Negative inversion exclamatives and speaker commitment

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This paper examines *negative inversion exclamatives* in English, e.g., *Isn't [that]_F hideous!*. Traditional accounts of exclamatives would analyze this construction as encoding a high degree of *hideousness*, but I show that negative inversion exclamatives are compatible with ungradable predicates and extreme predicates, which suggests that the semantics of this construction is beyond that of *very*. I argue instead that Neg-Ex's denote a set of alternatives via focus, with an additional expressive layer that gives rise to a conventional implicature (CI) that the speaker is maximally committed to an alternative. At a broader level, this paper calls for a re-evaluation of what "exclamative" is as a natural class.

1. Introduction

Exclamative constructions such as *What an idiot!* and *Isn't he an idiot!* express some out-of-the-norm reading of the predicate. Zanuttini & Portner (2003) and Rett (2011) make an explicit claim that what makes an exclamative an exclamative is its *degree interpretation*: *What an idiot!* means that the referent is an idiot to a very high degree. In this paper, I challenge this claim that exclamatives necessarily encode degree extremity, using data from what I will call *negative inversion exclamatives* (Neg-Ex) in English as driving examples. I argue instead that Neg-Ex's denote high speaker commitment.

Neg-Ex's syntactically resemble inverted negative polar questions (e.g., *Isn't that hideous?*), but does not have the force of questions. Instead, it intensifies the propositional content, denoting the speaker's heightened emotion towards the at-issue proposition, as exemplified in (1)-(3).

(1)　　Isn't [that]_F hideous!
　　　　≈ 'Wow, that is hideous!'

(2)　　Isn't [Mina]_F sassy!
　　　　≈ 'Wow, Mina is sassy!'

(3)　　Doesn't [she]_F sound delightful!'
　　　　≈ 'Wow, she sounds delightful!'

Note that the focus (indicated by the subscript *F*) is obligatory; this will be addressed in Section 4.2. At first glance, the contribution of the Neg-Ex in (1)-(3) may be glossable as *very*; that is, (1)-(3) perhaps mean 'that is very hideous,' 'Mina is very sassy,' and 'she sounds very delightful,' respectively. However, the data in (4)-(5) pose a problem for this approach.

(4)   a.   Aren't [you]$_F$ a linguist!
           (. . . you're always asking for grammaticality judgments, even during faculty meetings!)

      b.   Isn't [she]$_F$ a teacher!
           (. . . she's always telling people facts and quizzing them afterwards!)

(5)   a.   Isn't [that]$_F$ fantastic!

      b.   Isn't [this place]$_F$ freezing!

(4a) and (4b) involve ungradable predicates, which — unlike gradable predicates like *idiot* or *stupid*— cannot be modified by degree words like *very* (Kennedy & McNally 2005), or the nominal counterpart *big* (Morzycki 2012b), as shown in (6)-(7).

(6)   He is a big idiot/nerd   (gradable predicates)
         'He is an idiot/nerd to a high degree'

(7)   * He is a big linguist/teacher   (ungradable predicates)
         Intended: 'He is a linguist/teacher to a high degree'

If Neg-Ex's are equivalent to *very*, we predict the examples in (4) to be unacceptable, which is not the case. Similarly, predicates like *fantastic* and *freezing* in (5) that denote the maximum end of the scale are not compatible with *very* by virtue of already denoting an extreme (Morzycki 2012a).

(8)   * That is very fantastic/freezing   (extreme predicates)
         Intended: 'That is fantastic/freezing to a high degree'

If Neg-Ex's denote *very*, (5a) and (5b) should be unacceptable, contrary to actual data. My proposal to account for this observation will be that Neg-Ex's encode the speaker's maximal commitment to the truth of the proposition at hand, rather than the intensification of some gradable property.

The punchline of this proposal is that language has various modes of intensification. In particular, my suggestion is that not all exclamatives intensify in the same way. What we have the impulse to call "exclamatives" all encode extraordinariness or noteworthiness in some intuitive sense, but it is not formally clear what the range of such intensification is. In fact, at the most skeptical level, it is unclear if these so-called "exclamatives" form a natural class at all. What we gain from examining understudied constructions like Neg-Ex's is this possible re-evaluation of what makes an illocutionary class an illocutionary class.

In Section 2, I will briefly outline further empirical puzzles associated with this exclamative construction. In Section 3, I argue that existing analyses of exclamatives cannot account for the present phenomenon. In Section 4 I make the connection between Neg-Ex's and speaker commitment explicit. Section 5 provides a formal semantic account of Neg-Ex's, followed by a discussion and conclusion in Section 6 and Section 7.

2. Empirical puzzles

As previewed in the previous section, Neg-Ex's have the surface form of inverted negative polar questions (Neg-Q). The parallel is shown in (9) and (10) below.

(9) Negative inversion exclamatives[1]

    a.   Isn't $[he]_F$ an idiot!

    b.   Aren't $[you]_F$ lucky!

    c.   Didn't $[Mina]_F$ steal the show!

(10) Inverted negative polar questions

    a.   Isn't he an idiot?

    b.   Aren't you lucky?

    c.   Didn't Mina steal the show?

The two are distinguishable by their illocutionary force. While Neg-Q's are true answerable questions, Neg-Ex's do not have an interrogative force.

(11) Neg-Q

    A: Isn't he an idiot?

    B: He's an idiot.

(12) Neg-Ex

    A: Isn't $[he]_F$ an idiot!

    B: ? He's an idiot.

Note that this is a departure from Zanuttini & Portner (2003)'s position that the negative inversion construction is not a true exclamative, but rather a question. However, it is not clear whether Zanuttini & Portner are referring to Neg-Ex's or Neg-Q's, especially without reference to the prosody of each construction. This brings us to an observation unaccounted for in the existing literature: Neg-Ex's have special intonational contour. There is obligatory focus on the subject in Neg-Ex's, but Neg-Q's have no such requirement.

(13)   a.   Isn't $[he]_F$ an idiot!   (Neg-Ex, subject focused)

        b.   * Isn't he an idiot!   (Neg-Ex, no focus)

        c.   Isn't he an idiot?   (Neg-Q, no focus)

I will use this fact about focus to make my secondary claim in this proposal: Neg-Ex's rely on alternatives, mimicking question semantics.

3. Previous analyses of exclamatives

Before proceeding to the analysis, a discussion about exclamatives will be useful. There are two main accounts of the semantics of exclamatives: the question approach (Zanuttini & Portner 2003) and the degree approach (Rett 2011). More recently, Wood (2014) has proposed an analysis of Neg-Ex's specifically. I argue that none of the existing accounts extend straightforwardly to the present phenomena.

3.1. Question approach

Zanuttini & Portner (2003) assume that exclamatives derive from actual questions, meaning that WH-Exclamatives (WH-Ex) such as *What things John eats!* have the same basic semantics as

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[1]The term "negative" in the label merely refers to syntactic negation; there is neither a logical notion of negation in the semantics, nor a requirement for a negative-attitude predicate for this construction.

the question *What things does John eat?*. Adopting Hamblin (1973)'s semantics of questions, Zanuttini and Portner assume that questions are sets of alternatives. That is, the denotation of *What things does John eat?* is the set of answers to this question. If the context of this utterance is the kinds of peppers John eats, then the domain of quantification is the types of peppers that John might eat, as exemplified in (14).

(14) $[\![$What things does John eat?$]\!] = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{John eats poblanos} \\ \text{John eats serranos} \\ \text{John eats jalapenos} \end{array} \right\}$

Exclamatives are exactly like this, except that the domain *widens*; what sets exclamatives apart from questions is the inclusion of an exceptional alternative that would not normally be in the domain. Under the same context, the alternative set for the exclamative *What things John eats!* would include *John eats habaneros*, which are unlikely peppers to be eaten, as in (15).

(15) $[\![$What things John eats!$]\!] = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{John eats poblanos} \\ \text{John eats serranos} \\ \text{John eats jalapenos} \\ \text{John eats habaneros} \end{array} \right\}$

This widening effect is responsible for the deviation-from-the-norm reading. However, if we were to apply domain widening to inversion exclamatives, it is not clear how this would work.

(16) a. $[\![$Isn't he an idiot?$]\!] = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{He is an idiot} \\ \text{He is not an idiot} \end{array} \right\}$

b. $[\![$Isn't [he]$_F$ an idiot!$]\!] = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{He is an idiot} \\ \text{He is not an idiot} \\ \text{???} \end{array} \right\}$

Domain widening is not directly extendable to exclamatives with yes/no question forms since answers to yes/no questions are binary.

3.2. *The degree approach*

Rett (2011)'s position is that exclamatives do not have the semantics of questions. For her, the exclamative interpretation is the result of two illocutionary operators: exclamation force operator (E-Force) and a degree measurement operator (M-Op).

(17) M-OP: $\lambda d\lambda P\lambda x.P(x) \wedge \mu(x) = d$

(18) E-FORCE(p), uttered by s_C, is appropriate in a context C if p is salient and true in w_C. When appropriate, E-FORCE(p) counts as an expression that s_C had not expected that p.

E-Force operates at the sentential level, contributing to the evaluative content of the exclamative: the speaker is surprised at the fact that some degree holds for a property, and this degree is noteworthy in some way (i.e., very high). In the case of *How beautiful she is!*, E-Force expresses the speaker's surprise that the referent is extraordinarily beautiful. When the exclaimed

property lacks a degree argument (e.g., *What a cat!* where *cat* is not gradable), M-Op gives it a "freebie degree": It assigns a contextually determined scale to non-gradable predicates (e.g., the scale "beauty" for a cat). As a result, E-Force is felicitous even for nominal properties. An exclamative, then, is essentially the speaker being surprised at the fact that a specific degree holds of some degree (or degree-coerced) property. The derivation of the WH-exclamatives *What desserts John baked!*, for example, would proceed as follows.

(19)   What desserts John baked!

    a. $[\![\text{M-Op desserts}]\!] = \lambda d.\lambda x.\text{desserts}'(x) \wedge \mu(x) = d$

    b. $[\![\text{What desserts John baked}]\!]$
        $= \lambda d.\exists x[\text{baked}'(j,x) \wedge \text{desserts}'(x) \wedge \mu(x) = d]$

M-Op has made the predicate *desserts* gradable, and its scale would be contextually supplied. At this point a degree d' would be provided by the context, leaving the unbound expression $\exists x[\text{baked}'(j,x) \wedge \text{desserts}'(x) \wedge \mu(x) = d']$. E-Force supplies the existential closure.

(20)   a. $p = \exists x[\text{baked}'(j,x) \wedge \text{desserts}'(x) \wedge \mu(x) = d']$

    b. E-FORCE(p) counts as an expression if $\exists d'$ such that s_C had not expected that $d' \in D$

    c. Existential closure via E-FORCE: $\exists d'.\exists x[\text{baked}'(j,x) \wedge \text{desserts}'(x) \wedge \mu(x) = d']$ + Illocutionary force "speaker didn't expect p"

What desserts John baked! therefore essentially means that there is some gradable property that holds of the desserts that John baked (e.g., tasty), and the speaker is surprised that this holds at such a high degree. Rett discusses how E-Force and M-Op apply to positive inversion exclamatives[2] like (21), the affirmative cousin to Neg-Ex's.

(21)   Wow, did Sue win that race!

Her observation is that (21) cannot be expressing noteworthiness about the fact that *Sue* won the race, which is an individual-oriented reading. What it must mean is that the way in which Sue won the race is noteworthy in some way, which is an event-oriented reading. On these grounds, she claims that inversion exclamatives denote a degree property, and that this degree property is associated with eventualities. Furthermore, the eventualities inherit their degreehood from M-OP. She remains agnostic as to why inversion exclamatives specifically care about eventualities.

    The following data are problematic for Rett's account.

(22) a. # (Boy), is she a teacher!   (positive inversion exclamative)

      b. Isn't $[\text{she}]_F$ a teacher!   (negative inversion exclamative)

As with WH-exclamatives, the semantics of positive inversion exclamatives will not be explored in this paper (see Taniguchi (in preparation)), but what matters is that positive and negative inversion exclamatives are not the same creature: the positive exclamative is fully incompatible with ungradable predicates. If the target of M-OP is what distinguishes different exclamative constructions, then what is to be made of Neg-Ex's, which clearly do not behave in the same way as its affirmative sibling? It is unclear how M-OP would be manipulated to distinguish the two.

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[2]She calls them *inversion exclamatives*

3.3.   Wood (2014): Neg-Ex and SO

Wood (2014) is the first to observe the selectiveness of Neg-Ex's in terms of its predicates[3], as shown in (23).

(23)   a.   Aren't you pretty!
       b.   Isn't that a relief!
       c.   ? Isn't that a bus!

The observation that drives his analysis is that predicates that Neg-Ex's license are compatible with the degree modifier *so/such*.
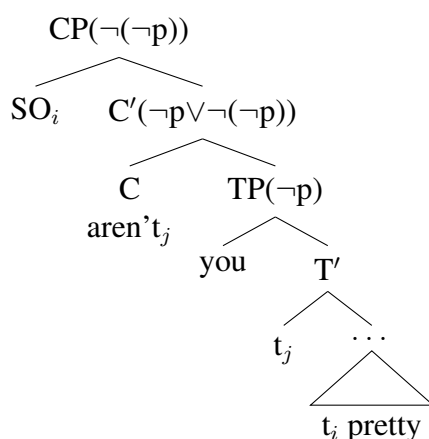
(24)   a.   You are so pretty
       b.   That is such a relief
       c.   ? That is such a bus

Wood initially assigns an asterisk to data points (23c) and (24c), but later observes that there are contexts in which the Neg-Ex is acceptable, such as (25) (slightly modified from his version here).

(25)   *[Context: A soccer mom manages to fit the entire soccer team into her van. You ex-claim:]*
       Isn't [that]$_F$ a bus!

It is not clear whether (24c) improves in the same context, but what matters for Wood is the connection between *so/such* and Neg-Ex's. Following this, Wood proposes a covert SO operator as a part of the semantics of Neg-Ex's.

(26)   Aren't you pretty! (Wood 2014)

The SO operator, which originates with the predicate, is responsible for the supposed exclamative degree reading ($\approx$'You are so pretty'). A question feature in C takes its complement proposition and turns it into a polar question: e.g., "Is it the case that you're not pretty ($\neg p$), or is it not the case that you're not pretty ($\neg\neg p$)?". Furthermore, the SO operator moves to

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[3]He calls them *yes/no exclamatives*; the phenomenon is the same.

Spec,CP and picks the affirmative answer to this question: "It is not the case that you're not pretty" (¬¬p). Conceptually, Wood connects SO's affirmative operation to the close link degree words like *so* and *too* have with affirmation — e.g., *I think* **so**, *I will dance* **too**. In this way, this account pays a nice tribute to the polar question syntax of this construction, something that the previous accounts could not necessarily do.

However, Wood's analysis is problematic with predicates of extremity, replicated below.

(27)   Isn't [this place]$_F$ freezing!

Considering that extreme predicates cannot take degree modifiers ($^?$*this place is so freezing*), why (27) is acceptable is not clear under his story. Furthermore, it is not fully clear why (25) must be the type of context for the Neg-Ex to be felicitous, and not, for example, a context in which you are exclaiming about a very large bus. In my proposal, this fact will not be an accident. Moreover, while Wood does not address the obligatory subject focus in Neg-Ex's, his account as is does not have an explanation for the prosodic effects.

4.   Explaining the puzzles
4.1.   Speaker commitment, not extreme degree

The data from Section 3.3 suggest that a predicate need not be modifiable with *so* in order to be compatible with the Neg-Ex construction. I propose that Neg-Ex's do not necessarily express a predicate of an extreme degree, but rather that it encodes high speaker commitment. One warning deserves mention. While Wood (2014)'s degree SO analysis fails to capture some data, the degree word *so* is not completely irrelevant to speaker commitment. Potts (2005) and Irwin (2014) observe that certain versions of *so* can express high speaker commitment, as in the following example in (28).

(28)   People are *so* wearing flip-flops this season.

Roughly glossable as "definitely," *Drama* SO — as Irwin (2014) calls it — involves intensification at the expressive level. (28) does not necessarily mean that there is a high number of people wearing flip-flops this season; rather, it means that the speaker is convinced that there is a flip-flop trend this season. While Wood does not make the explicit connection between *so* and speaker commitment, I do not deny that Wood's intuition is largely congruous with my own.

Speaker commitment can be best thought of as a speaker-oriented scale that measures how convinced the speaker is of some propositional content. Consider the English adverb *totally*, one interpretation of which is a speaker-oriented reading (Beltrama 2014).

(29)   Beltrama (2014)

   a.   The tank is totally full   (Lexical scale)
        Paraphrase: 'The tank is full to the brim'

   b.   Dinosaurs are totally extinct   (Precision scale)
        Paraphrase: 'Dinosaurs are absolutely extinct'

   c.   We totally won the game   (Speaker-oriented scale)
        Paraphrase: 'I'm telling you, we won the game'

Totally in (29a) measures along the pure 0%-to-100% scale of fullness. (29b) on the other hand measures the precision of extinctness; are they there's-two-of-them-left *extinct*, or there's-none-of-them-left *extinct*? Of interest is the *totally* in (29c), which has yet another meaning: the speaker is highly committed to the fact that they won the game. While Beltrama (2014) does not note this, the speaker-oriented reading of *totally* is even more clear when truncated as *totes*. When *totally* is pronounced *totes*, even predicates that tend to take the lexical or the precision *totally* obligatorily take on the speaker-oriented reading.

(30) a. The tank is totes full   (*Lexical scale / ✓ Speaker-oriented scale)
    Paraphrase: 'I'm telling you, the tank is full'

   b. Dinosaurs are totes extinct   (*Precision scale / ✓ Speaker-oriented scale)
    Paraphrase: 'I'm telling you, dinosaurs are extinct'

   c. We totes won the game   (✓ Speaker-oriented scale)
    Paraphrase: 'I'm telling you, we won the game'

That the lexical scale is not available in *totes* can be shown in the following context of *full*.

(31) A customer's beer glass is 90% full.

   A: Excuse me, my glass is not full; my beer wasn't poured to the brim.

   B: # It's totally full, don't complain! (Lexical scale)

   B′:   It's totes full, don't complain! (Speaker-oriented scale)

If a customer complains that a 90% full glass is not full to the brim, the server cannot retort that it indeed is *totally* full because that is simply false. If *totes* also has the lexical scale meaning, B′'s response should not be any better than B's. However, *totes full* is in fact felicitous in this context: the speaker is completely convinced that the glass content meets the standard of fullness.

This obligatory speaker-oriented reading of *totes* can help us probe for speaker commitment in Neg-Ex's. Consider the following context in which not thanking someone is typically considered rude.

(32) A: John didn't thank Mina for the gift.

   B: That's rude . . . I suppose.

   B′:   ? That is totes/totally rude . . . I suppose.

   B″:   ? Isn't [THAT]$_F$ rude! . . . I suppose.

B's response is felicitous; the speaker recognizes that John's action is socially considered rude but he does not have to be highly committed to this conviction, as the follow-up statement "I suppose" indicates. This is not the case with *totes*. B″'s attempt to attenuate his *totes rude* commitment with "I suppose" is contradictory, since *totes* signals high speaker commitment. Similarly for B″, following a Neg-Ex up with a commitment-weakening statement is not felicitous, suggesting that this construction has a speaker-oriented interpretation similar to *totes*. Note that a high degree (i.e., *very*) does not necessitate high speaker commitment, as (33) shows.

(33) A: Dinner is at 4pm.

   B: That's very early for dinner . . . I suppose.

   B′:   ? That is totes/totally early for dinner . . . I suppose.

B″:   ? Isn't [THAT]$_F$ early for dinner! …I suppose.

B can recognize that 4pm is quite early for dinner, but he need not be judgmental about this. B′ and B″'s *totes*/Neg-Ex responses respectively are still contradictory with the qualifying statement.

4.2.   Focus

Next, I will specify exactly *what* the speaker is committed to in a Neg-Ex, using facts about focus. The key observation is that Neg-Ex's require focus on its subject. An example is replicated below.

(34)   a.   Isn't [John]$_F$ an idiot!

  b.   * Isn't John an idiot!

Focus traditionally analyzed as evoking alternatives (Rooth 1992). A focused expression comes with two values: A regular semantic value, and a focus semantic value. Consider the following example in (35).

(35)   Bill introduced [Mary]$_F$ to John.

  a.   Semantic value: **introduce(b,m,j)**

  b.   Focus semantic value: $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Bill introduced Mary to John} \\ \text{Bill introduced Sarah to John} \\ \text{Bill introduced Kyle to John} \\ \vdots \end{array} \right\}$

Bill introduced [Mary]$_F$ to John compares *Bill introduced Mary to John* to other propositions of the form *Bill introduced x to John*; Rooth (1992) suggests that a single focus operator introduces the alternative set as a presupposition. In the case of (35), there is a presupposition that *Bill introduced Mary to John* is a member of a set that includes *Bill introduced Mary to John* and at least one other proposition of the form *Bill introduced x to John*. If the question in the context is *Who did Bill introduce to John?*, (35) is a felicitous answer because the ordinary semantic value of this question is a set of alternatives of the same form as (35b) and already present in the context — the presupposition is satisfied. *[Bill]$_F$ introduced Mary to John*, however, is not a felicitous answer because it needs a presupposition of the form {Bill introduced Mary to John, Kathy introduced Mary to John … }; the question at hand does not have this sort of alternative set, thus failing to satisfy the presupposition.

Following suit, the focus in the Neg-Ex in (34) should also be sensitive to alternatives. Given the focus on the subject, we could imagine a set of alternatives such as:

(36) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{John is an idiot} \\ \text{Bill is an idiot} \\ \text{Sarah is an idiot} \\ \vdots \end{array} \right\}$

The subject focus can easily be connected to speaker commitment at the expressive level by saying that the speaker is highly convinced that *John* in particular is an idiot. I do not have an explanation for why Neg-Ex's commit the speaker to the proposition relevant specifically to the subject, but it could be that there are other exclamative constructions that commit the speaker to a proposition based on the predicate, for example. WH-exclamatives (e.g., (37)), whose natural focus falls on the predicate, may be a fruitful place to search for this contrast.

(37)   What an [idiot]$_F$ John is!

I leave this for future research. For present purposes, I use this sensitivity of Neg-Ex's to alternatives to advocate for a question approach of exclamatives, not a degree approach.

5. *Analysis*

My proposals thus far are:

1. In a Neg-Ex, the subject must be focused because it is underlyingly a question

2. Neg-Ex's express the speaker's high commitment to the proposition

To model proposal 1, I will introduce an alternative-sensitive operator EX-OP that introduces thetic-question-based alternatives ("thetic alternatives" henceforth). Proposal 2 will be modeled via conventional implicatures (Potts 2007).

Silent alternative introducers occur elsewhere in semantics, most notable being Chierchia (2006)'s silent O(nly) operator for scalar terms. The present EX-OP takes in a property f and generates a question of the form *What/Who is f?*. Finally, this "question" is internally answered by the focused subject element. Like Wood (2014), I endorse the intuitive charm of inversion as a question that answers itself. Let us take stock:

(38) $[\![\text{Ex-Op}]\!] = \lambda f_{<e,st>}.\lambda y.\lambda w.f(y) \in \{p : \exists x[p = f(x) \wedge p(w)]\}$

(39)   Isn't [that]$_F$ hideous!
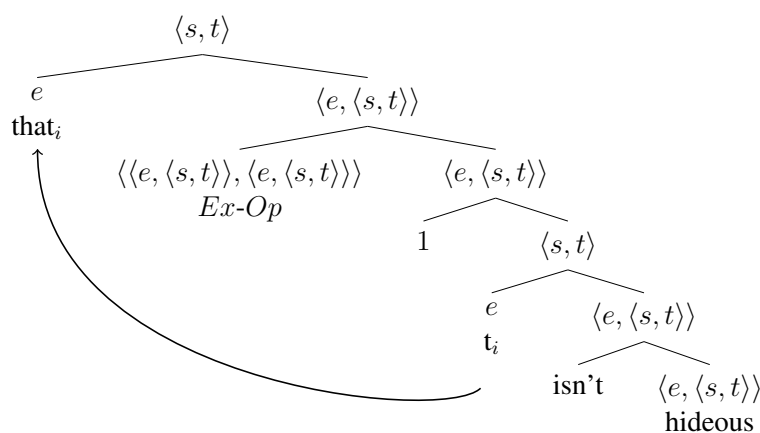
(40)   a. $[\![(\text{isn't}) \text{ hideous}]\!] = \lambda x.\lambda w.\textbf{hideous}(w)(x)$
        b. $[\![\text{t}_i \text{ (isn't) hideous}]\!] = \lambda w.\textbf{hideous}(w)(x)$
        c. $[\![1 \text{ t}_i \text{ (isn't) hideous}]\!] = \lambda x.\lambda w.\textbf{hideous}(w)(x)$

d. $[\![$EX-OP 1 t$_i$ (isn't) hideous $]\!]$ = $\lambda y.\lambda w.\mathbf{hideous}(w)(y)$ $\in$ $\{p$: $\exists x[p$ = $\lambda w.\mathbf{hideous}(w)(x) \wedge p(w)]\}$

e. $[\![$this$_i$ EX-OP 1 t$_i$ (isn't) hideous $]\!]$ = $\lambda w.\mathbf{hideous}(w)(\text{that})$ $\in$ $\{p$: $\exists x[p$ = $\lambda w.\mathbf{hideous}(w)(x) \wedge p(w)]\}$

We start with the proposition *that is hideous*. The crucial operation here is the raising of the subject *that* at LF, leaving the unbound expression in (40b). The lambda abstraction in (40c) opens the *hideous* predicate back up again. This allows for us to introduce EX-OP to raise the question *What is hideous?* ($\{p : \exists x[p = \lambda w.\mathbf{hideous}(w)(x)]\}$) in (40d), which is also awaiting some individual to satisfy the answer to this question ($\lambda y.\lambda w.\mathbf{hideous}(w)(y) \in \ldots$). In (40e), this ends up being the subject that was moved earlier, making this a self-answered question.

This alternative-based semantics manifests as focus on the answer, *that*. However in order for this question-answer operation to work, the lambda abstraction must happen below EX-OP, and not immediately below *that* as canonical raising operations do. This is perhaps some restriction posed by inversion or the EX-OP itself; I will leave this for further research.

At this point, the at-issue meaning of *Isn't that hideous!* is 'What is hideous? *That* is hideous.' Adding speaker commitment to this meaning is the final touch. Following Beltrama (2014), I will model speaker commitment as a conventional implicature (CI) in the style of Potts (2007).

(41) $[\![$EXCL/totally$]\!]$ = $\lambda p_a[\mu(p)(s) = \mathbf{max}(\mu)]_c$

(42)   **Isn't Steve ugly!**: t^a

•

EXCL(Isn't Steve ugly!): t^c

EXCL: $< t^a, t^c >$ **Isn't Steve ugly!**: t^a
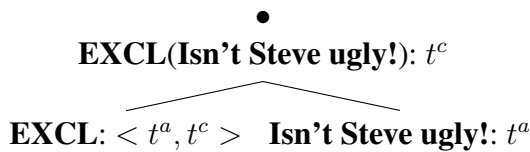
An exclamative operator (a silent *totally*) takes in a proposition p, and μ measures the degree of speaker s's commitment to this proposition; this returns the maximal degree of μ. a is an at-issue type, and c is a CI type. This is essentially function application, only with the returned value being of an expressive type. In addition to this, the multi-tiered bullet (•) duplicates the at-issue meaning. This allows for a separate treatment of the at-issue and CI meanings, which is crucial for Potts (2007) in accounting for the scopeless and speaker-oriented nature of expressives (e.g., *Clinton says the damn Republicans should be less partisan — damn* is the attitude of the speaker, not Clinton).

This analysis ultimately characterizes Neg-Ex's as the speaker's maximal commitment to an answer to a question: *Isn't [that]$_F$ hideous!* generates the question *What is hideous*, and answers *that* — but not just *that* — *definitely that*. Note that a context in which a speaker is committed to a proposition is likely one in which a property holds of some individual to a high degree. That is, the speaker will likely be very committed to *that is hideous* if that thing is extremely hideous. A speaker-commitment account such as this one captures the deviation-from-the-norm spirit of exclamatives without directly appealing to gradability or extreme degrees.

Speaker commitment allows for us to explain the compatibility of Neg-Ex's with degree-incompatible predicates (e.g., predicates of extremity (27) and ungradable nouns (4)/(25), examples replicated below:

(43)   Isn't [this place]$_F$ freezing!
        $\approx$ 'This place is totally/totes freezing'

(44)   *[Context: A soccer mom manages to fit the entire soccer team into her van. You ex-
       claim:]*
       Isn't [that]$_F$ a bus!
       ≈'That is totally/totes a bus'

Extreme predicates like *freezing* do not repel speaker commitment: as long as there is potentially
a question of whether *this place* indeed is freezing in the discourse, the speaker is allowed to
show a strong commitment to the answer, *this place is freezing*. The same holds for ungradable
predicates: you are, in principle, allowed to be strongly committed to the fact that something
is a *bus* or a *teacher*. Since the question of whether something is a *bus* is typically objectively
resolved — a bus is a bus if on average it has enough properties of a bus (Sassoon 2011, 2013)
— *isn't* [that]$_F$ *a bus!* particularly requires a context in which the criteria for whether something
is a bus is under discussion, such as with the soccer mom scenario above. The connection to
totally/totes is a clear one here: *that is totally/totes a bus* is only felicitous if for some reason
that thing is potentially *not* a bus. For gradable predicates like *idiot*, this sort of question under
discussion is an easy one to accommodate. Since gradable predicates come with an inherent
standard, or a cut-off point for whether something counts as e.g. an *idiot* based on the degree to
which it falls on the *idiot* scale, the question can always be about where this standard is for the
speaker, and whether the individual under discussion surpasses this standard.

This makes an additional prediction: a context in which there is absolutely no question as
to if a property holds of some individual should rend Neg-Ex's infelicitous, regardless of the
gradability of the predicate. This is why the exchange in (45) below is a strange one.

(45)   *[Context: You knew that Shaq O'Neal was tall, but you hadn't seen him in person until
       this very moment. You exclaim:]*
       ? Aren't [you]$_F$ tall!
       Intended: ≈ 'You are totally/totes tall'

If felicitous, there is something strangely sarcastic or dismissive about exclaiming *aren't* [you]$_F$
tall![4] to Shaq in this situation because there is not a question of whether he counts as tall. Under
the present analysis this can be cashed out as illicit speaker commitment: deliberately taking a
position in committing oneself to an obviously true proposition is a strange discourse move.

6.   Discussion

Some issues, both analytical and empirical, remain unaddressed. One issue with the proposed
semantics of EX-OP, perhaps more aesthetic than technical, is whether we actually want a WH-
question semantics for Neg-Ex's given that they resemble yes/no questions. If we do assign
Neg-Ex's a yes/no question semantics, the advantage is that we can get away with saying that
exclamatives literally have the semantics of their question counterparts. The disadvantage is
that the facts about focus would require an alternate explanation since yes/no questions do not
require focus on the answer. More empirical support for the WH semantics and covert subject
raising is needed to strengthen the current proposal. This is currently under investigation.

Another element that I remain agnostic about in the derivation is the pre-posed expletive
negation *n't*. Clearly, the negation is not interpreted in the logical sense since *isn't that hideous!*

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[4]Compare this to *Boy, are you tall!* or *How tall you are!*, which are sincere and felicitous

does not mean that that is *not* hideous, but it is too strong of a claim to say that the negation has no contribution syntactically and semantically. While what exactly licenses expletive negation varies from analysis to analysis (Horn 2010; Espinal 1992; Tovena 1996; Abels 2005), the common denominator is that it is some sort of modality marker, seen in constructions that evoke nonveridicality, or speaker uncertainty (Yoon 2013; Giannakidou 2006), such as in (46).

(46)   I'll see if I can't finish this by midnight
        'I'll see if I can finish this by midnight, but there is no guarantee'

Expletive negation in inverted negative polar questions (Neg-Q's) involve modification at an epistemic level as well. Neg-Q's like *Isn't that hideous?* are not normal yes/no questions; it has been abundantly observed in the literature that they involve some sort of speaker bias for the positive answer (Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró 2011; Romero & Han 2002, 2004; Ladd 1981; Han 1998), i.e., *that IS hideous*. Consider the following contrast.

(47)   (Pope 1976)
        a.   Weren't you at the scene of crime at 10:00 on the night of the murder?
        b.   Were you at the scene of crime at 10:00 on the night of the murder?

If (47) are questions from a criminal investigation, (47a) and (47b) have two different interpretations. In (47a) with the negation, it is backgrounded that the interrogator believes that the suspect indeed was at the scene of crime, while (47b) has no such implication; the latter is an honest elicitation of information. One analysis of these biased questions proposes that the negation triggers an epistemic question about how certain one is about the truth of a proposition, not a simple at-issue yes/no question (Romero & Han 2004, 2002). For example, *isn't that hideous?* informally means 'are we certain that *that is hideous* should be in the common ground?'.

While a more detailed analysis will not be explored here, a possibility that I entertain is the connection Neg-Ex's like *isn't* [*that*]$_F$ *hideous!* has with this notion of expletive negation in Neg-Q's like *isn't that hideous?*. If a Neg-Q raises a question about certainty and a Neg-Ex conventionally implicates certainty via speaker commitment, then the connection is a hard one to ignore. The abridged point here is that speaker commitment is not completely off the radar in terms of negation, a bonus point for the present proposal. I leave this for future research.

One final observation that I have not discussed in this paper is that Neg-Ex's are most natural with pejorative predicates (e.g., idiot), and when they do take meliorative predicates (e.g., genius), the natural interpretation is a sarcastic one that turns it into a pejorative meaning, as exemplified in (48).

(48)   a.   Aren't [you]$_F$ an idiot! (... the earth is not flat!)
        b.   Aren't [you]$_F$ a genius! (... trying to charge your phone in the microwave!)

This contrasts with the negation-less, positive inversion exclamative *boy, are you a genius!*, which has a sincere interpretation. I currently do not have an explanation for this observation (see Taniguchi (in preparation)).

7.   Conclusion

In this paper, I showed that negative inversion exclamatives (Neg-Ex's) are compatible with non-gradable predicates, and proposed that propositional extremity can be modeled in terms of

magnitudes of speaker commitment. Additionally, I advocated for an alternative-based semantics of exclamatives in order to address obligatory prosodic focus in the Neg-Ex construction. Compositionally, an alternative-sensitive operator turns the predicate into a question, of which it is asserted that the subject is an answer. At the expressive level, the exclamative intensifies this claim by setting the speaker's commitment to this answer to the maximal degree. This paper shows that language has various ways of encoding extraordinariness — seemingly an obvious property of exclamatives, but elusive as far as formalization concerns. The hope is that by examining this understudied construction, a better understanding of the sentential class "exclamatives" will be bought.

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Abbreviations

F	focus
NEG-EX	negative inversion exclamative
NEG-Q	negative inversion question
EX-OP	exclamative operator
M-OP	measurement operator (Rett 2011)

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