

Minor sentence types – their form and its impact on grammar

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

4th September 2025

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). 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 König and Siemund (2007), Evans (2007) and Altmann, Meibauer, and Steinbach (2013). 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).
3. Optatives in Germanic (cf. Grosz 2012, Grosz 2013) and in Meithei (Tibeto-Burman) , (cf. Chelliah 1997).
4. Rhetorical questions (Dehé and Braun 2019, Farkas 2020).
5. Deliberative self-addressed questions.
6. Other non-canonical questions (cf. Trotzke 2023).
7. Echo questions A: *I tell you he is a braggart* – B: *He is what?* (cf. Beck and Reis 2018).
8. Declarative questions in Germanic languages (cf. Gunlogson 2001).
9. *What if* questions (cf. Bledin and Rawlins 2019, Li and Liu 2023).
10. 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)
11. Non-finite presentatives/mad magazin sentences: *Him play the piano? Ludicrous!* (cf. Akmajian 1984, Lambrecht 1990, Fernández-Pena and Pérez-Guerra 2024).
12. 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)
 - (b) Directive dative constructions in Russian: *khui vojne* ‘penis.NOM war.DAT= f*ck war’.
 - (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).
13. Main clauses that display characteristics of embedded clauses (*insubordination*), as suggested by Evans (2007), such as:
 - (a) Verb forms that typically occur only in dependent clauses, such as the subjunctive in certain languages.
 - (b) Word order variations, such as verb-final sentences in Dutch and German.
 - (c) Sentences headed by complementisers.
 14. Short answers and response particles derived from deictic adverbs, e.g. Portuguese *sim*, French *oui*, Polish *tak* or from finite forms as Portuguese *tá* (cf. Ginzburg 2012:217–265).
 15. 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).
 16. Vocatives (Zwicky 1974, Ladd 1978, Portner 2007, Hill 2007, Hill 2022, Portner 2007 Maché 2020, Maché 2025).
 17. Evaluative or expressive “vocatives” prevalent in many European languages such as English *you idiot!* or Portuguese *seu idiota!* ‘POSS.3S idiot’ (cf. Svennung 1958, Rauh 2004, Espinal 2013:120–127, d’Avis and Meibauer 2013).
 18. Greetings (cf. Ginzburg 2012:74–80).
 19. Exclamative interjections and evaluative expressions like *Wow!* or *Oh God!* (cf. Ginzburg 2014, Sieberg 2016)

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

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/>

References

- Akmajian, Adrian (June 1984). "Sentence types and the form-function fit". In: *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 2.1, pp. 1–23. DOI: 10.1007/bf00233711. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF00233711>.
- Altmann, Hans, Jörg Meibauer, and Markus Steinbach (2013). *Satztypen des Deutschen*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Beck, Sigrid and Marga Reis (June 2018). "On the Form and Interpretation of Echo Wh-Questions". In: *Journal of Semantics* 35.3, pp. 369–408. DOI: 10.1093/jos/ffy002. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jos/ffy002>.
- Bledin, Justin and Kyle Rawlins (Nov. 2019). "What ifs". In: *Semantics and Pragmatics* 12.14, pp. 1–62. DOI: 10.3765/sp.12.14. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3765/sp.12.14>.
- Browne, Mitchell (Nov. 2024). *A Grammar of Warlmanpa*. Canberra, ACT: ANU Press. DOI: 10.22459/gw.2024. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22459/GW.2024>.
- Callender, John B. (1985). *Studies in the nominal sentence in Egyptian and Coptic*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chelliah, Shobhana Lakshmi (Dec. 1997). *A Grammar of Meithei*. Mouton Grammar Library 17. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110801118. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110801118>.
- Condoravdi, Cleo and Sven Lauer (2012). "Imperatives: meaning and illocutionary force". In: *Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics* 9. Ed. by Christopher Piñón, pp. 37–58. URL: <http://www.cssp.cnrs.fr/eiss9/>. semantic proposition, imperative, directive.
- d'Avis, Franz-Josef and Jörg Meibauer (2013). "Du Idiot! Din idiot! Pseudo-vocative constructions and insults in German (and Swedish)". In: *Vocative! Addressing between system and performance*. Ed. by Barbara Sonnenhauser and Patrizia Noel Aziz Hanna. Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs 261. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 189–217. DOI: 10.1515/9783110304176.189.
- Dehé, Nicole and Bettina Braun (July 2019). "The prosody of rhetorical questions in English". In: *English Language and Linguistics* 24.4, pp. 607–635. DOI: 10.1017/S1360674319000157. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1360674319000157>.
- Dingemanse, Mark, Francisco Torreira, and Nicholas J. Enfield (Nov. 2013). "Is 'Huh?' a Universal Word? Conversational Infrastructure and the Convergent Evolution of Linguistic Items". In: *PLoS ONE* 8.11. Ed. by Johan J. Bolhuis, e78273. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0078273. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0078273>.
- Espinal, Teresa M. (2013). "On the structure of vocatives". In: *Vocative! Addressing between system and performance*. Ed. by Barbara Sonnenhauser and Patrizia Noel Aziz Hanna. Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs 261. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 109–132.

- Evans, Nicholas (Apr. 2007). “Insubordination and its uses”. In: *Finiteness*. Ed. by Irina Nikolaeva. Oxford: Oxford University Press (OUP), pp. 366–431. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780199213733.003.0011. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199213733.003.0011>.
- Farkas, Donka (2020). *Canonical and non canonical questions*. Ms. UC Santa Cruz / Princeton University.
- Fernández-Pena, Yolanda and Javier Pérez-Guerra (Sept. 2024). “A constructionist account of why-fragments and Mad Magazine sentences: the ‘Sceptical Small’ construction”. In: *English Language and Linguistics* 28.3, pp. 491–520. DOI: 10.1017/S1360674324000261. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1360674324000261>.
- Frajzyngier, Zygmunt (May 2012). *A Grammar of Wandala*. Mouton Grammar Library 47. Berlin: De Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110218411. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110218411>.
- Frajzyngier, Zygmunt, Eric Johnston, and Adrian Edwards (Dec. 2005). *A Grammar of Mina*. Mouton Grammar Library 36. Mouton de Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110893908. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110893908>.
- Gärtner, Hans-Martin (2013). “Infinite Hauptsatzstrukturen”. In: *Satztypen des Deutschen*. Ed. by Jörg Meibauer, Markus Steinbach, and Hans Altmann. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 202–231.
- (2014). “On covert modality in German root infinitives”. In: *Proceedings of the 31st West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*. Ed. by Robert E. Santana-LaBarge. Somerville, Mass: Cascadia Press, pp. 199–206.
- (2017). “Root infinitivals and modal particles. An interim report”. In: *Discourse Particles. Formal Approaches to their Syntax and Semantics*. Ed. by Josef Bayer and Volker Struckmeier. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 115–143.
- Ginzburg, Jonathan (1996). “Dynamics and the semantics of dialogue”. In: *Logic, language and computation*. Ed. by J. Seligman and D. Westerståhl. CSLI Lecture Notes 58. Stanford: CSLI Publications, pp. 221–237.
- (2012). *The interactive stance: Meaning for conversation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199697922.001.0001.
- (2014). *Divine Scatology: Exclamative interjections in dialogue*. Ms. Université Paris-Diderot.
- Grosz, Patrick G. (July 2012). *On the Grammar of Optative Constructions*. Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today. John Benjamins Publishing Company. DOI: 10.1075/la.193. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/la.193>.
- (2013). “Optativsatz”. In: *Satztypen des Deutschen*. Ed. by Jörg Meibauer, Markus Steinbach, and Hans Altmann. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 146–171.
- Gunlogson, Christine (2001). “True to form: Rising and falling declaratives as questions in English”. PhD thesis. Santa Cruz: University of California. URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/1802/231>.
- Hill, Virginia (Dec. 2007). “Vocatives and the pragmatics–syntax interface”. In: *Lingua* 117.12, pp. 2077–2105. DOI: 10.1016/j.lingua.2007.01.002.
- (July 2022). “The syntactization of kinship in vocative phrases”. In: *Volume 7* 7.1, pp. 1–24. DOI: 10.16995/glossa.6557.
- Jackendoff, Ray and Steven Pinker (2005). “The nature of the language faculty and its implications for evolutions of language, (Reply to Fitch, Hauser & Chomsky)”. In: *Cognition* 97, pp. 211–225.
- Jacobs, Joachim (2008). “Wozu Konstruktionen?” In: *Linguistische Berichte* 213, pp. 3–44.
- Kaufmann, Magdalena (2012). *Interpreting Imperatives*. Vol. 88. Studies in linguistics and philosophy. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Klein, Wolfgang (2008). “On finiteness”. In: *Semantics in acquisition*. Ed. by Veerle van Geenhoven. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 245–272.
- König, Ekkehard and Peter Siemund (2007). “Gender and noun classes”. In: *Language typology and syntactic description. Volume I: Clause Structure*. Ed. by Tim Shopen. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 276–324.
- Ladd, Robert D. (1978). “Stylized intonation”. In: *Language* 54.3, pp. 517–540. DOI: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/412785>.
- Lambrecht, Knud (Aug. 1990). “What, me worry? – ‘Mad Magazine Sentences’ Revisited”. In: *Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* 16.1, pp. 215–228. DOI: 10.3765/bls.v16i0.1730. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3765/bls.v16i0.1730>.
- Li, Wenshan and Jiang Liu (Sept. 2023). “What is what if?” In: *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 42.2, pp. 275–312. DOI: 10.1515/zfs-2023-2004. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/zfs-2023-2004>.
- Maché, Jakob (2020). “Overcoming distances – The usage of calling contours to initiate dialogues”. In: *Proceedings of the 24th Workshop on the Semantics and Pragmatics of Dialogue at Brandeis University*. Ed. by Sophia Malamud, James Pustejovsky, and Jonathan Ginzburg. Waltham, New Jersey: Brandeis University. URL: http://semdial.org/anthology/Z20-Mache_semdial_0012.pdf.
- (2025). “The diversity of vocative formation across languages”. In: *Catalan Journal of Linguistics* 24.
- Meibauer, Jörg (2013). “Satztyp und Pragmatik”. In: *Satztypen des Deutschen*. Ed. by Jörg Meibauer, Markus Steinbach, and Hans Altmann. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 712–737.
- Michaelis, Laura A. and Knud Lambrecht (June 1996). “Toward a Construction-Based Theory of Language Function: The Case of Nominal Extraposition”. In: *Language* 72.2, p. 215. DOI: 10.2307/416650.
- Nikolaeva, Irina, ed. (Apr. 2007). *Finiteness: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780199213733.001.0001. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199213733.001.0001>.
- Ørnes, Bjarne (2011). “Wohin mit Konstruktionen?” *The syntax and semantics of non-verbal questions in German and Danish*. Manuscript, FU Berlin.
- Painter, Colin (1975). “/m hm/, /!m !m/ and some forms of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ in Gwa”. In: *Anthropological Linguistics* 17.1, pp. 19–23.

- Portner, Paul (Nov. 2007). “Imperatives and modals”. In: *Natural Language Semantics* 15.4, pp. 351–383. DOI: 10.1007/s11050-007-9022-y.
- Potts, Christopher (2005). *The logic of conventional implicatures*. Vol. 7. Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics. Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199273829.001.0001>.
- (2015). “Presupposition and implicature”. In: *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory*. Ed. by Shalom Lappin and Chris Fox. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 168–202.
- Rauh, Gisa (2004). “Warum *Linguist* in *ich/du Linguist* kein Schimpfwort sein muß. Eine konversationstheoretische Erklärung”. In: *Linguistische Berichte* 197, pp. 77–105.
- Reis, Marga (1985). “Satzeinleitende Strukturen im Deutschen. Über COMP, Haupt- und Nebensätze, w-Bewegung und die Doppelkopf-Analyse”. In: *Erklärende Syntax des Deutschen*. Ed. by Werner Abraham. Vol. 25. Studien zur deutschen Grammatik. Narr, pp. 271–311.
- (1995). “Über infinite Nominativkonstruktionen”. In: *Festvorträge anlässlich des 60. Geburtstags von Inger Rosengren*. Ed. by Olaf Önnersfors. Sprache und Pragmatik. Arbeitsberichte Sonderheft. Lund: University of Lund.
- (1999). “On sentence types in German. An enquiry into the relationship between grammar and pragmatics”. In: *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis* 4, pp. 195–236. URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/10900/46377>.
- (2003). “On the form of German wh-infinitives”. In: *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 15, pp. 155–201.
- Roberts, Ian G. (2012). “Diachrony and cartography. Paths of grammaticalization and the clausal hierarchy”. In: *Functional heads*. Ed. by Laura Brugé et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 351–367.
- Schmerling, Susan (1982). “How imperatives are special and how they aren’t”. In: *Papers from the parasession on nondeclaratives: Chicago Linguistic Society*. Ed. by Robinson Schneider, Kevin Tuite, and Robert Chametzky. Chicago, IL, pp. 202–218.
- Schwabe, Kerstin (1994). *Syntax und Semantik situativer Ellipsen*. Vol. 48. Studien zur deutschen Grammatik. Tübingen: Narr.
- Sieberg, Bernd (2016). “Vorschlag für eine Erweiterung der Kategorie Responsive.” In: *Gesprochene Fremdsprache Deutsch*. Ed. by Brigitte Handwerker, Rainer Bäuerle, and Bernd Sieberg. Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag, pp. 101–116.
- Smeets, Ineke (Mar. 2007). *A Grammar of Mapuche*. Mouton Grammar Library 41. Berlin: De Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110211795. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110211795>.
- Svennung, Josef (1958). *Anredeformen : vergleichende Forschungen zur indirekten Anrede in der dritten Person und zum Nominativ für den Vokativ*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Trotzke, Andreas (2023). *Non-canonical questions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192872289.001.0001.
- Truckenbrodt, Hubert (2006). “On the semantic motivation of syntactic verb movement to C in German”. In: *Theoretical Linguistics* 32.3, pp. 257–306. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/TL.2006.018>.
- Watson, Janet C. E. (2002). *The phonology and morphology of Arabic*. The phonology of the world’s languages. Oxford: Oxford University Press (OUP).
- Wilder, Chris (2008). “The PP-’with’-DP construction”. In: *Elements of Slavic and Germanic grammars: a comparative view*. Ed. by Jacek Witkos and Gisbert Fanselow. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, pp. 235–253.
- Zanuttini, Raffaella and Paul Portner (2003). “Exclamative Clauses: At the Syntax-Semantics Interface”. In: *Language* 79.1, pp. 39–81. DOI: 10.1353/lan.2003.0105.
- Zwicky, Arnold (1974). ““Hey, Whatsyourname””. In: *Papers from the Tenth Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society, April 19-21, 1974*. Ed. by Michael La Galy, Robert A. Fox, and Bruck Anthony. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, pp. 787–801. URL: <https://web.stanford.edu/~zwicky/hey-whatsyourname.pdf>.