Exclamative *Se* Constructions

Synopsis   I explore a novel construction that I dub "exclamative *se* constructions" (ESC). ESCs possess the exclamative quality of *wh*-exclamatives (e.g. "how handsome he is!"), but feature no *wh-* constituent. I illustrate these constructions for standard Italian and Trevigiano, a Northern Italian dialect. An example of ESC is given below for Italian:

1) A: "We never talk anymore"
   B: *"Se ti   chiamo ogni   fine-settimana!"*
      if CLdat. I-call   every   weekend
      "What are you talking about, I call you every weekend!"

Structure & Occurrence in Corpora In Italian, ESCs are introduced by the morpheme "se" (=if). "Se" is used to introduce both embedded polarity questions and conditional adverbial clauses, yet ESCs are neither: the polarity of the ESC construction is not in question, and unlike actual conditional clauses (see ex. 7), no superordinate main clause functioning as antecedent is present in ESCs. In Italian ESCs, "se" is often preceded by the adversative connective *ma* (= but). A search for ESC on the Italian online corpus *Paisà*[1] returned a total of 18 relevant structures. The interpretation of 15 out of 18 examples is clearly connected to degrees on a scale, as for example in (2). Alongside (2), we also find examples like (3), whose interpretation is not as obviously linked to degrees on a scale:

2) *lo zio poi ha cercato di sdrammatizzare, "no, era una cacca normale", ma la zia è intervenuta con le mani appena ripulite "normale? <u>ma se era un mare di fango</u>!"*
   The uncle then tried to play it down, "no, it was a normal poop", but the aunt
3) *Parlavo di antisemitismo, la gente mi rideva in faccia, anche gli amici. "<u>Ma se non esiste!</u>", dicevano.*
   I talked about anti-Semitism, people laughed at me, even my friends. "It doesn't (even) exist!" they said.

Analysis   I argue that, in ESC constructions, speakers *resort to entailments determined on contextually-relevant scales to rebutter an existing conclusion* (here I follow Rocci's (in press) typology of counterarguments). A formal analysis is provided in (4a); in (4b), the logic of (4a) is applied to (1). In an ESC exchange, speaker A asserts a proposition P. A's interlocutor B utters a second proposition Q (the ESC structure). Proposition Q entails the falsity of the original proposition P because it entails the falsity of a third proposition, R, whose falsity necessarily entails the falsity of P as well. Importantly, these entailments follow because Q and R sit on opposite ends of a contextually relevant scale.

4a)
   A   asserts p
   B   asserts q, where
      $p \Rightarrow r \wedge q \Rightarrow \neg r$
      Since q = True, r =False.
      Since r = False, p= False
(q $\Rightarrow \neg$r because q and r on opposite
ends of a contextually relevant scale)

4b)
   A: "We never talk" = True
   B: "I call every weekend" = True.
      If "we never talk" is True, then "I never call" must also be True. Yet "I never call" must be False, since "I call every weekend" is True, and "I call every weekend" being True entails "I never call" being False.

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[1] Query: <s>[word="ma"][word="se"], which returns 110 hits. Results were then manually checked to exclude duplicates and actual conditional clauses.

Since "I never call" is False, "we never talk" is also False.

In (4b), Q being True entails R being False because, given a contextually relevant contrast set like {*never, once every month, once every weekend*}, asserting that B calls every weekend renders false all other weaker claims in the set. Similarly, in (2), if we assume the existence of a scale like {*tiny, normal, big, a sea of mud*}, Uncle is asserting *normal(p),* whereas Aunt is asserting *sea-of-mud(p).* Asserting *sea-of-mud(p)* renders any weaker claim in the scale false, thus falsifying the original proposition *normal(p).* I contend that all ESCs operate on a degree-on-a-scale interpretation: this puts ESC in line with *wh*-exclamatives, whose interpretation is also dependent on scales (Portner & Zanuttini 2003). Examples like (3) can also be made to fall in line with this generalization if we assume that the relevant scale in (3) is *degrees of certainty*: A talking about antisemitism presupposes that antisemitism *most likely* exists, and then B asserts that antisemitism *definitely* does not exists.
ESCs thus have the semantics of counterarguments (which explains the frequent presence of the adversative connective "ma" in Italian ESCs), plus the degree-on-a-scale interpretation that is typical of run-of-the-mill exclamative structures.

Cross-Linguistic Variation While Italian ESC are introduced by "se", in Trevigiano, "co" (=when) is used instead (5). "Co" is syntactically a head and it is used to introduce temporal adverbial clauses (6) [note that "co" is not used to express temporal wh- questions; a different element, the wh-word *quando* (also =when), is used instead].

5) A: "We never talk anymore"	6) *Co*	*te*	*vien*	*te*	*digo*
B: *Co*	*te*	*ciamo tuti i*	*dì!*	When youCL come datCL I-tell	
When	CLdat.	I-call	all the days	"When you get here I'll tell you"	

If/when are clearly not being used compositionally in ESC: (5), for example, does not situate an event or a state temporally. I suggest that the cross-linguistic variation stems from languages remedying the lack of a specialized ESC structure by readapting syntactic structures, specifically, adverbial syntax. Why would ESC be parasitic on *adverbial* clauses? Adverbials provide information on the (temporal, locative, conditional, etc.) circumstances under which the events depicted in the main clauses (can) take place. For example, in (7), the conditional specifies the circumstances in which the apodosis will return True. Note that certain types of temporal adverbials can also assume a conditional interpretation (see Farkas & Sugioka 1983 on restrictive *when* clauses), see (8), where *when* can be replaced by *if* with no significant change in meaning:

7) <u>If I call every weekend</u>, you will be happy
8) Canaries are popular <u>*when* they are rare</u>   (Farkas & Sugioka 1983:225)

In (4a), I have argued that in ESC, a proposition P is rejected by asserting Q, where Q is incompatible with P. In other words, in all situations in which Q equals True, P must necessarily return False. Both adverbial clauses and ESC thus specify a circumstance that has an effect on the truth conditions of a relevant proposition P. The difference between ESC and a conditional like in (7) is that, in the former case, this circumstance is the circumstance which renders P false rather than the condition which makes it true.

Selected references **Brunello et al. (2014).** The PAISA corpus of Italian web texts. Proceedings of the 9th Web as Corpus Workshop (WaC-9) (pp. 36-43). **Farkas, D. F., & Sugioka, Y. (1983).** Restrictive if/when clauses. Linguistics and Philosophy, 225-258. **Rocci, A.** In press. The Language of Argumentation. ed. by Ronny Boogaart, Henrike Jansen and Maarten van Leeuwen. Springer. **Rocci, A., Greco, S., Schär, R., Convertini, J., Perret-Clermont, A. N., & Iannaccone, A. (2020).** The significance of the adversative connectives aber, mais, ma ('but') as indicators in young children's argumentation. Journal of Argumentation in Context, 9(1), 69-94. **Zanuttini, R., & Portner, P. (2003).** Exclamative clauses: At the syntax-semantics interface. Language, 39-81.