Measureless quantificational exclamatives in North Germanic

Swedish allows a type of quantificational degree exclamative where no overt quantifier is expressed. The examples in (1) all mean ‘What a lot of cars there were here!’ despite the absence of an overt measure/quantifier.

The sentences in (1) have been included in the questionnaire which underlies the Swedish part of Nordic Syntax Database, and (1a) and (1b) have also been tested in Norway. Based on the judgments in the database, (1a) is accepted all over Sweden and Northern Norway, whereas (1b) is restricted to certain parts of Sweden. (1c) has an even more restricted distribution across Swedish dialects: it was unfortunately not tested in Norway, but spontaneous data from for instance the web suggest that it can be found also in Norwegian dialects.

There are interesting differences though between North Norwegian and Swedish with respect to the choice of wh-word and thus ultimately to the syntactic range of the items in question. Whereas Swedish will use vad ‘what’ also in degree exclamatives with an overt measure (cf. (2)), North Norwegian will use a different item in that case, namely kor, compare (3a) with (3b). In turn, this item is used in degree questions (see (4)), and in such clauses Swedish uses the item hur (see (5)). The same discrepancy between the varieties as in overtly quantified degree exclamatives can be observed in degree manner exclamatives, i.e. where an aspect of the verbal act is intensified, cf. (6) vs. (7).

In other words, North Norwegian does the cut differently from Swedish, and that holds also when we consider additional wh-constructions. The Swedish item hur is used as ‘how, in what way’ in a manner question, but kor cannot, cf. (8) vs. (9): instead for North Norwegian, we see the item korns, which arguably is augmented on kor. And whereas North Norwegian kor can be used to ask for place, Swedish hur cannot (see (9) vs. (10)): instead we find the item var.

The various differences and overlaps between Swedish and North Norwegian are summarized in table 1, where the various construction types are organized to give maximum continuity for the wh-items used. One item stands out in breaking the continuity, namely North Norwegian korns. But as mentioned this item can be argued to properly contain kor.

In this paper I will discuss the semantic and morpho-syntactic properties of measureless quantificational exclamatives in light of the wh-items used in them. I will argue that this construction provides important information as to how to better understand the organization of the wh-inventories of the different varieties. Furthermore, I will propose to organize the various constructions in a particular hierarchical order whereby the wh-items span different consecutive parts of that hierarchy, and that this will enable us to understand how the particular language specific pattern have arisen.

I will also discuss some other types of measureless quantificational exclamatives where we, rather than a wh-item, find a complicated sequence of function words including the universal quantifier. I will relate the existence of such exclamatives to the general dichotomy that we observe in North Germanic exclamatives, namely that between wh-exclamatives versus D-exclamatives, i.e. exclamatives where we find determiner-like elements rather than wh-items.
(1) a. Vad bilar det var här!
what cars it was here

b. Vad det var bilar här!
what it was cars here

c. Vad med bilar det var här!
what with cars it was here

(2) a. Vad många bilar det var här!
what many cars it was here

(3) a. Ka/*kor bila de va hær!
what/how cars it was here

b. Kor/*ka mange bila de va hær!
how/what many cars it was here

(4) Kor/*ka mange bila va de dær?
how/what many cars was it there

(5) Hur/*vad många bilar var det där?
how/what many cars was it there

(6) Kor/*ka dokker krangle!
how/what you.PL quarrel

(7) Vad/*hur ni bråkar!
what/how you quarrel

(8) Hur förklarar du detta?
how explain you this

(9) Korsn/*kor forklare du det?
how+/how explain you that

(10) Var/*hur bor du nånstans?
where/how live you some-place

(11) Kor /*korsn bor du hen?
where/how+ live you PRT

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<th>Swedish</th>
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<td><em>vad</em></td>
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<td>measureless quantificational excl.</td>
<td><em>ka</em></td>
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<td>MANNER exclamative</td>
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<td>(Q/A) degree exclamative</td>
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<td>DEGREE interrogative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLACE interrogative</td>
<td><em>kor</em></td>
<td><em>var</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1: *wh*-items used in a selection of interrogative and exclamative constructions in North Norwegian and Swedish