Encoding emotion in discourse: A cross-linguistic approach to *that*-exclamatives

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The cross-linguistic inventory of exclamatives is a (if not the) key phenomenon at the grammar-emotion interface. Some languages feature *that*-configurations that can be used as root clauses expressing an exclamatory speech act; German (1) is a prominent case. Crucially, Catalan features *that*-exclamatives as well (2), without strict parallels in other Romance varieties (Villalba 2003):

(1)  
*Dass er diese Bücher lesen kann!*  
that he those books read can  
‘Wow, he can read those books!’

(2)  
¡*Que n’és, de car!*  
that of.it-is of expensive  
‘How expensive it is!’

In this paper, we show that *that*-exclamatives in Germanic and Romance languages differ semantically in expressing either a non-degree (German) or a degree reading (Catalan). However, both languages pattern alike at the discourse level: when used as responses to polar questions, *that*-exclamatives (i) can in fact assert (and not only presuppose) $p$ and (ii) the speaker typically expresses either a self-directed negative emotion towards $p$ (‘I regret that $p$’ = [3a]) or an addressee-directed negative emotion (i.e., a reproach; see [3b]).

(3)  
A: Have you already done the shopping for tonight?  
B: a.  
*Dass ich das vergessen habe!*  
that I that forgotten have  
‘How could I have forgotten that!’?  

   b.  
*Dass Du mich daran nicht erinnert hast!*  
that you me that not reminded have  
‘You should have reminded me!’

We account for these observations within Farkas & Bruce’s (2010) discourse model and will treat exclamatives as two-dimensional semantic objects, conveying an expressive content *and* asserting $p$. Support for this account will also be provided by recent experimental work showing that the ‘descriptive’ content of exclamatives is in fact ‘at-issue’ (Villalba 2017; Trotzke to appear).

References:  