

Are Minor Speech Acts Syntactic Objects in Universal Grammar?

The case of Spanish, Galician *a ver/a que*, Basque *ea ... ote*, Quechua *maa ... chu ... shi*

1. The problem: The place of Minor Speech Acts (MSA) in Universal Grammar

The context of utterance (speaker, addressee, time, place of u) has been recently represented in syntax (Bianchi 2003, Sigurðsson 2004, Giorgi 2009, Delfitto&Fiorin 2014). In semantics, structure-sensitive *monster operators* able to rewrite context variables are actively discussed (Schlenker 1999, 2004, Anand&Nevins 2004, Anand 2006). Research on illocutionary force, by contrast, is limited, and tied to work on indexicality. Some scholars include illocutionary force in the context (Tenny&Speas 2003, Alcázar&Saltarelli 2014). In this paper, I argue that *MSA of uncertain outcome* (2, 3, §4:inline) are *syntactic objects* in UG (like exclamatives, also MSA). They receive uniform expression in Spanish, Basque and Quechua (§2~4). These languages are unrelated. The morphology has different origins and functions. Their parallelism is unexpected.

2. Basque *ea ... ote*: Grammars identify *ea* as **an optional marker of indirect questions (IQ)**, be those polar (1a) or pronominal (1b, Saltarelli 1988, Zubiri&Zubiri 2000, de Rijk 2008).

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| <p>1. a. <i>Jakin nahi dut (ea) joan-go (ote) naiz-en</i>
 know want AUX MIR go.PER-IRR MIR aux-COMP
 “I want to know whether I will go”</p> | <p>b. ... <i>(Ea) nor joan-go (ote) d-en</i>
 MIR who go.PER-IRR MIR aux-COMP
 “[I want to know] who will go”</p> |
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Ea co-occurs with *ote*, a mirative in the *classic sense* (surprising, unexpected events: DeLancey 1997, Aikhenvald 2004). *Ote* is also interpretable as *anticipating a yet uncertain outcome* in the imminent or near future. This is a lesser-known interpretation of mirative morphology (e.g., Quechua mirative-marked riddles, challenges [§4]: Floyd 1995). *Ea* is mirative in this sense in (1), as well as in (2): **“Root” IQs** (Zubiri&Zubiri, de Rijk).

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| <p>2. a. <i>Ea zer gerta-tu-ko (ote) d-en</i>
 MIR what happen-PER-IRR MIR aux-COMP
 “Let’s see what happens”</p> <p>b. <i>Ea nor-k irabaz-ten du-en</i>
 MIR who-ERG win-IMP aux-COMP
 “Let’s see who wins!”</p> | <p>c. <i>Ea apur-tzen duzu-n</i>
 MIR break-IMP aux-COMP
 “Don’t you break it!”</p> <p>d. <i>Ea asma-tzen duzu-n</i>
 MIR guess-IMP aux-COMP
 “Can you guess it?”</p> | <p>I propose (2) are MSA with uncertain outcome/mirativity in common & thus define a class.</p> |
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“Root” IQs express hope (2a) or uncertainty, fear (2a), challenges/bets (2b), preventatives (2c), guesses (2d), and other speech acts. “Root” IQs resemble imperatives in that they resist negation and embedding; temporal interpretation is now or imminent future, and past is counterfactual. The meaning of “Root” IQs seems to follow from *absence of speaker control*. By contrast, imperative semantics is based on *speaker control* (Potsdam 1998). *Ea* in (2) is higher than CP(-en), NegP, Evidentials, Polar Q Marker/Agreement (-entz).

3. Spanish *a ver* “to see” and *a que* “to that”: I found no discussions in classic grammars (Bello; Alarcos-Llorach; Franch&Blecua; Quilis). Montolío (1999: 3680-1) discusses *a ver* as a series of desiderative, preventative expressions. ***A ver* (3) covers the same ground as (2).** *A ver* is obligatory in (3); *ea* is also obligatory in (2).

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| <p>3. a. <i>A ver que pasa</i> [to see what happens] “Let’s see what happens”
 b. <i>A ver quien gana</i> [to see who wins] “Let’s see who wins!”
 c. <i>A ver si lo rompes</i> [to see if you break it] “Don’t you break it!”
 d. <i>A ver si lo adivinas</i> [to see if you guess it] “Can you guess it?”</p> | <p><i>A ver</i> has a fixed position, unless used as an <i>interjection</i> or in <i>elided IQs</i> (§3~4).</p> |
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***A ver* is used in polar (4a) and pronominal (4b) IQs.** It adds *mirativity* (=uncertain outcome).

- 4 a. *Me pregunto (a ver) si viene* “I wonder [to see] whether he will come”

b. *Quiero saber (a ver) si vale* “I want to know [to see] whether it works”
Spanish (&Galician) permit **IQ elision** (4cd; Basque doesn’t, but it allows interjection: *Ea, Ask!*).

4. c. *No se si lo harán. ¿Pregunta a ver!* “I don’t know whether they’ll do it. Ask [to see]!”

d. *¿Vas a comprar algo? Miraré a ver* “Will you buy anything? I’ll look around [to see]”

(4) are spoken language (CREA: phone conversations; *Corpus del español: habla culta* [spoken standard] across Latin America). (4) abound in the Internet (Portuguese, Catalan, French [*ask*]).

A ver, ea (ba) function as INTERJECTIONS (§4.2), in diverse settings, with great overlap. Hill (2007) analyzes interjections as deictics. [NB: postponed *a ver* (4cd) is not an interjection].

ANOTHER FORM: ***a que*** “to that”, covers similar ground to (2-3); however, it cannot be used in indirect questions (1, 4) or as an interjection. Its origin is likely *te apuesto a que* “I bet you that”. If *a ver* originates from *quiero saber si* (“I want to know whether”), or *vamos a ver si* “let’s see if/whether”, which select indirect questions, this could explain their different distributions.

4. Quechua *maa ... chu... shi* (Adelaar 1977, Weber 1983, 1989, Floyd 1995): Quechua has a pattern of mirative-marked speech acts & IQs (Floyd 1995). It is more difficult to describe. It involves multiple mirative marking (like Basque *ea, ote*), but also a mirative reading of reportative evidential *shi* (Cusihuamán 1976, Muysken 2004). Floyd (1995) speaks of a grammaticalized form that engages the addressee into a joint action with the speaker. They begin with *maa*, translated as *uhm* or *a ver*: riddles (*Maa what-shi is it?*, exs. 11-13, p. 917); challenges (“*Maa* let’s see which of us-*shi* lasts till morning”, ex. 17, p. 924). He considers *maa... shi* “syntactically interrogative”, pointing to Weber (1989), who had described *shi* as a marker of finite IQs (“in that way we’ll know which of us-*shi* is the stronger” 332; ex. 1372). Weber (1983) provides five more examples of IQs (pp. 93-4, exs. 315-18, 320; also 1989: 437, ex. 1753).

4.1 Semantics of the Quechua speech acts and indirect questions: For Floyd *shi* is mirative; he argues reportatives have mirative uses (e.g. Turkish). Aikhenvald (2004: 202) notes these uses of *shi* co-occur with Adelaar’s (1977: 98) “sudden discovery tense” [mirative]. Adelaar (99-100) describes *maa...shi* noting it takes *chu*, a root polar question marker [& mirative tense]. For him, *maa...chu...shi* refers to “the uncertain outcome of an experiment”. Cusihuamán (1976) describes *ma* not as an interjection, but as a *mirative enclitic*. One of its uses is riddles: *ima-s[h]-ma-ri?* [what-MIR-MIR-TOP.Q] “What could it be?”. Weber suggested a modal difference in the interpretation of *shi* marked IQs: “I don’t know where he went” [319] vs. “where-*shi* he might have gone” [320]. Weber may have meant mirativity.

4.2 Comparison of Quechua, Spanish and Basque forms: Quechua riddles and challenges overlap with uses of *ea* and *a ver* (2, 3). Coincidentally, Floyd complains other linguists translate *challenge shi* with *a ver*. I disagree with the interpretation as non-confrontational “challenge” of his only other ex. “*Maa* let’s find out who-*shi* he gave the money too” [son lost borrowed money from third party] (ex. 18, p. 926). It is hope and/or insecurity/expectation instead (compare with 2a, 3a). To gain perspective on *maa ... shi*, Cerrón-Palomino helps Andrade-Ciudad (2007) with *A ver, ¿quién-shi habrá venido?* “[to see] who-*shi* has come?”. Not a riddle or challenge but, depending on context, similar to (2a, 3a). On the other hand, there are interjections uses of *maa* to introduce imperative clauses. Weber (1989: 74, exs. 259-261) provides exs of *maa* without *shi* or *chu*—exhortations with “challenge” (his gloss for *maa*): “*Maa*, count them out for me [so that I can verify ...]”. All translate naturally with *ea/a ver* as interjection+imperative; or as IQs (2-3).

5. Conclusion: MSA of uncertain outcome seem to be *syntactic objects* in unrelated languages. Is it contact, convergence, coincidence? I propose they are encoded into UG. Comparison of these MSA and imperatives begs questions about the relationship of mirativity to illocution.