

Micro-discourses and context-enrichment: Interjections, vocatives and adversative particles

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To be published in: In Tommaso Balsemin, Irene Caloi, Jacopo Garzonio, Nicolas Lamoure, Francesco Pinzin (Eds.), *Quaderni di Lavoro ASIt 25*, Padova

1. Introduction

In this work I discuss evidence in favor of two theoretical notions: *micro-discourses* and *context enrichment*. I will do so by considering structures including interjections, vocatives and adversative particles such as *ma* (but). I also briefly discuss the distribution of secondary interjections in connection with the relevant phenomena investigated here. I compare standard Italian with (standard) American English and some Italian dialects: Roman and Neapolitan. I show that the items in question appear on the left of the portion of the sentence which is currently called *left periphery* and are organized in a predictable order. I argue that they must be taken to be *external* to the sentence itself in that they constitute separate speech acts, exhibiting their characteristic prosodic contours and gestural patterns. Interestingly, there are no main differences across the languages considered here. The general theoretical issue of this work is therefore the relationship between the linguistic notion of discourse and the pragmatic notion of speech act. In other words, my aim is to describe on principled grounds how pragmatics is mapped into syntax. The hypothesis I will argue for in what follows is that discourse heads provide the syntactic device to connect separate speech acts in a uniform syntactic structure.¹

Developing an idea proposed in Giorgi (2014, 2015 and 2016), I argue that interjections, vocatives and adversatives particles appear each in association with a dedicated discourse head, giving rise to a hierarchically ordered *micro-discourse*. Micro-discourses are projected as canonical syntactic structures, which might look like single sentences, while being actually a hierarchy of discourse heads, each heading a different speech act. Micro-discourses, therefore, are constituted by different units, each a speech act, which could also be used in isolation and,

¹ I thank a reviewer for having brought this issue to my attention.

in the appropriate context, even uttered by different speakers. When they appear together, they must be organized in a certain order.²

I am going to argue that each part of the micro-discourse takes the smaller unit in its scope and by means of this operation it *enriches* the context, i.e., it identifies further conditions defining and constraining the contextual settings.

I define the *context*, as I did in previous works, as *the hic et nunc – the here and now – of the speaker*.³ Namely, the temporal and spatial coordinates of the speaker define the context. This is therefore a dynamic perspective, in that the context changes according to the identity of the utterer. The context, as well-known, is crucial for identifying the reference of indexical items, such as pronouns, tenses and indexical adverbs and adverbials, and in the licensing of temporal and causal relations. Hence, *context enrichment* contributes in a significant way to this process.

In Giorgi (2010) and in subsequent works, I argued that the speaker's coordinates are represented in the syntax in the left periphery, and precisely in its highest projection, which I dubbed C-speaker.⁴ Therefore, according to the perspective I am developing here, the notion of *context* is indeed a syntactic notion.

Under the perspective that pragmatics is *the contribution of the context to the interpretation*, it is possible to conclude that the very basis of pragmatics is syntactic and that pragmatics is not a separate *module* of grammar, but is distributed among the various components, playing a role in the representation of utterances and at the interfaces with the sensorimotor apparatus, on one side, and the conceptual system, on the other.⁵

2. The issue

The issue which I am going to consider concerns the properties and the syntax of sequences such as the standard Italian one in (1), corresponding to the American English (henceforth, AE) one in (2):⁶

² I will not discuss here the source of such fixed ordering, whether *a priori* given, or derived on the basis of semantics. This is a very important question, which however concerns several aspects of the cartographic approach.

³ See Giorgi (2010, 2014, 2018b). See also the discussion of presuppositional negatives in Larrivé (2014).

⁴ See among the others Bianchi (2006), Sigurdsson (2004), see also Speas and Tenny (2003).

⁵ On different bases, more or less the same conclusion is reached by D'Alessandro and van Oosterdorp (2016) and Wiltschko (2022).

⁶ Most American speakers prefer the option without the adversative particle *but*, even if it is not judged totally ungrammatical: on a scale 1-5, this sentence is usually valued 2-3. In Italian as well some speakers can omit the adversative particle.

- (1) Ehi, Maria, ma che stai facendo?
- (2) Hey, Mary, (but) what are you doing?

The equivalent in the Roman dialect (henceforth, R) is the following example:

- (3) Ahò, a Mari, ma che sta' a ffa'?
- Interj, particle Maria, but what are you doing?

And in Neapolitan – henceforth N – (from Marchetiello 2022):

- (4) Ua, o Pè, (ma) ch'aie cumbinat?
- Interj, the Giuseppe, (but) what did you do?

In these sentences we see a primary interjection, a vocative and an adversative particle – *ma* (but) – introducing a special question (Obenauer 2004, 2006, Munaro and Obenauer 1999, Munaro and Poletto 2008, Obenauer and Poletto 2000, Giorgi 2016, 2018a, Giorgi and Dal Farra 2019) expressing surprise-disapproval. I will show below that the structure could also include other elements on the left of the special question, such as a secondary interjection. These items, when present, usually appear in the following order: Interjection > Vocative > adversative particle, the other orders are judged from ungrammatical to marginal.⁷ Finally, special attention should be paid to the intonation. The following judgments are referred to the sentences uttered with the intonation associated to basic sentences (1)-(4), in particular one should check the fortuitous adding of extra pauses between the various items on the left of the clause, because a change in the intonation might determine a different interpretation. The following examples are the possible permutations of the interjection, vocative and adversative particles of sentence (1) above:⁸

⁷ Judgements were asked to native speakers who had to assign a score from 1 – very bad – to 5 – perfect – to each sentence. Here I will use the traditional diacritics: “*”, corresponding to 1-2, “??” or “?” corresponding to the intermediate markings 3 and 4, and 5 corresponding to good. However, I will not consider interpersonal variation, because on the one hand, judgments were quite uniform, and on the other the subjects were not so numerous to permit statistical elaborations. For an analysis of similar issues in German, see among the others Gast (2008) and Gutzmann and Turgay (2016). I thank a reviewer for having brought these references to my attention.

⁸ Note that besides being an adversative particle, *ma* (but) can be an interjection expressing various feelings, such as astonishment and (strong) disapproval. In such cases it is sometimes written with an added *h*, *mah*, and it is associated with different prosodical contours. A reviewer notices that in these cases the particle can precede the vocative, for instance when *ma* expresses astonishment, it is possible to have the sequence *ma Maria*. Further study of the prosodic characteristics of these cases is needed.

- (5) *Ma, ehi, Maria, che stai facendo?
- (6) *Ehi, ma, Maria, che stai facendo?
- (7) ?-??Maria, ehi, ma che stai facendo?
- (8) *Maria, ma, ehi, che stai facendo?
- (9) *Ma, Maria, ehi, che stai facendo?

These orders are all disfavored, even if there are possible prosodical contours which might make them acceptable. The same judgments hold for Roman and Neapolitan. Analogously, in AE, the following example is marginal:⁹

- (10) ?-??Mary, hey, what are you doing?

It is interesting to observe that languages do not seem to differ consistently with respect to word order. The aim of this article is to characterize these expressions, providing a syntactic structure for them and explaining the reason for this uniformity in word order.

3. The adversative particle

In previous work (Giorgi 2016, 2018a) I addressed some issues concerning the properties and the distribution of the adversative particle *ma* (but) in Italian. I will briefly review the main points here.

As a first point, consider that *ma* is not a complementizer, in that it cannot introduce complement sentences, with or without the canonical complementizer *che* (that) and in whatever order they are presented. Consider the following examples:

- (11) *Gianni ha detto che ma Maria è partita
Gianni said that but Maria left
- (12) *Gianni ha detto ma che Maria è partita
Gianni said but that Maria left
- (13) *Gianni ha detto ma Maria è partita

⁹ In this case I provide only one alternative order since as noted before, most speakers prefer to omit the adversative particle.

Gianni said but Maria left

Moreover, *ma* cannot introduce sentences – except for special questions, which will be briefly reviewed in a while, such as surprise and surprise-disapproval ones – but must always be preceded by the antecedent of the adversative contrast:

- (14) Maria è povera, ma è felice
Maria is poor, but she is happy.
- (15) *Ma Maria è felice, è povera
But Maria is happy, she is poor.

The reverse ordering, given in (15), is totally ungrammatical. Note that this is not the case with other particles appearing in similar contexts, such as for instance the concessive *sebbene* (though, although):

- (16) Sebbene sia povera, Maria è felice
Although she is poor, Maria is happy.
- (17) Maria è felice, sebbene sia povera
Maria is happy, although she is poor.

The adversative sentence cannot precede its antecedent, whereas both orders are possible with *sebbene* (though).

Furthermore, the two parts of sentence (14) might be uttered by two different speakers:

- (18) Speaker A: Maria è povera
Maria is poor
- (19) Speaker B: Ma è felice
But she is happy.

This indicates that the antecedent of adversativity can be found anaphorically either in the same sentence or in the conversational context. Note in fact that (19) alone, without (18), would be sharply ungrammatical, in that out-of-the-blue sentences – i.e., sentences opening a

conversation – cannot begin with *ma*.¹⁰ An apparent exception to this, as I anticipated above, is constituted by surprise and surprise-disapproval sentences, as in the following example (from Giorgi 2016 ex. 3):

- (20) Ma non era rosso?
But wasn't it red?

Uttered in a context in which the speaker is surprised, because she has a strong expectation to see the addressee with a red dress, while she is actually wearing a blue one. Analogously for the following one, which is a surprise-disapproval question:

- (21) Ma che fai?
But what are you doing?

Example (21) can be uttered in a context in which the speaker disapproves of the behavior of the addressee. Both surprise and surprise-disapproval sentences are associated with a special prosodic and gestural pattern (see Giorgi and Dal Farra 2019, Petrocchi 2022, Marchetiello 2022). In these cases, as discussed by the authors, the adversativity antecedent is provided contextually, in that the speaker's expectations strongly contrast with the observed facts.¹¹

Since the adversative particle is on the left of the subject, its syntactic position must be outside the T-layer, hence it is possible to check if it is located somewhere in the left periphery, in the sense of Rizzi (1997). As discussed in Giorgi (2016, 2018a), neither focus, nor clitic left dislocation – henceforth, CLLD – can precede *ma*:

- (22) *A Luca, ma non gli avevi dato un libro? (from Giorgi, 2018a, ex.37)
To Luca, but not (you) to him.CL had.IMPF given a book?
'But didn't you give a book to Luca.TOP?'

¹⁰ Even under the hypothesis that (19) is a case of ellipsis, the antecedent of the adversativity interpretation must be looked for in the context.

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of special questions expressing surprise, see Vicente (2010) and for further discussion Giorgi (2016, 2018a). On special questions, see Munaro and Obenauer (1999), Munaro and Poletto (2008), Obenauer and Poletto (2000) and Hinterhölzl and Munaro (2015).

In this case, the left dislocated phrase *a Luca* (to Luca) cannot occur on the left of *ma*, but only on its right, as shown by the following example:

- (23) Ma a Luca, non gli avevi dato un libro? (from Giorgi, 2018a, ex.39)
But to Luca, not to him.CL (you) had.IMPF given a book?
'But didn't you give a book to Luca.TOP?'

Contrastive focus (in capital letters in the glosses) cannot precede the particle *ma*, as shown in the following examples:

- (24) * UN LIBRO (non un vestito) ma non avevi comprato a Maria?
(from Giorgi 2018a ex.41)
A book.FOC (not a dress) but (you) not had bought to Maria?
'But didn't you buy a book (not a dress) to Maria?'

However, a focused phrase on the right of *ma* is ungrammatical as well:

- (25) *Ma UN LIBRO (non un vestito) non avevi comprato a Maria?
(from Giorgi 2018 ex.43)
But a book.FOC (not a dress) (you) not had bought to Maria?
'But didn't you buy a book (not a dress) to Maria?'

Note that the unacceptability of both (24) and (25) is expected – and due to reasons not immediately relevant for this analysis – in that in Italian a *wh*- operator is incompatible with a contrastive focus in the left periphery, as shown by the following example:

- (26) *IL LIBRO (non i biscotti) hai dato a Maria? (from Giorgi 2018a ex.45)
The book.FOC (not the cookies) (you) have given to Maria?
'Did you give the book (not the cookies) to Maria?'

To overcome this issue and check the compatibility of *ma* and Focus, it is possible to reproduce the relevant structure by means of an exclamative sentence, instead of an

interrogative one, which is not subject to the same constraint:¹²

- (27) *UN LIBRO ma gli hai comprato (invece del vestito)!
A book but you to him-bought (instead of a dress)
'You bought him a book.FOC (instead of a dress)!'
- (28) ?Ma UN LIBRO gli hai comprato (invece del vestito)!
But a book you to him-bought (instead of a dress)
'You bought him a book.FOC (instead of a dress)!'

The sentence in (28) is not perfect but is judged much less marginal than (25) and (26). Hence, it is possible to conclude that Focus and CLLD behave alike with respect to the adversative particle.

In the literature on CLLD and left-peripheral focus it is usually assumed that the position of Focus is the result of movement, whereas a clitic left dislocated phrase is base generated in its position.¹³ As a consequence, these data show that the position on the left of *ma* is available neither for moved phrases, nor for base generated ones, whereas the one on its right is in general accessible.¹⁴

Finally, in a V2 language such as German, the adversative item equivalent to *ma* – i.e. *aber* – does not trigger V2. Consider for instance the surprise question in (29):

- (29) Ma non mangiavi solo frutta?
But weren't you eating only fruit?

This sentence is appropriate in the following scenario: I know that you are on a diet and decided to eat only fruit. One day I see you eating a big hamburger. I am surprised and utter

¹² Note that in examples (27) and (28) *UN LIBRO* (a book) is a corrective focus, and it is not by itself an exclamative phrase. The exclamative operator here has scope on the whole sentence and should occupy a higher position. However, I am not going to consider this issue in this work any further.

¹³ For a different view on left-peripheral focus, see however Samek-Lodovici (2015). In general, the left-peripheral position of the Focus phrase, especially when contrastive and corrective is not the most favored one (see among the others Bianchi, Bocci and Cruschina 2015, Frascarelli, Carella, Casentini, 2022) compared to the *in situ* one. This issue is however not immediately relevant here. The crucial point of this discussion is to show that *ma* lies on the left of the whole sentence, left periphery included.

¹⁴ See, among the others, Rizzi (1997), Cinque (1990), Frascarelli (2000). Rizzi (1997) only points out that focus is quantificational – i.e., it gives rise to an operator-variable structure – whereas topic is not. Cinque (1990) and Frascarelli (2000) explicitly argue that CLLD is base-generated.

(29), analogously to example (20) above. The German equivalent does not show V2:¹⁵

- (30) Aber du wolltest doch nur Obst essen?
But you wanted *doch* only fruit eat

Summarizing, *ma* appears on the left of the left periphery, preceding both Focus and CLLD. This piece of evidence, taken together with the fact that the antecedent and the adversative clause can be uttered by two different speakers, the impossibility of embedding, the observation that *ma* is not a complementizer and, finally, the absence of V2 in German, points to an extrasentential analysis for the adversative particle.

I propose that *ma* does not belong syntactically to the sentence on its right and that is a *discourse head*, connecting two separate sentences and giving rise to a *micro-discourse*, where a *discourse* is not just a simple sequence of unconnected sentences, but a hierarchical structure, where each sentence is in an ordered structural relation with the other ones.¹⁶

According to this proposal, a micro-discourse can be syntactically represented as follows:

- (31) [_{DIS} [_{CP1} ...] [DIS [_{CP2} ...]]]

In (31) a discourse head connects two sentences, one appearing as the Specifier of its projection, and the other as its complement. Consequently, the discourse in (18)-(19) has the following syntactic structure:¹⁷

- (32) [_{DIS} [_{CP1} Maria è povera] [ma_{DIS} [_{CP2} è felice]]]

¹⁵ *Doch* is a modal particle, which can appear in German special questions. See Hinterhölzl and Munaro (2015) for a discussion. However, its presence is not relevant for the present analysis. The sentence in (30) was part of the replica with German speakers of Giorgi and Dal Farra's (2019) experiment (see Dal Farra, Giorgi and Hinterhölzl 2018).

¹⁶ Cinque (2008) proposes a similar solution for certain non-restrictive relative clauses, suggesting that the nominal head and the non-restrictive relative clause give rise to a discourse, connected by an empty discourse head. Giorgi (2015, 2018b) also discusses the distribution of Hanging Topics, which can precede *ma*, contrary to clitic left dislocation. Giorgi's proposal is that hanging topics appear in the Specifier of a silent discourse head, taking the discourse projection headed by *ma* as its complement, giving rise to a complex discourse structure.

¹⁷ One might wonder whether in the case of the single sentence in (30) the structure would be the same. In other words, is *ma* always a discourse head, even when it connects two parts of the same sentence? The issue should be further investigated and lies beyond the limits of this work. However, the *prima facie* answer seems to me to be positive, since so far there are no empirical reasons pointing to a different categorization in the two cases.

Maria is poor but she is happy

Several pertinent questions might come to mind at this point, in particular: Which are the properties of a structure such as the one in (31)? Which conjunctions, besides *ma*, belong to this category? As for the second question, so far, I do not have an answer since this would entail a specific work on the issue and leave the question open for further research.¹⁸

As for the first question, let me point out the structure in (31) is a hierarchical one. This implies that, given that CP1 c-commands CP2, their roles cannot be inverted. Consider the following case, in comparison with example (32):

(33) [_{DIS} [_{CP1} Maria è felice] [*ma* _{DIS} [_{CP2} è povera]]]
 Maria is happy but she is poor

In (32) *Maria è povera* (Maria is poor) c-commands *Maria è felice* (Maria is happy). The adversative semantics of *ma* is such that, given the expectations provided by CP1, CP2 comes as an *unexpected consequence*. In (33) the unexpected consequence would be that Maria is poor, and not that she is happy, as in (32). I propose that these effects follow from the hierarchical structure, when it is interpreted at the interface, combined with the intrinsic meaning of *ma*.¹⁹

In the surprise case discussed above, the sentence, i.e. CP1, on the left of *ma* is not overtly expressed, being an expectation in the mind of the speaker. I.e., CP1, i.e.: *Gianni è a dieta e mangia solo frutta* (Gianni is on a diet and eats only fruits), is present neither in the sentence, nor in the discourse. In this case, therefore, it is necessary to hypothesize that the spec position of the DIS projection is syntactically empty:

(34) [_{DIS} [_{CP1} ...] [*ma* _{DIS} [_{CP2} non mangiavi solo frutta]]]
 but weren't you eating only fruit?

Note finally, that in surprise and surprise-disapproval contexts *ma* can be omitted,

¹⁸ Marchetiello (2022) in her work on surprise and surprise-disapproval special questions in Neapolitan, found that in a certain number of occurrences in the repetition test some speakers substituted the conjunction *e* (and) for *ma*. Therefore, *e* could be a possible discourse head, at least in these cases, able to project the structure provided in (31). See also Munn (1993). Further study on this issue is indeed needed.

¹⁹ I will not discuss here an explicit semantics for *ma*. On this issue, see among the others Malchukow (2004).

whereas this is not possible in the canonical contexts such as (32) above. A possible explanation is that, semantically, the adversative value of the particle can be easily retrieved in the strong emotional contexts, but not in the canonical ones, where it has to be overtly expressed,²⁰

Consider for instance the following examples, corresponding to sentences (30)-(32) discussed above:

(35) *Maria è povera, è felice
Maria is poor, she is happy

(36) Speaker A: Maria è povera
Maria is poor

(37) Speaker B: *(Sì,) è felice
(Yes,) she is happy

The star appearing on examples (35) refers to the adversative interpretation, which in absence of *ma* is impossible and, analogously, the discourse in (36)-(37) would not make sense. In these cases, in fact, differently from the emotional cases, the adversative meaning cannot be inferred from the context.

4. Vocatives

The item appearing on the left of *ma* in the examples above is a vocative phrase.²¹ It could be a proper name, as in the examples above, repeated here for clarity, or a common noun as in the example (42)-(43) in Italian and English:

(38) Ehi, Maria ma che stai facendo?

(39) Hey, Mary (but) what are you doing?

(40) Ehi, ragazzi, ma che state facendo?

(41) Hey, guys, (but) what are you doing?

²⁰ Not all speakers accept the omission of *ma*. Those who do also comment that they perceive an increasing of emphasis on the clause.

²¹ I do not discuss here the issues concerning the existence of a vocative *case*. I refer the reader to the discussion in Hill (2007, 2014, 2022) and Moro (2003).

Here I will briefly discuss the nature of vocatives and then I will consider more closely their distributional properties.

Schaden (2010) distinguishes three alternative functions of the vocatives: it can be used to identify the addressee, to predicate a property of the addressee or to activate the addressee. In the case of the identification function, the vocative is used to select an addressee among several possible ones, as for instance in the following case (from Schaden 2010 ex. 22a):

(42) George, could you passe me the salt, please?

The second, i.e., the predicational use of the vocative, is exemplified by the following example (from Schaden 2010, ex. 22b):

(43) Dear friends, let us go inside!

The third one, i.e., the vocative aiming at activating the addressee, is exemplified by the following sentence (from Schaden, 2010 ex. 28, adapted):

(44) Grandma, what a big nose you have!

These three types of vocatives can correspond to the classification provided by Zwicky (1974), who distinguishes between vocative *calls* and vocative *addresses*. It seems to me that vocative calls mostly absolve an identificational function, whereas addresses can either have the predicative or the activating function. The distinction between calls and addresses is relevant, because they correspond to two different contextual relations between speaker and addressee. When a vocative is used as a call, the speaker does not have the attention of the addressee, whereas when it is used as an address, the speaker already has it. Hence, in the first case, but not in the second, the vocative is used to define and enrich the context itself, as I will further discuss below. The examples provided above in (42)-(44) can be identified as calls, namely, vocatives designed to draw the attention of the addressee.

The type of vocative preceded by the particle “o” discussed in Moro (2003) and exemplified in (45), is presumably a third type, namely an *invocation*, typical of prayers and rituals, and is not fully natural in “normal” contexts:²²

²² Cf. for instance the prayer *Salve Regina* (Hail Holy Queen), ending with the following invocation:
i. O clemente, o pia, o dolce Vergine Maria

- (45) O Maria, cosa succede?
O Maria, what is happening?

This kind of vocative shares most of its distributional properties with addresses, however, it differs from both types in that, besides being preceded by the particle “o”, it does not require the presence of the person addressed in the context. I.e., the recipient of the invocation might not belong to the audience of the speaker.

The various types of vocatives have different prosodic contours and different distributions: addresses and invocations are similar to parentheticals and, especially when they appear in the middle of the clause, can be associated with the *comma intonation* (see Selkirk 2005). Calls on the contrary, are usually associated with an exclamatory intonation.²³ A detailed analysis of the differences between the two types will be the topic of further research, here I will mostly consider calls, given that the relevant examples belong to this type and illustrate the properties of addresses only as far as pertinent to the present discussion.

Let’s consider now the distribution of vocatives, in order to determine where they appear in a syntactic representation. As pointed out by Moro (2003), a focus cannot precede a vocative, but can only follow it, as exemplified by the contrast between the following sentences (from Moro 2003, exx.13a and b):

- (46) O Maria, I RAGAZZI Gianni aiuta, non i conigli
O Maria, the boys Gianni helps, not the rabbits
- (47) *I RAGAZZI, o Maria, Gianni aiuta, non i conigli.
The boys, o Maria, Gianni helps, not the rabbits.

With clitic left dislocation (CLLD), the results are less clear, in that the sentence in which the topicalized phrase precedes the vocative is marginal, but not totally ungrammatical

O clement, o loving, o sweet Virgin Mary.

²³ For a discussion of the Italian intonation, including exclamatives, see Avesani (1995). For a discussion of the prosody of vocatives, see Hill (2007) and D’Alessandro and van Oostendorp (2016). Notice also that it is not the case that calls are always associated with imperatives, though it is a frequent association. It is possible in fact to have a call even in absence of an imperative, as in the following example:

- i. Maria, Gianni è appena partito!
Maria, Gianni just left!

Moro (2003) distinguishes two cases: infradeictic and extradeictic, depending on the presence of a coreferential item inside the clause. Under this perspective, therefore, examples such as (i) are classified as extradeictic.

(examples from Moro 2003, exx.12a. and b):²⁴

- (48) O Maria, i ragazzi, li aiuta Gianni.
O Maria the boys them helps Gianni
- (49) ??I ragazzi, o Maria, li aiuta Gianni
The boys, O Maria, Gianni will help

However, as pointed out above, this kind of vocatives are closer to addresses than to calls, with the difference that they are preceded by the particle *o*, whereas addresses are not. When appearing at the left of the sentence, however, they can in some cases perform the function of calls, i.e., drawing the attention of the addressee.²⁵ As discussed in Moro (2003), invocations can follow the verb taking a complement clause, but must appear on the left of the high complementizer – Rizzi's (1997) Force:

- (50) Gianni ha detto o Maria, che Luisa è partita
Gianni said, o Maria, that Luisa left
- (51) *Gianni ha detto che, o Maria, Luisa è partita
Gianni said that, o Maria, Luisa left

This is also the case for addresses, such as *mia cara Maria* (my dear Maria):

- (52) Gianni ha detto, mia cara Maria, che Luisa è partita
Gianni said, my dear Maria, that Luisa left
- (53) *Gianni ha detto che, mia cara Maria, Luisa è partita
Gianni said that, my dear Maria, Luisa left

²⁴ The judgment is the same if a dative appears instead of an accusative, showing that it is not a case of Hanging Topic:

- i. O Maria, a Gianni, gli darò un premio.
O Maria, to Gianni I will give a present
- ii. ??A Gianni, o Maria, gli darò un premio
to Gianni o Maria, I will give a present

One of the differences between hanging topic and clitic left dislocation concerns the possibility of omitting the preposition *a* with the former. Moreover, there are also clear prosodic differences between the two, given that clitic left dislocation is always compatible with a comma intonation, whereas hanging topic is not. On this issue, see also Giorgi (2015).

²⁵ It seems to me however, that invocations have a milder effect when used as calls, presumably due to their peculiar register.

Differently from invocations, calls cannot be embedded at all, independently from the presence of the complementizer on its left or on its right, i.e., they cannot follow the verb introducing a complement clause. Consider the following examples (where the call is preceded here by the primary interjection *ehi*, better to distinguish it from invocations):

- (54) *Gianni ha detto che ehi Maria Luisa è partita
Gianni said that hey Maria Luisa left
- (55) *Gianni ha detto ehi Maria che Luisa è partita
Gianni said hey Maria that Luisa left

Invocations and addresses can appear in the middle of the clause, whereas calls cannot. Cf. the contrast between (56)-(57) on one side and (58) on the other:

- (56) Gianni, mia cara Maria, è un idiota
Gianni, my dear Maria, is an idiot
- (57) Gianni, o Maria, è un idiota
Gianni, o Maria, is an idiot
- (58) *Gianni, ehi Maria, è partito!
Gianni, hey Maria, left!

Finally, invocations, together with addresses, are never truncated, contrary to calls, which in many Italian varieties, included Roman and Neapolitan, are truncated:²⁶

- (59) *O Mari, Gianni è partito!
O Maria(trunc), Gianni left
- (60) * Gianni, mia cara Mari, è partito
Gianni, mia dear Maria(trunc), left
- (61) A Mari, viè qua! R
A(particle) Maria(trunc), come here!
- (62) Mari, ch'ae cumbinat? N

²⁶ One has to take care not to assign to the invocation particle *o* the interpretation of an interjection call, i.e., the one which can be assigned to *ehi* in Italian, or to *ua* in Neapolitan. Moreover, the interjection *oh*, with a long vowel, is often used to express surprise, and only marginally as a call. On vocative truncation see D'Alessandro and van Oostendorp (2016) and Kenstowicz (2019).

Maria, what did you do?

Note that in the Roman dialect, the vocative can be preceded by the particle *a*, which is however not obligatory. In Neapolitan, it is possible to have a masculine vocative preceded by a definite article, as in the following case (from Marchetiello 2022):²⁷

- (63) Ua, o Pè tu n' aie ritto ca tu n' ive mangià sul frutt? N
Hey, the Peter, didn't you say that you would eat only fruit?

O in (63) is the definite article in Neapolitan, optional with masculine proper names.²⁸ Let me get back to the hypothesis suggested above that addresses, but not calls, can indeed be assimilated to parentheticals. According to Giorgi (2014, 2016), parentheticals are base generated at the immediate left of the left periphery and are hosted in a projection headed by a *prosody-oriented* head, i.e., a head which is read at the interface with the sensory-motor system and assigns the correct *comma* intonation to the parenthetical. When parentheticals appear in some other position, the order is by hypothesis a derived one.²⁹ Moreover, Giorgi (2016) distinguishes between parentheticals that cannot be embedded, such as parentheticals introducing Free Indirect Discourse and Quotations, and parentheticals which can appear in a subordinate clause. Consider for instance the following cases:

- (64) Maria, disse Gianni, partirà domani,
Maria, said Gianni, will leave tomorrow
(65) *Luisa mi ha informato che Maria, disse Gianni, partirà domani,
Luisa informed me that Maria, said Gianni, will leave tomorrow,

In this case, a parenthetical introducing a quotation such as *disse Gianni* (said Gianni) cannot be embedded. Simplifying a complex issue, the reason this kind of parentheticals cannot be embedded is that they permit to identify a sentence-internal speaker, i.e., *Gianni*, as opposed

²⁷ Marchetiello (2022) also discusses some cases where the vocative is preceded by the particle *oi*: *Uà, oi mà!* (hey, Particle mother!)

²⁸ Other languages allow definite articles with vocatives with various restrictions, for instance French and Romanian. See Schaden (2010) and Hill (2007). I will not discuss here the cooccurrence of determiners with vocatives and leave the issue for future research.

²⁹ For a discussion of this proposal see Giorgi (2014, 2018b).

to the utterer. Consequently, they must be located at root level.³⁰

I propose that the grammaticality of (50), where the vocative follows the main verb *ha detto* (said) does not represent a real case of embedding, but a derived order in the main clause and for this reason it must precede the high complementizer *che* (that).³¹ The hypothesis I'm arguing for is that in general vocatives cannot be embedded. The reason is that they express a different speech act with respect to the sentences they are associated with, defining a relationship between speaker and addressee. Therefore, they must have scope on the whole sentence and cannot be confined in an embedded clause. Being parentheticals, moreover, they can appear in several derived positions, such as the ones in the examples discussed above. The vocatives relevant to the present discussion are the vocative calls and I will not discuss any further the issues relating to the parenthetical status of addresses and invocations.

Given the discussion above, we can conclude that there is ample evidence that vocative calls appear on the left of the left periphery. There are several theoretical proposals in the literature concerning their syntactic position. I am not going to review them here, but I want simply to point out that they all have in common the idea that vocatives are *external* to the CP and express a separate speech act. However, scholars regard vocatives as part of the sentence, in a way or another.

Here, on the contrary, I capitalize on the observation that vocative calls can be uttered by themselves, i.e., in isolation, and do not even need previous discourse context:

(66) Maria!/ Mary!/ A Mari (R)/ O Pè (N)

Hence, they must correspond to a well-formed syntactic structure, even in absence of anything else. Furthermore, in an adversative surprise, or surprise-disapproval structure, such as *Maria, ma che fai?* (Maria, but what are you doing?), they obligatorily appear on the left of *ma*. I argued above that *ma* is a discourse head, consequently, they must be represented outside the sentence, giving rise to a micro-discourse.

³⁰ Other parentheticals, on the contrary, can be embedded, in that they appear in subordinate clauses on the right of the complementizer:

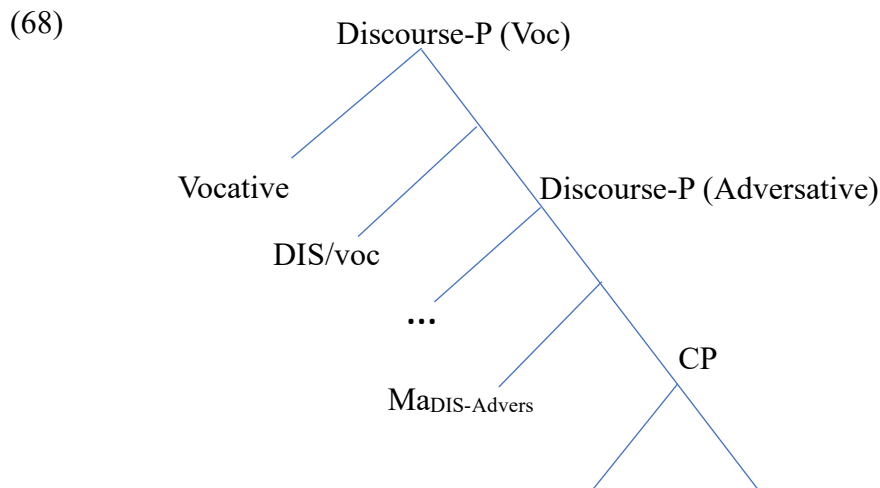
- i. Gianni ha detto che, come tutti sanno, Mario è un genio
Gianni said that, as everybody knows, Mario is a genius.

In this case the parenthetical does not express a content referring to the speaker, but to the subject of the superordinate clause.

³¹ According to Giorgi (2010) the complementizer introducing an indicative clause is the leftmost projection in the clause. According to the hypothesis I am developing here, everything beyond it pertains to the level of micro-discourses. Special discussion should be devoted to parentheticals, whose heads according to Giorgi (2014 and 2018b) are read off at the interface with the sensorimotor component.

Therefore, I propose the structure in (68) for (67), combining a vocative with an adversative particle introducing a surprise- disapproval question:

- (67) Maria, ma che fai?
 Maria, but what are you doing?



As illustrated above in section (3), *ma* heads an adversative discourse, combining the sentence with the unexpressed expectations; the vocative appears in the Spec of a null vocative discourse head.³²

As illustrated above, the vocative itself can be combined with a vocative particle, such as *a* in the Roman dialect, or, in Neapolitan in the case of a masculine proper name, with an article. This means that the vocative has a complex internal structure, as discussed by several scholars. However, a proposal about the internal structure of vocatives is not the goal of the present research, hence, I will not consider it here any further.

The structure proposed in (68) is a complex one, where the vocative discourse head is combined with another discourse head. Besides this structure, a vocative can occur by itself, as pointed out above, and with a simple sentence, as opposed to a special question, as in the following case:

- (69) Maria, Gianni è partito!

³² Scholars are divided as to the head vs maximal projection nature of the vocative. I will not pursue the issue here any further and assume that the vocative is always a maximal projection appearing in the specifier of a dedicated projection, analogously to all the phrases appearing in the left periphery. See Rizzi (1997).

(70) [DIS-VocP Maria [Dis-Voc [CP Gianni è partito]]

The structure in (70) is a micro-discourse, including two different speech acts. The vocative in both cases – and in isolation as well – has the function of *enriching* the context. The presence of the vocative in fact enables the speaker to focus the interaction following it – be it verbal or non-verbal – toward a specific addressee. In this sense, the role played by the vocative in these cases resembles the *identification* function discussed by Schaden (2010). The *enriched context* at this point not only includes the spatial and temporal coordinates of the speaker, but also specific reference to the addressee.³³

5. Primary Interjections

The vocative is often preceded by an interjection, as we have seen above in examples (1)-(4), repeated here for simplicity:

- (71) Ehi, Maria, ma che stai facendo?
Interj., Maria, but what are you doing?
- (72) Hey, Mary, (but) what are you doing?
- (73) Ahò, a Mari, ma che sta' a ffa'?'
Interj., particle Maria, but what are you doing?
- (74) Ua, o Pè, (ma) ch'aie cumbinat?
Interj., the Giuseppe, (but) what did you do?

As pointed out above, in some dialects a particle can precede the vocative, such as the particle *a* in the Roman dialect, optional and invariant for gender and number. This particle should not be confused with the interjection itself. The particle in fact can never appear by itself without the vocative, whereas the interjection can. Consider the following examples in the Roman dialect:³⁴

³³ Note that reference to a specific addressee – be it a single individual or a set – is by no means obligatory, in that obviously many sentences do not include a vocative. Hence, under this perspective it is an *enrichment* of the context, providing more information to promote a better interaction. The necessary and obligatory elements which define the context are the temporal and spatial coordinates of the speaker.

³⁴ *Ahò* in the Roman dialect serves as a call and as an expression of reproach and disapproval, depending on the context. On interjections in Roman, see Frascarelli and Badan (2023) who provide an analysis of several interjections, even if not of *ahò* in particular. Judgements by native speakers are given on a 1-5 scale and in this case are consistently polarized, i.e., either 1 or 5.

- (75) *A!
Part.
- (76) Ahò!
Interj.
- (77) * A, ma che sta' a ffa'?'
Part., but what are you doing?
- (78) Ahò, ma che sta' a ffa'?'
Interj., but what are you doing?

Ahò, *uà* in Neapolitan, *ehi* in Italian and *hey* in (American) English are primary interjections, in that they do not have an independent lexical meaning associated with them, differently from the secondary interjections.³⁵ They can all appear in isolation, as exemplified for Roman by example (76) above and have the role of asking for attention. They are accompanied by special intonation and gesture, such as for instance pointing with head and chin toward the addressee.³⁶ Moreover, they cannot be preceded by the vocative, as pointed out in section 2 above. A possible explanation for this distribution is that they have the function of enriching the context by calling the attention of the addressee. However, such a function is generic, in that the specific reference is not overtly mentioned. The subsequent vocative, though not obligatory, serves this purpose, in that it identifies a single referent uniquely. Therefore, they cannot be switched, unless there is a long pause between them, signaling a restarting of the whole discourse.

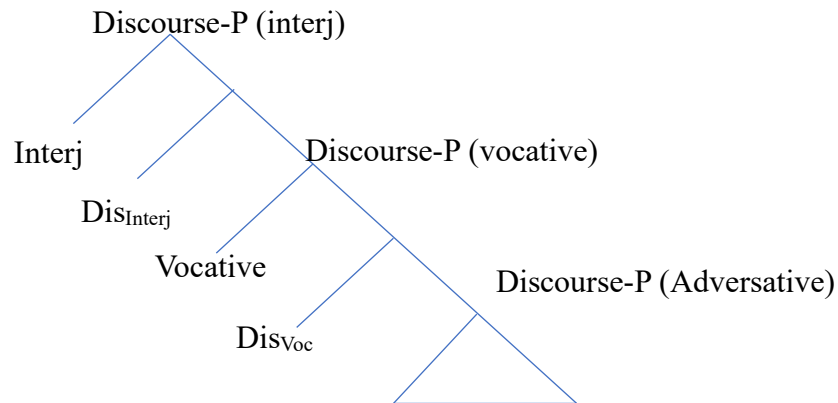
The representation of the micro-discourse with the interjection is the following:³⁷

³⁵ On a classification of interjections, see Poggi (1995, 2009). For an analysis of the properties and distribution of secondary interjections in northern Italian dialects, see Munaro (2019, 2022), Munaro and Poletto (2008). See also González López and Trotzke (2021) on Spanish.

³⁶ A study of the alignment of prosody and gestures in these cases, will be the object of future research, together with an analysis of the prosodic renderings of the various orders.

³⁷ As pointed out by a reviewer, the presence of the interjection in these cases is related to that of the vocative. However, as pointed out above, the two do not always cooccur and each of them can appear in isolation. Furthermore, they do not have the same contextual value, in that primary interjections can absolve a variety of functions, whereas vocatives only work as calls and addresses (besides invocations). For these reasons, I propose that they head two separate projections.

(79)



6. Secondary interjections

Primary and secondary interjections can be combined with each other. Secondary interjections occupy a lower position with respect to the other ones. Consider for instance the following cases:

- (80) Ehi, Maria, porcamiseria, ma che fai?
InterjectionP, Maria interjectionS but what are you doing?
- (81) Ahò, a Mari, mannaggia a te, ma che sta' a ffa'? R
InterjectionP, particle Maria interjectionS but what are you doing?
- (82) Hey, Mary, gosh dammit, what are you doing?

Secondary interjections like *porcamiseria* (lit: pig misery), *mannaggia a te* (lit: bad things to you) and *gosh dammit*, a euphemism to avoid mentioning God, in this context also convey an aggressive content of strong disapproval toward the addressee. Given that they are directed toward the addressee, these secondary interjections appear on the right of the vocative, i.e., with the vocative projection taking scope over them. In other words, the vocative identifies the target of the negative evaluative content which follows.

When it precedes, the aggressive expression constitutes a more general statement by the speaker towards the whole content and not only toward the addressee herself. Consider the following examples:³⁸

³⁸ I was not able to collect data on Neapolitan on this point. Further research is needed.

- (83) ?-?? Porcamiseria, ehi, Maria ma che fai?
InterjectionS, interjectionP Maria but what are you doing?
- (84) * Maria, porcamiseria, ehi, ma che fai?
Maria interjectionS, interjectionP Maria but what are you doing?
- (85) * Maria, ehi, porcamiseria, ma che fai?
Maria interjectionP, interjectionS Maria but what are you doing?
- (86) ?-??Ehi, porcamiseria, Maria, ma che fai?
InterjectionP, interjectionS Maria but what are you doing?
- (87) * Gosh dammit, hey Mary, what are you doing?
- (88) ?-??Hey gosh dammit Mary, what are you doing?
- (89) * Mary, gosh dammit, hey what are you doing?
- (90) * Mary hey, gosh dammit, what are you doing?

The judgments vary from 1 to 3 on a scale 1-5. All the alternative orders are degraded with respect to the ordering *primary interjection* > *Vocative* > *secondary interjection*. Their acceptability is also strongly influenced by the presence of long pauses after the initial primary or secondary interjection, which improve the grammaticality judgment. I will say a few words on this issue in a while. The difference between the canonical order and the other ones might be subtle, but the judgments of the speakers are quite consistent.

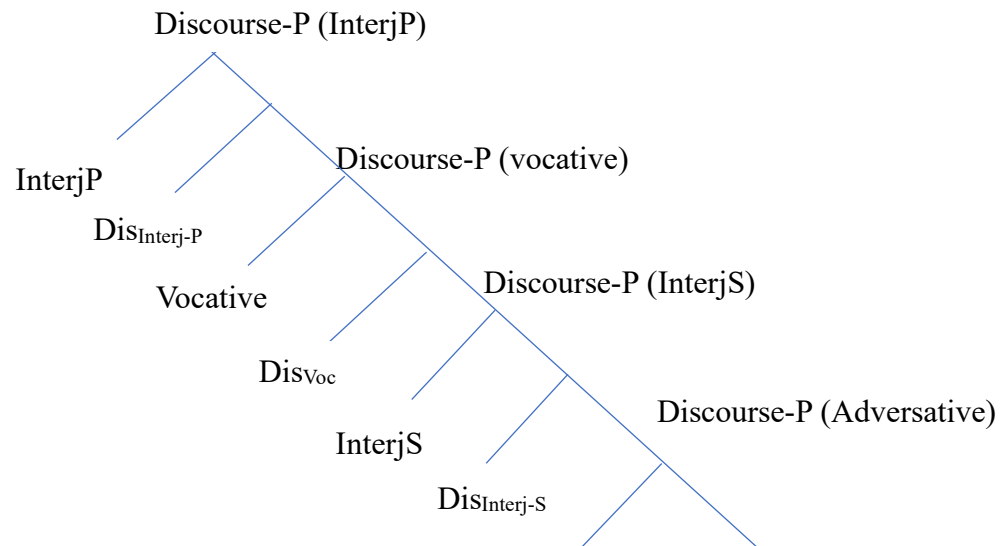
The Roman secondary interjection *mannaggia a te* (bad things to you) includes *a te* (to you), so that in this case there is a clear reference to the addressee, independently of the ordering. Judgements however, go in the same directions: the preferred order is the one in (81). The other orders are considered marginal by native speakers (1 to 3, on a 1-5 scale) and improve if a long pause is inserted between the aggressive interjection and the rest of the utterance. Consider the following examples:

- (91) ??Mannaggia a te, ahò, a Mari ma che sta' a ffa'? R
InterjectionS interjectionP particle Maria but what are you doing?
- (92) ??Ahò, mannaggia a te, a Mari, ma che fai? R
InterjectionP interjectionS, particle Maria but what are you doing?
- (93) ?-? A Mari, ahò, mannaggia a te, ma che sta' a ffa'? R
Maria, interjectionP interjectionS but what are you doing?
- (94) ?? A Mari, mannaggia a te, ahò, ma che sta' a ffa'? R

Maria, interjectionS interjectionP but what are you doing?

Under the hypothesis that there is a discourse head for each speech act, the resulting structure is therefore the following one:

(95)



Going back to the possibility of improving the degraded utterances by means of the insertion of a long pause, I suggest that that too is represented in the syntax and read off at the interface with the sensorimotor system. The pause – or at least the *perceived* pause – signals that the speaker is resetting the speech act sequence. Under this perspective, an acceptable realization of, for instance, (83)– reproduced here with the appropriate punctuation i.e., the exclamation mark – is the one given in (96):³⁹

(96) Porcamiseria! Ehi, Maria, ma che fai?

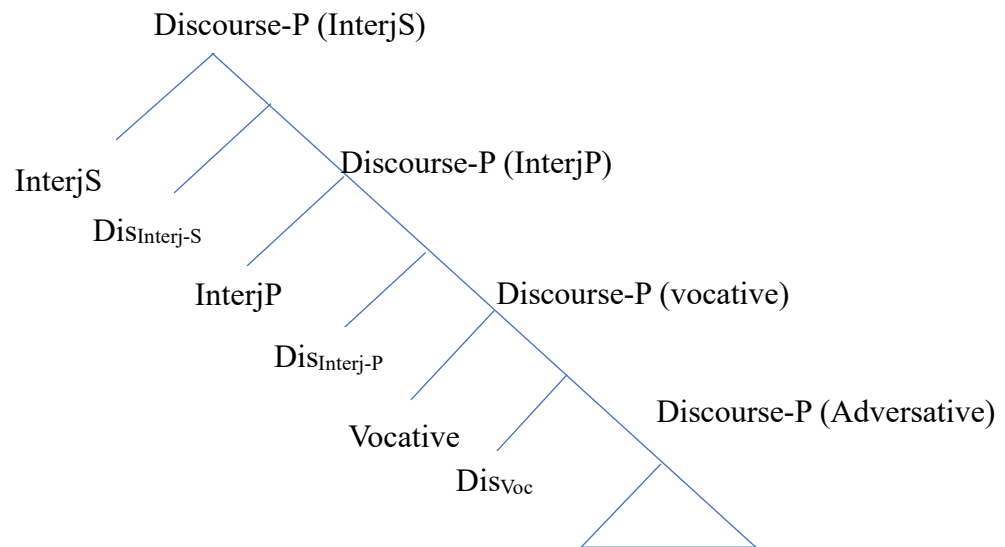
InterjectionS! interjectionP Maria but what are you doing?

³⁹ Note that the representation would be the same for all the languages considered. Note also that in the following acceptable example, without the interjection, the vocative is an address and not a call:

- i. Porcamiseria Maria, ma che fai?
InterjectionS Maria, but what are you doing?

Note that in this example the intonation is completely different from (96), in that the primary interjection is not realized with an exclamative intonation. Further study is however necessary for differentiating the various cases based on prosody.

(97)



The discourse in (97) is produced by a single speaker but with two different context enrichments. In the first, the speaker enriches the context by expressing a negative evaluation of it by means of the secondary interjection. In the second, the speaker enriches the context by means of a call identifying the addressee – primary interjection + vocative – and then utters a special question expressing surprise-disapproval.

To illustrate this point, consider the following context A: Mary gives me a very big parcel, which is too heavy for me to hold and goes away. I am upset with her and need her help. Therefore, I say:

(98) Ehi, Maria, porcamiseria, vieni qui!
InterjectionP Maria InterjectionS, come here!

Consequently, the ordering of context enrichment is the following: primary interjection > vocative > secondary interjection > imperative sentence. In this case, the primary interjection has scope on the whole discourse, followed by the vocative. The evaluative secondary interjection expresses a negative feeling toward Mary, hence, it appears lower in the structure, once the context has been appropriately enriched by means of explicit reference to the addressee.

Consider now the following context B: Mary gives me a parcel and I am surprised and upset because it is much heavier than I expected. I feel I cannot hold it and need her help. I say:

(99) Porcamiseria! Ehi, Maria, vieni qui!

InterjectionS! InterjectionP Maria, come here!

The secondary interjection appearing as the first item, expresses my feeling toward the context in general, and not Maria in particular. This is because the context has not been enriched yet with reference to the addressee, in that the primary interjection and the vocative follow.

Note that the two orders are not interchangeable, in that micro-discourse (99) is not appropriate in context A, and conversely, micro-discourse (98) is not felicitous in context B.

7. Concluding remarks

The discussion provided in this article shows that each speech act is represented as a syntactic unit, which interfaces with the sensorimotor component and the conceptual system. The various speech acts are connected by means of discourse heads, which can be silent or lexically realized like the adversative one. Discourse heads are prosody-oriented heads – capitalizing on Giorgi's (2014 and subsequent works) proposal – in that they trigger characteristic prosody and gesture, in order to convey the appropriate meaning. They are hierarchically organized according to a strategy of context enriching, where each speech act takes scope on the one at its right.

The phenomena discussed here provide evidence in favor of the following hierarchy of discourse heads:

(100) Attention call > vocative > aggressive expression > adversative particle > surprise-disapproval question.

Each projection progressively enriches the context in which the surprise-disapproval question is inserted. The aggressive expression can appear on the left of the whole micro-discourse and therefore in this case it is not in the scope of the vocative, hence, it qualifies the context in general, and not the enriched one:

(101) Aggressive expression > attention call > vocative > adversative particle > surprise-disapproval question

Finally, the proposal sketched above also accounts for the fact that each of the items

listed above can appear in isolation, and be licensed as such, without the support of further syntactic structure.

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