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## "What, me worry?" - 'Mad Magazine sentences' revisited.

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### 1. Introduction.1

In an important paper dealing with the relationship between form and function in natural language, Akmajian (1984) discusses a special type of exclamative sentence which he calls 'Mad Magazine sentence' (MM) and which is illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. What, me worry?
  - b. My boss give me a raise?! (Ha.)
  - c. Him wear a tuxedo?! (Sure.)

On the basis of a number of formal similarities between the MM construction type and the class of imperative sentences in English, Akmajian argues that MMs and imperatives may be generated by the same, highly general, phrase structure rule, "with the proviso that pragmatic principles for the use of imperatives will in fact limit imperatives to a subset of the structures in question" (1984:14). He concludes that neither the Mad Magazine sentence type nor in fact imperative sentences have a special status in a syntactic theory and he suggests that a very general, and perhaps universal, 'Formal Sentence-Type Schema' accounts for most pragmatically specialized sentence patterns.

In this paper, I would like to present an alternative analysis of the sentence type illustrated in (1), following the Construction Grammar approach to syntactic analysis laid out in Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor (1988).<sup>2</sup> I will argue that MM sentences differ from imperatives in so many respects, both pragmatically and formally, that they cannot be subsumed under the same type, hence cannot be invoked as evidence in favor of a universal Formal Sentence-Type Schema of the type advocated by Akmajian.

My paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, I will summarize Akmajian's analysis of MMs and his claim concerning their similarity with imperative sentences. In Section 3, I will briefly discuss the German equivalent of the English MM. Unlike its English cousin, the German construction bears no resemblance whatsoever with imperatives. Formally, the German construction is not a sentence but a sentence fragment. In Section 4, I will return to the English MM construction and I will argue that it may be given essentially the same analysis as its German counterpart. Instead of being related to the imperative, the MM construction is related to (but not identical with) a cross-linguistically widely attested type of topic-comment construction.

### 2. Akmajian's analysis.

Akmajian defines the discourse function of the sentence type in (1) as follows: MMs "are used by speakers to express surprise, disbelief, skepticism, scorn, and so on, at some situation or event" (p. 2). For example (1c) might be used in a context such as (2):

(2) Speaker A: I hear that John may wear a tuxedo to the ball...

Speaker B: Him wear a tuxedo?! He doesn't even own a clean shirt.

The syntactic properties of MMs are summarized as follows by Akmajian:

- (3) A. The subject is accusative:
  - i. What! Her call me up?! Never.
  - ii. What! \*She call me up?! Never.
  - B. Tense and modals never appear:
    - i. \*Him gets a job?!
    - ii. \*Her {will/might/...} call me up?!
  - C. Sentential adverbs do not occur:
    - i. What! \*Her unfortunately lose her job!
  - D. Rules such a Topicalization, which move constituents into COMP, apply in a restricted way:
    - i. What! Us read that trash novel by tomorrow?!
    - ii. What! \*That trash novel, us read by tomorrow?!

According to Akmajian, properties (3A) - (3C) show that MMs lack an AUX constituent in the sense of Akmajian, Steele, & Wasow (1979), i.e. a constituent which contains Tense and Modal (but not have and be). This accounts not only for (3B), but properties (3A) and (3C) will follow automatically, because nominative case on a subject is possible only in tensed expressions and sentential adverbs are banned in tenseless environments (as e.g. in imperatives). Property (3D) suggests that the construction has no COMP node, hence no landing site for topicalized constituents.

Akmajian argues that a phrase structure rule for MMs must make the subject constituent optional, in order to account for cases such as (4) in which the subject me can be omitted:

(4) Speaker A: Why don't you get a respectable job?

Speaker B: (Me) get a respectable job! What do you think I am?

He then observes that the second constituent in MMs does not have to be a verb phrase but can belong to any major syntactic category. In such cases, the copula seems to be understood. Consider the examples in (5) through (7):

- (5) Speaker A: I think Bronsky is such a clever author.

  Speaker B: What! Bronsky (be) clever?! Ha. (NP AP)
- (6) Speaker A: Do you suppose Larry is a doctor by now? Speaker B: Larry (be) a doctor?! What a laugh. (NP NP)
- (7) Speaker A: I'm furious that Mary joined the army.

  Speaker B: What! Mary (be) in the army?! It can't be. (NP PP)

According to Akmajian, MMs which lack the copula can be used to refer both to unrealized and to realized states, events, and actions, while all MMs with overt infinitives (whether copula or full verb) have "fixed irrealis interpretation". In such cases, the states, events, and actions in question, though unrealized, are under the control of either the subject of the sentence or the speaker.

Akmajian tentatively suggests the phrase structure rule in (8) to generate all forms of MM sentences:

(8)  $S_{MM} \longrightarrow (NP) X^n$ , where X ranges over N, A, V, and P, and n is maximal.

The rule in (8) states that the subject of MMs is optional and that it is followed by a predicate phrase which may consist of any of the major syntactic categories, with the proviso that  $X^n$  never contains AUX (i.e. tense and modals) and that it is distinct from S.

Akmajian then points to certain restrictions on MMs in the form of constraints on the subject position. The first restriction is that MMs may not contain dummy subjects. This is shown in examples (9) through (11):

- (9) Speaker A: Damn! There's no more beer left. Speaker B: What! \*There (be) no more beer?!
- (10) Speaker A: It's false that the world is flat. Speaker B: What! \*It (be) false that the world is flat?!
- (11) Speaker A: Those clouds make it look like it might rain again. Speaker B: What! \*It rain again?! Oh no.

The second restriction concerns anaphoric it, which is also banned from subject position of MMs, as shown in (12):

(12) Speaker A: At last I see the book. It's on the table.

Speaker B: Oh? \*It (be) on the table?! We must be blind.

Akmajian argues that these constraints can be accounted for in terms of an independently stateable intonational factor, according to which the subject of an MM forms an obligatory intonation center. The phrases which are acceptable subjects in MMs are just those which can also stand alone as single exclamations. He concludes that the simple rule in (8) can be maintained, even though it overgenerates. To rule out unacceptable sequences, a special property of MMs must be stipulated to the effect that the subject phrase must form an intonation center.

Having formally defined the MM sentence type, Akmajian then raises the question whether "MMs form a special syntactic sentence-type with a unique pragmatic function", resulting in "a one-to-one correspondence between a unique formal sentence-type and a unique use in context for that special formal type" (p. 11). He argues that this view of MMs would be mistaken because MMs share important grammatical properties with imperatives. MMs and imperatives, he claims, should in fact not be formally distinguished. He bases his argument on the following parallels:

- (13) A. Subject Properties: Both MMs and imperatives have optional subjects (both you leave! and Leave! are possible) and both have subjects which are obligatory intonation centers (cf. you leave! vs. \*ya leave!).
  - B. Lack of AUX: Both MMs and imperatives are characterized by lack of tense and modals (cf. Be nice! vs. Are nice! or \*Must leave!) and neither accept sentence adverbs of the fortunately-type (cf. (3B) above).

- C. Oddities with Perfective HAVE: Both MMs and imperatives with perfective have seem unacceptable (cf. ?\*Have finished our homework by 5?! and ?\*Have finished your homework by 5!).3
- D. Topicalization: COMP-landing-site rules apply in a restricted way in MMs as in imperatives (cf. (3,D)).
- E. Control-Interpretation in Cases with the Copula: Both in MMs and in imperatives the presence of a copula indicates that the subject of the sentence, or else the speaker, has control over the state, event, or action in question.
- F. Irrealis Interpretation: Both MMs and imperatives force an irrealis interpretation of the state, event, or action expressed in the sentence.

Akmajian also mentions a number of differences between MMs and imperatives. For example imperatives can only have a restricted set of subjects, such as you and someone, and they are restricted to verb phrases with overt verbs. These differences, he argues, follow from the pragmatic principles underlying the use of imperatives. In other words, the fact that only a subset of the structures generated by PS rule (8) are useable as imperatives is due to pragmatic, not syntactic reasons, hence does not have to be mentioned in the syntactic rule. In spite of certain idiosyncratic "local" syntactic features, imperatives are not unique from a "global" standpoint, i.e. "the formal sentence type in general is not restricted to an imperative function" (p. 18). According to Akmajian, it makes therefore no sense to posit an 'imperative sentence' type in a formal grammar, since the basic structure of imperatives is also that of MMs. He concludes that a notion such as 'imperative sentence' has no status in a syntactic theory, but only in a theory of speech acts.

Akmajian then raises the issue whether particular clusterings of formal properties, such as those which imperatives and MMs have in common, should be singled out "as constituting significant sentence-types" (p. 18). Akmajian suggests that the answer to this question is "yes" and that the notion 'sentence-type' indeed has theoretical status in formal grammar. However he argues that such sentence-types belong to a highly restricted, and perhaps universal, 'Formal Sentence-Type Schema'. Although he acknowledges the theoretical possibility of a one-to-one form-function fit, for example in such "highly marked" constructions as *Down with the king!* or *Off with his head!*, his main claim is "that something along the lines of the Formal Sentence-Type Schema, based on a small and restricted set of formal parameters, provides the input from formal grammar to the pragmatics" and that across languages "the task will be to specify a set of correspondence principles that relate certain formal sentence-types and certain pragmatic functions" (p. 21).

In the remainder of this paper, I would like to challenge Akmajian's conclusions by proposing an alternative analysis, in which MMs constitute a formal type in its own right, which cannot be explained in terms of more general syntactic and pragmatic properties of the grammar. I will interpret the MM construction as an instance of what Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor call a FORMAL IDIOM, i.e. "a syntactic pattern dedicated to semantic and pragmatic purposes not knowable from its form alone" (1988:505). While I agree with Akmajian that certain formal properties of MMs (as of imperatives) are predictable from, or motivated by, the pragmatic function of the construction in discourse, I will challenge the idea that these properties

can be accounted for in terms of highly general pragmatic principles and may therefore be left unspecified in the syntactic description of the construction. In MMs, as in many other sentence types, discourse function and formal structure are inseparably intertwined. Idiosyncratic pragmatic and formal features must therefore be specified as inherent properties of this particular construction.

### 3. Mad Magazine sentences in German.

To avoid the language-specific and culture-specific connotations attached to the label 'Mad Magazine Sentence', I will refer to the German type as the 'Incredulity Response Construction' (IRC), a name suggested by Fillmore, Kay, & O'Connor (1988:511). The German IRC is illustrated in (14), which parallels the English examples in (1):

- (14) a. Ich und mir Sorgen machen? 'Me worry?'
  I-NOM and me-DAT worries make-INF
  - b. Mein Chef und mir eine Gehaltserhöhung geben? 'My boss give me a raise?'
     my-NOM-MASC boss and me-DAT a-ACC-FEM raise give-INF
  - c. Der und einen Smoking anziehen? 'Him wear a tuxedo?' that.one-NOM and a-ACC-MASC tuxedo put.on-INF

It is not my purpose here to provide a complete analysis of the German IRC. I will simply point to those grammatical properties in (14) which I think are relevant to a proper understanding of MMs in English.

The IRCs in (14) consist of an NP in the nominative case, followed by the conjunction *und*, and a bare infinitival verb phrase, schematically [NP[+nom] *und* VP[+inf]]. As in English, the German construction does not have to contain an overt verb. If the infinitive is the copula *sein* 'to be', it may be omitted, leaving behind a simple NP, AP, or PP. Verbless IRCs are shown in (15) through (17), which correspond to the English examples in (5) through (7):

- (15) Bronsky und schlau?! (NP und AP) 'Bronsky clever?!'
  Bronsky and clever
- (16) Larry und Arzt?! (NP und NP) 'Larry a doctor?!'
  Larry and doctor
- (17) Mary und in der Armee?! (NP und PP) 'Mary in the army?!' Mary and in the army

Notice that in (16) the second constituent is a bare N (Arzt). This shows that this NP must be a predicate phrase, since common nouns like Arzt may appear without a determiner only if they function as complements of a copula (cf. Larry is/remains/becomes a doctor'). The constituent after und can thus be described as an infinitival verb phrase whose infinitive may be missing just in case it is the copula sein, in which case the remaining phrase has the form of a complement of sein. Since I see no motivation for postulating an optional deletion rule which would apply to sein but not to any other infinitive, and since to my knowledge there is no conventional way of designating the particular array of

features required, I will represent the second constituent in the IRC in the form of a disjunction (symbolized by /): $^5$ 

(18) IRC: [NP[+nom] und VP[+inf] / YP], where YP is the complement of a copula and where Y is {N,A,P}.

In what follows, I will use the symbol 'PredP[+inf]' as a cover term for the disjunction in (18), i.e. I will use the schema [NP[+nom] und PredP[+inf]] instead of the cumbersome schema in (18).

The construction in (18) clearly does not resemble any known sentence type. In particular, it bears no resemblance to the German imperative construction (in German, imperative verb forms are inflected for person and number). What makes the pattern in (18) unique are the following properties. First, the construction contains an initial NP which by its morphological case and its position ought to be a subject but which is not syntactically a subject because subjects cannot be separated from their predicates by a conjunction and because non-tensed verb phrases cannot have subjects in German. Second the occurrence of the conjunction und runs counter to generally shared assumptions about the syntax and semantics of conjoined coordinate structures (the two conjuncts belong to different syntactic categories and the conjunction cannot be interpreted as a zeugma). Finally the particular set of syntactic features required to characterize the second conjunct seems to appear nowhere else in the grammar of German. The German IRC is made up of phrasal constituents which are perfectly ordinary with regard to their internal morphosyntactic structure but which are combined with one another in a non-ordinary, construction-specific way. To use a set of terms which are of prime importance in Construction Grammar, while the INTERNAL SYNTAX of the two major constituents is trivial, their EXTERNAL SYNTAX is a unique feature of this particular construction. As I will show below, the IRC does in fact not represent a sentence, but a conventionalized SENTENCE FRAGMENT.

The idiosyncratic syntactic pattern in (18) is directly paired with a specific discourse function. This function is the same as in English, as far as I can tell. To account for this function, it is necessary to modify Akmajian's characterization (cf. ex. (2) and discussion) in one crucial respect, both for German and for English. The expression of "surprise, disbelief, skepticism, scorn, and so on" is not directed at some situation or event, as Akmajian has it, but at the LINGUISTIC EXPRESSION of a situation or event, i.e. a PROPOSITION which was expressed (or contextually implied) in the immediately preceding discourse. More specifically, it is directed at the pairing of a certain argument with a certain predicate in that proposition. I will call the previously expressed (or understood) proposition the 'context proposition' (cf. Fillmore, Kay, & O'Connor 1988), and I will call the sentence expressing this proposition the 'context sentence'. For instance in the English MM in (2), the NP him corresponds to the subject argument John in Speaker A's context sentence, and the predicate phrase wear a tuxedo corresponds to the VP may wear a tuxedo to the ball in the context sentence. For an IRC (MM) to be used appropriately, the NP must semantically correspond to an argument (typically, but not necessarily, the subject) in the context proposition, and the infinitival or verbless predicate phrase must semantically correspond to a predicate with which the NP was associated as an argument. (I am using the vague expressions 'semantic correspondence' and

'association of an argument with a predicate' because of the fact that the meaning correspondence between the IRC and the context proposition need not be one of lexical identity, as shown e.g. in (7).)

We are now in a position to understand the semantic-pragmatic motivation for the syntactic structure in (18). First, since the IRC has the pragmatic function of expressing incredulity with respect to some context proposition, it is natural (though of course not logically necessary) that it should present itself as a kind of incredulous QUOTATION of the relevant parts of the context sentence and that this quotation should have interrogative or exclamative form. The difference between the context sentence and the IRC is then the difference between a 'use' form and a 'mention' form of the same or a similar sentence. However what is "mentioned" in the IRC is not the context sentence itself but its subject and its predicate as separate, "nonsentential" constituents. Under this analysis, the morphosyntactic shape of the NP and the PredP in the IRC follows naturally, since nominative and infinitive are the syntactic default (and hence quotation) forms of the categories N and V in German. (In German dictionaries, nouns are listed in the nominative case and verbs in the bare infinitive.) Second, since what prompted the use of the IRC was the controversial pairing of the argument and the predicate in the context proposition, it is also natural (though again not logically necessary) that the IRC should have the syntax of a conjoined coordinate structure whose conjuncts are the argument and the predicate (or part of the predicate) in the context proposition.

Notice that I am characterizing the relationship between the discourse function of the IRC and its syntactic structure as one of MOTIVATION rather than NECESSITY. Different languages do not necessarily have identical structures to express IRCs, as the English MM shows.<sup>6</sup> This notion of functional motivation entails that it is not possible to omit from the syntactic description of the construction those features which are directly explainable in terms of its discourse function (contradicting Akmajian's claim concerning the irrelevance of certain "predictable" formal features for the syntactic description of MMs and imperatives).

The conjunction of NP[+nom] with PredP[+inf] does not constitute a SENTENCE, as Akmajian has it for English, nor does it express a regular PROPOSITION, in the sense that it neither asserts nor presupposes the propositional content which is construable by associating the two conjuncts. What then is the grammatical category of the conjoined structure? To answer this question, it is necessary to take another look at the linguistic environment in which the IRC is conventionally embedded. This environment involves not only the preceding context proposition but also the (overt or implied) proposition which FOLLOWS the IRC, and which expresses the speaker's emotional judgment about the context proposition. An example of an IRC involving such a proposition in overt form is shown in (19):

# (19) Der und einen Smoking anziehen? Du hast sie wohl nicht alle! 'Him wear a tuxedo?! You must be crazy!'

Let us call the proposition expressed by *Du hast sie wohl nicht alle* the 'follow-up proposition'. It seems reasonable to assume that the special meaning associated with the IRC is due to the conventional association of the two conjuncts with such a follow-up proposition, since it is this proposition which expresses the doubt, rejection, challenge, etc. about the context proposition. There is nothing in the syntactic

structure NP[+nom] und PredP[+inf] itself which would explain such a connotation. I conclude that the follow-up proposition must be included in the description of the IRC, even though its expression via an overt sentence or sentence fragment is optional.

To account for the external syntax of the conjoined structure in the IRC I would like to suggest that this structure forms a complex TOPIC expression, about whose referent the follow-up proposition expresses a COMMENT. For example in (19) the conjunction of the NP der with the VP einen Smoking anziehen constitutes a topic about which the sentence Du hast sie wohl nicht alle expresses a relevant judgment (namely rejection). I propose to represent the structure of (19) as follows:

- (20)  $_{\text{TOP}}[_{\text{NP[+nom]}}[_{\text{der }}]$  und  $_{\text{VP[+inf]}}[_{\text{einen }}S.$  anziehen ] ]  $_{\text{S}}[_{\text{du }}(...)$  alle ] In (20), TOP indicates a syntactic position rather than a syntactic category. Syntactically, the TOP phrase shares with topic constituents in other topic-comment constructions the property of being located outside the domain of S (or of S'). The PredP constituent in this TOP phrase is a possible topic expression because it is infinitival, i.e. nominalized. Pragmatically, the TOP phrase is similar to other topics in that the entity designated by it has been evoked in previous discourse and stands in a pragmatic relation of aboutness with the following proposition (see Lambrecht forthcoming:Ch.4). The structure in (20) is formally and pragmatically related to a crosslinguistically widely attested construction which I call the 'Unlinked-Topic Construction' (Lambrecht, op.cit.), in which an NP expressing a previously evoked discourse entity is preposed as a topic to a sentence whose argument positions are not anaphorically related to the NP and whose proposition is pragmatically construed as conveying information about the entity designated by the NP. (21) and (22) are characteristic attested examples of the Unlinked-Topic Construction in spoken English (the sentences in parentheses indicate the discourse context):
  - (21) (That isn't the typical family anymore.)

    The typical family today, the husband and wife both work.
  - (22) (Talking about planting flowers) Tulips, you don't have to plant new bulbs every year.

In (21) and (22), the sentences following the commas express comments about the entities designated by the topic NPs the typical family today and tulips. As in the IRC, the entities designated by the topic expressions were evoked in the immediately preceding discourse. What distinguishes the IRC from other topic constructions, whether linked or unlinked, and what makes it unique, is the fact that in the IRC one of the topic constituents (the NP) designates a discourse entity, while the other (the PredP) designates an attribute of that entity.

The structure in (20) may be generalized into (23), which replaces (18):

(23) IRC: 
$$_{\text{TOP}}[_{\text{NP[+nom]}}[ \dots ] \text{ und }_{\text{PREDP[+inf]}}[ \dots ]] \quad (_{S}[ \dots ])$$

As part of the grammatical information necessary for the appropriate use and correct interpretation of the IRC the following pragmatic conditions must be appended to the structure in (23): (i) the TOP constituent must correspond semantically to a proposition which was evoked in the immediately preceding discourse and in which the designatum of the PredP[+inf] constituent was predicated of the designatum of the

NP[+nom] constituent; and (ii) the proposition expressed by S must be interpretable as a judgment about the designatum of the TOP phrase. As mentioned earlier, the structure in (23) is a FORMAL IDIOM in the sense of Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor (1988), i.e. it is a fully productive syntactic pattern in which familiar syntactic pieces are unfamiliarly arranged and whose semantic and pragmatic properties do not follow from its form alone but must be stated as features of the construction.

### 4. Mad Magazine sentences revisited.

I believe that the analysis of the German IRC can be extended to the English Mad Magazine type, with one minor restriction concerning the presence of the conjunction *und* in German. If we adopt my interpretation of the IRC as a special kind of topic-comment construction, most if not all of the formal properties observed by Akmajian can be given a uniform and natural explanation. Moreover certain problems in Akmajian's analysis do not arise in the alternative I propose. As for the parallel between MMs and imperatives, it cannot be maintained under my analysis.

I would like to begin by pointing to an important fact concerning the syntax of MMs which Akmajian does not mention. This is the fact that the sequence of the two initial constituents in the MM construction is REVERSIBLE. Parallel to (1) (a), (b), and (c) we also find the versions in (24):

- (24) a. What, worry, me?!
  - b. Give me a raise, my boss?!
  - c. Wear a tuxedo, him?!

As often observed (e.g. Lambrecht 1981, Bresnan & Mchombo 1987, etc.), constituents in TOP position--being extra-clausal non-argument constituents--may be freely ordered with respect to each other. The phenomenon of reversibility illustrated in (24) follows then directly from my analysis of the MM as a TOP constituent. An attested example of an MM with reversed order (pointed out to me by Sue Schmerling) is the following advertisement for a brand of thermal underwear, in which a happily smiling woman utters the sentence in (25):

### (25) Cold, me, never.

(25) is an especially illuminating example as it illustrates, in the concisest possible form, not only the fact that the NP and the predicate phrase may be reversed, but also that the follow-up proposition (here *never*) is a natural part of the construction. The property of reversibility alone is sufficient to demonstrate that the MM cannot be a sentential structure generable with the PS rule in (8). Indeed in English a subject NP can never follow a verb phrase (though it may sometimes follow a verb).

Given the reversibility of the two constituents in TOP position, I propose the structure in (26) for the IRC (MM) construction in English. The symbol PredP[+inf] stands for the same set of syntactic features as in German (cf. (18) and discussion):

(26) MM: 
$$_{\text{TOP}}[_{\text{NP[+acc]}}[\dots]]$$
,  $_{\text{PredP[+inf]}}[\dots]]$  ( $_{\text{S}}[\dots])]$ 

The structure in (26) is identical to that in (23), except for the difference in NP case and for the fact that the English structure has a comma instead of a conjunction between the two TOP elements (indicating that the two constituents are not ordered

with respect to each other). Like (23), (26) is interpreted as a formal idiom.

Concerning the various formal properties in item (3) pointed out by Akmajian, these are naturally compatible with my proposal. (3A) (accusative case of the "subject") is explained by the fact that in English the accusative form is the default or unmarked case for pronouns in non-argument positions. (This possibility is hinted at by Akmajian in footnote 3 of his paper). Since TOP phrases are non-arguments, they must have accusative case (cf. the case of the topic pronoun in such nonstandard topic constructions as Me I'm waiting). The lack of a tense feature stated in (3B) is directly motivated by the pragmatics of the IRC. Speaker B's incredulous response does not concern the time at which the situation or event described in the context proposition takes place but rather the abstract predicate-argument structure of that context proposition. As for the non-occurrence of modals like will or might, I take it to be a purely formal consequence of the fact that modals have no infinitive in English (in German, where modals do have infinitives, they may occur in IRCs). The fact that sentential adverbs like fortunately cannot occur (item (3C)) follows from the semantic property of such adverbs as expressions of a speaker's attitude toward a proposition. Since the incredulous response in the IRC is not directed at Speaker A's attitude towards her proposition but at the meaning of the proposition itself, such adverbs may not occur. Finally the constraint against Topicalization (item (3D)) seems to follow from the fact that the pragmatic appropriateness conditions for topicalizing a constituent are incompatible with the situation under which IRCs are used.<sup>7</sup>

Of central importance for Akmajian's analysis are his observations concerning the optional status of the "subject" NP and the infinitival element in the VP (exx. (4) through (7)). In his attempt to make the syntactic description of the MM maximally general and maximally compatible with the structure of imperatives (leading up to the PS rule in (8)), Akmajian does not consider the following crucial fact: the NP[+acc] and the infinitive are in fact mutually dependent on each other. The NP may be missing only if there is no overt infinitive and the infinitive may occur only if there is an NP. Consider first the modified version of (4) in (4'):

(4') Speaker A: I hear you got a respectable job? Speaker B: \*?Get a respectable job! What do you think I am?

Unlike in Akmajian's example (4), the "subject" cannot be omitted in (4'). The difference in acceptability between (4) and (4') is due to the fact that in (4) the context sentence already contains a tenseless verb form. In (4), Speaker B's reply is acceptable only because it happens to be a direct quote of a portion of the context sentence. If the predicate in the context sentence has a tensed verb form, the NP cannot be omitted in the MM. Since the well-formedness of (4) is contingent upon a formal feature of the context sentence, the omissibility of the NP illustrated by (4) is in fact not a formal feature characterizing MMs.

The same observation holds for Akmajian's examples (5) through (7). While it is true that in these examples the copula is optional, this optionality is contingent upon the presence of the "optional" NP. Compare (5) through (7) with the corresponding versions in (5') through (7'), which lack the overt "subject":

- (5') Speaker A: I think Bronsky is such a clever author. Speaker B: What! \*Be clever?! Ha.
- (6') Speaker A: Do you suppose Larry is a doctor by now? Speaker B: \*Be a doctor?! What a laugh.
- (7') Speaker A: I'm furious that Mary joined the army. Speaker B: What! \*Be in the army?! It can't be.

As in (4'), the versions with the overt infinitive in (5') through (7') are unacceptable without the NP[+acc]. While the infinitival copula is omissible, the NP[+acc] constituent is not. This demonstrates that the "subject" of the MM is in fact not optional and that both NP[+acc] and PredP[+inf] are obligatory elements of the MM construction. Any well-formed utterances which lack the NP constituent are therefore not examples of MMs. Consider the utterances in (27), which lack both the NP and the copula:

(27) a. A job?! b. Clever?! c. A doctor?! d. In the army?!

These are indeed possible replies to the context sentences in (4) through (7), but they are not instances of MM constructions. It is true that with the appropriate intonation these utterances can have a force similar to that of MMs. However in such cases the MM interpretation is not an INHERENT FEATURE of the utterance. Unlike MMs, the utterances in (27) could be used for a variety of different pragmatic purposes. For example they could constitute requests by Speaker B for Speaker A to repeat part of her utterance. The MM interpretation arises with necessity only when the predicate constituent cooccurs with an overt NP as part of a complex TOP constituent or, to introduce a concept from Construction Grammar, when the predicate expression and the argument expression are 'in construction' with one another. The utterances in (27) (and the version in (4) without the NP) are simply quotes of portions of a context sentence. MMs on the other hand have an independent existence as GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTIONS. I conclude that the schema in (26) expresses the correct generalization.

The last feature to discuss is the constraint against dummy subjects and the non-occurrence of anaphoric it (exx. (9) through (12)), which Akmajian explains in terms of the stipulation that the subject phrase in MMs must form an intonation center. While I agree that the NP in TOP must be accented, I do not think that this prosodic feature should be formulated in terms of a phonological constraint on the syntactic structure of the MM. Rather intonation, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics go hand in hand and correlate with each other in our construction. Dummy subjects are banned from MMs both for intonational and for semantic-pragmatic reasons. Given that the purpose of the MM is to challenge a context proposition, it is natural that dummy syntactic elements like it and there, which do not contribute to the propositional meaning of a sentence, may not occur. As for anaphoric it (ex. (12)), I do follow Akmajian's explanation: the non-occurrence of the personal pronoun it is due to the fact that this expression cannot stand alone as a single exclamation.

Let me finish with a remark concerning the two formal differences between MMs and imperatives which Akmajian explicitly acknowledges, i.e. the fact that imperatives obligatorily contain a verb and the fact that they may only occur with a restricted set of subjects. Recall that under Akmajian's analysis these formal

differences do not have to be mentioned in the PS rule in (8) because they follow from general pragmatic principles underlying the use of these constructions. While it is no doubt true that there is a good pragmatic reason for imperatives to have the kinds of (optional) subjects they do, given that they are directed at an addressee; and while the overt presence of a verb is certainly pragmatically motivated in imperatives since it would not make much sense to order someone to do something without specifying the action to be performed--I do not think that Akmajian's conclusion concerning the syntactic identity of MMs and imperatives is theoretically justified, even if we ignore the various other factors which make MMs and imperatives dissimilar. From the observation that certain formal features of a construction are directly motivated by its communicative function it does not follow that such features can be left out of the formal description. To say that they can is a bit like saying that in the description of a bicycle one doesn't have to mention the wheels because the presence of wheels follows from the locomotive purpose of the bicvcle. If this line of reasoning were correct, we would be justified in saying, for example, that a bicycle is in fact a kind of chair.

### 5. Conclusion.

Akmajian's idea that the form-function fit is describable as a mapping function between highly general syntactic types and equally general pragmatic principles has undeniable theoretical appeal. However this idea does not seem to provide a realistic picture of the relationship between form and function in natural language. While it is true that a great many syntactic patterns cannot be uniquely paired with specific uses in discourse, I believe that the number of idiosyncratic form-meaning-use correspondences is much greater than assumed in most current formal approaches. With Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor (1988) I believe that it is impossible to draw a dividing line on principled grounds between "highly marked" (or 'idiomatic') patterns and "unmarked" (or 'regular') patterns (cf. also Lambrecht 1984 for a similar point). The existence and structure of MMs constitute good evidence in favor of a 'constructionist' approach to syntax in which the fundamental unit of syntactic analysis is not the sentence or the sentence-type, but the grammatical construction.

### **Endnotes**

- 1. I would like to thank Claudia Brugman, Georgia Green, Paul Kay, Ellen Prince, and Sue Schmerling for various helpful comments.
- 2. For general discussions of the notion of 'grammatical construction' and statements about the framework of Construction Grammar cf. Fillmore 1988, 1989. For syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic analyses of individual grammatical constructions or classes of constructions within the framework of Construction Grammar cf. Fillmore 1985, Fillmore, Kay, & O'Connor 1988, Kay 1990, Lakoff 1987:462-585, Lambrecht 1984, 1986, 1988, and McCawley 1988.
- 3. Akmajian claims that the unacceptability of perfective have in imperatives has no semantic basis, since synonymous sentences with main verb have, such as (i) Have your homework finished by 5!, are acceptable. This strikes me as an odd argument. Sentence (i) contains a present imperative and refers to a future state of affairs, hence can hardly be cited as evidence against the existence of a semantic (or

pragmatic) constraint against perfective have in imperatives.

- 4. One "local" formal feature of imperatives which cannot be explained in pragmatic terms is the syntax of do and don't. Akmajian argues that these two expressions can be analyzed as special sentence-initial 'imperative particles' which can be transformationally inserted in front of the structure [(NP) V<sup>n</sup>], thus preserving the validity of PS rule (8). Notice however that this insertion rule permits the generation of sentences like \*Do you leave the room!, whose ungrammaticality Akmajian points out in an earlier passage. See also the discussion of imperative do and don't in Schmerling 1982:202.
- 5. The representation of the second IRC constituent as a disjunction was suggested to me by Paul Kay.
- 6. This is shown also by the Latin IRC, which has a subjunctive rather than an infinitival verb form (*Ego tibi irascar!?* 'Me be angry at you!?'). This subjunctive is sometimes referred to as the 'subjunctive of protest' in Latin grammars, showing that Latin grammarians have recognized the IRC as a grammatical category.
- 7. I have no satisfying explanation for the fact pointed out by Akmajian that topicalizations without an overt subject seem to be acceptable (cf. *That trash novel, read by tomorrow?!*).

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