Minor sentence types – their form and its impact on grammar

Invited speaker: Jonathan Ginzburg (Laboratoire de linguistique formelle, Université de Paris)

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The large bulk of research in syntax and sentential semantics focuses on assertive declarative clauses, information seeking interrogative clauses, and, to a much lesser extent, imperatives. A key concept for the understanding of word order variation and prosodic prominence was introduced by Roberts (2012) and Ginzburg (1996) in form of the *Question Under Discussion* (QUD) and by Klein and von Stutterheim (1987) in a preliminary form. As has been shown on various occasions, different word order permutations and stress patterns express different focus placement. Focused constituents typically occupy a prominent position in the clause or exhibit more prominent prosodic features. The placement and the prosodic properties of focussed constituents is determined by QUD.

To gain a deeper understanding of these major sentence types and their interaction with the discourse, it is often productive to analyse the internal structure of minor sentence types. Minor sentence types frequently differ from major ones in that they (i) lack features that are characteristic of major sentence types such as overt subjects, finite verbs—or verbs all together; (ii) exhibit unusual word order and/or prosody, as seen in English exclamatives (*What small hands!*), (iii) or they exhibit segmental material, such as particles or markers, that does not occur in other sentence types.

Among the minor sentence types are those identified by Sadock and Zwicky (1985:156–157), König and Siemund (2007), Evans (2007), Altmann, Meibauer, and Steinbach (2013), Finkbeiner and Meibauer (2015b) and Geurts (2019:13–15). These are listed below and supplemented here by further types:

1. Imperatives and prohibitives lacking overt subjects in many languages (cf. Schmerling 1982, Kaufmann 2012, Condoravdi and Lauer 2012), also in Meithei (Tibeto-Burman, cf. Chelliah 1997) .
2. Exclamatives in many Indo-European languages characterised by unusual intonation and/or word order (Michaelis and Lambrecht 1996, Zanuttini and Portner 2003, Trotzke and Giannakidou 2024).
3. Optatives in Germanic (cf. Grosz 2012, Grosz 2013) and in Meithei (Tibeto-Burman), (cf. Chelliah 1997).
4. Various types of non-canonical questions (cf. Farkas 2020, Trotzke 2023).
   (a) Rhetorical questions (cf. Dehé and Braun 2019, Farkas 2020).
   (b) Declarative questions in Germanic languages (cf. Gunlogson 2001).
   (c) Deliberative self-adressed questions/conjectural questions in Germanic languages (cf. Truckenbrodt 2006:274–275, Zimmermann 2013, Eckardt 2020, Farkas 2020) and Sm'algyax (Tsimshianic, British Columbia/Alaska cf. Brown 2024).
   (d) Echo questions *A: I tell you he is a braggart – B: He is what?* (cf. Reis 2015, Beck and Reis 2018).
   (e) *What if* questions (cf. Bledin and Rawlins 2019, Li and Liu 2023).
5. Directive root infinitives in Germanic and elsewhere (cf. Reis 1985, Schwabe 1994, Reis 1995, Gärtner 2013, Gärtner 2014, Gärtner 2017) and *wh*-root infinitives (cf. Reis 2003)
6. Non-finite presentatives/mad magazin sentences: *Him play the piano? Ludicrous!* (cf. Delbrück 1893:73–77, Akmajian 1984, Lambrecht 1990, Grohmann 2000, Fernández-Pena and Pérez-Guerra 2024).

7. Verbless utterances such as:

   (a) Verbless directives in West-Germanic languages: *Off with his head!* (cf. Jackendoff and Pinker 2005:220, Jacobs 2008:22, Wilder 2008, Ørsnes 2011) and in Australian languages such negated directive infintives in Ngardi (Pama-Nyungan, cf. Ennever 2021:382–383, 645, 717).

   (b) Directive dative constructions in Slavic languages such as Russian: *khui vojne* 'penis.NOM war.DAT= f*ck war' and Slowenian *Smrt fašizmu* 'dead fascism.DAT.S'

   (c) Nominal sentences in Afro-Asiatic languages including Arabic, Biblical Hebrew (cf. Watson 2002), Egyptian Coptic and other (cf. Callender 1985), Chadic such as Mina (cf. Frajzyngier, Johnston, and Edwards 2005:273–285) and Wandala (Frajzyngier 2012:317–330). Russian also exhibits such structures as does Hungarian (Uralic), Warlmanpa (Pama-Nyungan) spoken in Australia (cf. Browne 2024:401–403), Mapuche (Araucarian) spoken in Chile (cf. Smeets 2007:143–145) and other languages (cf. Bertinetto, Ciucci, and Creissels 2025, Haspelmath 2025).

   (d) Non-canonical predications *Richtig gut, das Papier!* 'Really good, that paper!' (cf. Finkbeiner and Meibauer 2015a).

   (e) Verbless comments: *The more the merrier*, *Better late than never*, *Measure for measure* (cf. Sweet 1892:157)

8. Main clauses that display characteristics of embedded clauses (*insubordination*), as suggested by Evans (2007) and Evans and Watanabe (2016) such as:

   (a) Verb forms that typically occur only in dependent clauses, such as the subjunctive in certain languages (cf. Wiltschko 2014:154–156).

   (b) Word order variations, such as verb-final sentences in Dutch and German.

   (c) Sentences headed by complementisers.

   (d) Other lack of marking typical of main clauses, such as in Ngardi (cf. Ennever 2021:677)

9. Short answers and response particles derived from deictic adverbs, e.g. Portuguese *sim*, French *oui*, Polish *tak* or from finite forms/echo answers as Portuguese *tá* attested accross many phyla (cf. Ginzburg 2012:217–265, Krifka 2013, Wiltschko 2017, Fang 2025).

10. Other non-sentential utterances: *hm*, *huh* in English (cf. Ginzburg 2012:217–265) and West-African Atlantic-Congo languages (cf. Painter 1975, Dingemanse, Torreira, and Enfield 2013).

11. Vocatives (Zwicky 1974, Ladd 1978, Portner 2007, Hill 2007, Hill 2022, Portner 2007, Wiltschko 2014:244–245, Maché 2020, Maché 2025).

12. Evaluative or expessive "vocatives" prevalent in many European languages such as English *you idiot!*, Portuguese *seu idiota!* 'POSS.3S idiot' or Serbian *budalo jedna* 'fool one' (cf. Svennung 1958, Rauh 2004, Mel'çuk and Milićević 2011, Espinal 2013:120–127, d'Avis and Meibauer 2013, Gutzmann 2019:172–260, Jain 2021, Daniel Van Olmen, Andersson, and Culpeper 2023).

13. Morphologically marked alarm calls in Ancient Greek *Io Bacchus*! 'PRT Bacchus.NOM', Middle High German *fiur=â* 'fire=PRT' and Early New High German *Feind=io* 'enemy=PRT' (cf. Grimm 1850:112, Paul 1920:129, 131–132)

14. Presentatives such as French *Voilà Liliane* 'Here is Liliane' and attention getters such as Spanish *Mira* 'look' (cf. Zanuttini 2017, Daniël Van Olmen and Tantucci 2022).

15. Greetings and other formulaic expressions like thanking (cf. Ginzburg 2012:74–80, Geurts 2019:13–15, Leemann et al. 2024).

16. Exclamative interjections and evaluative expressions like *Wow!* or *Oh God!* (cf. Sadock and Zwicky 1985:157, Ginzburg 2014, Sieberg 2016)

17. Non-inflectional constructions widely known from comics and chats such as German **grins** 'smile.STEM' (cf. Bücking and Rau 2013)

Questions of interest may involve, but are not limited to, various aspects of the relationship between form and meaning, as illustrated below:

1. What is the role of finiteness in determining the illocutionary force? Are certain speech acts dependent on the presence or absence of finiteness (cf. Nikolaeva 2007, Truckenbrodt 2006, Klein 2008)?

2. What is the role of the QUD in minor sentence types? Is it necessary to assume QUDs to account for prosodic prominence and/or word order variation?

3. Do minor speech acts or sentence types involve a communicative intention or deontic speech act operator as proposed by Truckenbrodt (2006:268–278)? (e.g. assertion as SPKR *wants* ADDR *to add* p *to the common ground*, questions as SPKR *wants* ADDR *to extend to the common ground with respect to* p *or* $\neg p$)

4. Which impact does the marked form of minor sentence type have on what kind of at-issue and/or non-at-issue meaning it may convey (cf. Potts 2005, Potts 2015)?

5. What is the underlying syntactic representation of defective minor sentence types? Is their any empirical evidence for covert verbs, subjects or matrix predicates?

6. Is there any empirical evidence to determine which approach to the relationship between sentence type and illocutionary force is more adequate: *correspondence approach* or *derivational approach* as proposed by Reis (1999) and Meibauer (2013)?

This workshop follows the annual HPSG-colloquium but warmly welcomes contributions from any theoretical framework including constraint-based theories such as GPSG, HPSG, LFG, CG, CxG and derivational approaches such as Minimalism. Submissions related to the application of theoretical linguistics in NLP, as relevant to the workshop's theme, are also encouraged. The workshop aims to provide a forum for proponents of diverse theoretical approaches who are open to learning from one another.

This one day long workshop is going to be held as an hybrid event welcoming submissions for in-presence and online participation.

Submissions should be two pages in length, including data, figures, and references. They must be submitted in PDF format and should not include the authors' names. Authors are also asked to avoid self-references. All abstracts must be submitted by 30th March, 2025, via EasyChair.

`https://easychair.org/conferences?conf=hpsg2025`

- Deadline for abstracts: 30th March 2025
- Notification of acceptance: 30th April 2025
- Date: 4th September 2025 (preceded by the HPSG colloquium on 2nd–3rd September)
- Invited speakers: Jonathan Ginzburg (Laboratoire de linguistique formelle, Université de Paris)
- Conference proceedings submission: 15th October 2025
- Workshop webpage: `https://dkaramasov.github.io/hpsg2025/`
- Email contact/local organizer: jakob dot mache ett letras dot ulisboa dot pt

A call for contributions to the proceedings will be issued after the conference. The proceedings are going to be an indexed publication; the contributions will undergo a separate round of reviews. The proceedings of previous conferences are available at: `https://proceedings.hpsg.xyz/`

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