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VOCATIVES ON THE CLAUSAL SPINE: THE STATE OF THE ART

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Abstract. This paper provides a critical overview of the formal proposals that attempt to capture the mechanism by which vocatives relate to the clause structure. Briefly, all the studies agree that vocatives merge in the clause in response to a trigger, namely a probing [addressee] feature. However, the studies diverge when it comes to the location of this probing feature and the implementation of its syntactic checking. Crucially, while recognizing the considerable progress the theory has made so far on this issue, this overview also reveals the areas that still pose challenges for all the current studies, and for which further research is needed.

Keywords: vocatives, speech act, speaker, addressee

1. Introduction

The formal analyses of vocatives proliferated after the discussion proposed in Hill (2007), and they focus on both the internal structure of vocative phrases (henceforth VocP) and on their position in the clause. When it comes to the behavior of VocPs, as for example, in (1), two main questions

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arise: (a) why is *honey* (with reference to a person, not the food) restricted to a VocP, as in (1a), and cannot be used as a subject in (1b) – this is a problem of VocP internal syntax; and (b) why may the VocP surface at different locations in the clause, as in (1c), although the word order in English is quite restricted for other nominal phrases – this is a problem of VocP external syntax.

(1) a. **Honey**, taxes must be complied with.
b. ***My honey** does not understand taxes.
c. (**Honey**), taxes, (**honey**) must be complied with (**honey**).

For the internal syntax of vocative phrases, the general consensus is that it involves an extra layer at the left periphery of nominal phrases, where the pragmatic features reside and turn that nominal phrase into an address (e.g., for *honey* in (1a) but not in (1b)). Although the exact number of these features and their labeling may differ from one study to another, there is consensus with respect to the presence of an addressee oriented feature (labeled [2nd p] in Hill 2013; Coene *et al.* 2019; Berstein 2023; [ground addressee] in Kumari, Wiltschko 2023 a.o.) that establishes a discourse participant versus non-participant classification of the referenced entity[2]. This has consequences for the external syntax of VocP, since the [2nd p] makes this nominal phrase visible to a probe located on the clausal spine.

This rationale holds for vocatives used as addresses rather than as calls; that is, the vocatives in (2a) versus (2b).

(2) a. **Mary dear**, could you close the door?
b. **Mary**!!! Knock, knock.

Occasionally, some studies attempt to account for calls, but a consistent approach to this phenomenon has still to be developed.

So when it comes to the external syntax of VocP, the general idea is that vocatives as in (1) and (2a) can merge in a clause because their

[2] For data, classifications, tests and formal analyses of Romanian VocPs see Hill (2013, 2022); Bucci (2018); Croitor, Giurgea (2024) among others.

feature composition allows them to respond to a feature located on the clausal spine. Again, there is consensus that the relevant clausal feature belongs to a field that converts pragmatic features to syntactic features (the syntactization of the discourse in Haegeman, Hill 2013) and that dominates the left periphery of clauses (Slocum 2016). The exact hierarchy of this field may differ from one study to another, and so does the cluster of assigned features and their labeling, but when it comes to VocPs, they are systematically located wherever the addressee-oriented feature is on the clausal spine.[3] In formal terms, the [addressee] on the clausal spine probes for a nominal phrase that displays a [2nd/addressee] feature at its phase edge.

Despite the general consensus mentioned so far, the exact mechanism by which a VocP becomes inserted in the clause structure is still open for debate. More precisely, where the addressee feature is located on the clausal spine has consequences for the type of syntactic licensing VocPs undergo and for the word order arising from their processing. There is a variety of proposals in this respect, and the discussion of these proposals makes the topic of the overview provided in this paper. In a nutshell, when it comes to accounting for the positional flexibility of vocatives as in (1c), the proposed analyses may be organized as in Table 1.

Table 1

Location of VocP in the clause

Syntactic merge **= a fixed position in all configurations**	**Post-syntactic merge** **= free floating after merge**
1. VocP is non-argumental	3. VocP is a parenthetical adjunct
2. VocP is argumental	

The main contrast noticeable in Table 1 concerns the treatment of VocP as being either fully restricted by syntactic rules (syntactic merge) or partially escaping such rules (post-syntactic merge). Each proposal in Table 1 will be discussed in a separate section, from 2 to 3. Section 4 concludes the overview by weighing on the progress made by the

[3] For a debate on the conceptualization, composition and hierarchy of the pragmatic field see Hill (2025/forth.) in response to Wiltschko (2025).

approaches in Table 1, as well as on the questions that are still left for further research.

2. Syntactically restricted location

This section presents the two approaches according to which VocPs relate to the clause by obeying the same derivational rules that apply to any nominal phrase. The main conceptual difference consists in the (non)argumental status attributed to VocP, which further impacts the identification of a merge location.

2.1. VocP is non-argumental

Slocum (2016) argues that VocPs must be treated as topics at the left periphery of clauses, an idea that echoes the discussion in Lambrecht (1996). The rationale for this proposal is based on the word order in (3).

(3) a. The weather, **my dear**, will not cooperate.
b. I heard [that the weather, **my dear**, will not cooperate.]

Slocum found that word orders as in (3a) are statistically more frequent, which would indicate that VocPs are base generated in that position, under the topic projection in the discourse field of CPs. As such, VocPs can be embedded, as in (3b), since the CP can be embedded. Notably, Ashdowne (2007) has also obtained the same statistical results for word orders with VocPs in Latin texts, but his tests maintain the main clause (unembeddable) status for VocPs, as also argued for in philological studies from Svennung (1958) to Schnelzer (2024).

According to Slocum, in (3), the VocP is within CP and marks the boundary between old and new information; that is, if we consider the preceding constituent to be a topic, VocP may count as another topic element because it refers to a previously known entity, and as such, it allows for reiteration, as most topics do. In other words, *weather* and *my dear* form a topic cluster.

The technical implementation of this proposal is shown in (4), where the complementizer phrase (CP) displays the cartographic split hierarchy from Force to Fin as in Rizzi (2004).

(4) [ForceP [TopP the weather [**VocPaddr** **my dear** [FocP [TopP [FinP […

In (4), VocP merges in the discourse field of the CP, high but not clause initial, as a second topic projected for an addressee-oriented feature. Considering the theory of grammar, this configuration entails that VocP merges directly in a non-argumental position, that is, an A'-Spec that allows the constituents to create (as needed) non-quantificational chains; hence, the possible reiteration of topics. This further entails that the noun contained in VocP does not require the syntactic licensing that is obligatory with other noun phrases.

For more clarifications, Longobardi (1994) established that nouns do not become syntactic items unless they project a DP layer that allows them to be licensed for argument-hood; *i.e.*, to be checked for theta-role and Case. The licensing takes place when the DP merges in an argumental position (*i.e.*, an A-Spec). The inference is that DPs in Spec, TopP, which is an A'-Spec, have moved there after being licensed elsewhere. Along these lines, VocP in (4), being merged directly in an A'-Spec, does not undergo the licensing process. This problem is not explicitly discussed in Slocum (2016), but one may assume that VocPs do not have to be processed in the same way as DPs do.

Regarding the word order, Slocum's analysis resorts to subsequent hierarchical re-arrangements to account for the fact that VocP may surface not only in second position, as in (3), but at other locations in the clause, as seen in (1c). For example, a clause initial VocP as in (1) would arise when there is no lexical material in TopP. For other linearizations, VocP may occur in a structure with CP ellipsis or where the CP is emptied of lexical material.

The proposal in (4) was adopted as such for Arabic vocatives in Shormani, Qarabesh (2018) and, with subsequent adaptations, for Spanish vocatives in Gonzáles López, Schmid (2023). The latter point out a small challenge to (4); namely, in Spanish, vocatives may also occur between some *wh*-phrases and the proposition, as in (5a) versus (5b).

(5) a. ¿Con qué color, **Natalia**, has señalado
with which color Natalia have-2SG marked
la palabra "correr"?
the word run
"With which color, Natalia, did you mark the word "run"?"

b. *¿Qué, **Natalia**, has señalado en el texto?
what Natalia have-2SG marked in the text
"What did you mark in the text, Natalia?"

Gonzáles López, Schmid (2023) assume that all *wh*-phrases are in Spec, FocP, and thus, the VocP of (5a) is lower than the VocP position in (4), although the linearization seems similar to (3). They work with the same cartographic hierarchy as in (4), so the challenge they encounter is that movement of the *wh*-phrase in (5) from FocP to TopP would be unjustified and illicit. Hence, Gonzáles López, Schmid (2023) take constructions as in (5a) as evidence for another direct merge position for vocatives, as in (6).

(6) [ForceP [TopP [IntP [TopP [**Voc**P Voc [FocP *wh*-phrase [TopP [**Voc**P **Natalia** [FinP …]]]]]]]]]

The proliferation of VocP positions in (6) is unsurprising considering that TopP is also projected at least at two levels within CP, and VocP is topic-like.

An important observation made in Gonzáles López, Schmid (2023) is that not all *wh*-phrases allow for the word order in (5a): the set of *wh*-phrases in (5b) rule out that option. Unfortunately, the difference between the types of *wh*-phrases is not discussed in their paper, although the literature provides information about the cross-linguistic variation in the properties of *wh*-phrases (e.g., with or without a [focus] feature; with movement to FocP or elsewhere, Aboh 2008 a.o.) and in their relation to the discourse (+/- D-linked). It is obvious that the *wh*-phrase in (5a) is D-linked, whereas the one in (5b) is not, so the former may not be frozen in Spec,FocP (Criterial Freezing; Rizzi 2007 et seq). Hence, we do not know whether the *wh*-phrase in (5a) is in Spec,FocP or in Spec,ForceP, where it could move to check the clause typing feature and get linked to the discourse. In other words, (5a) could still be derived by (4).

Be it as it may, the proposals in (4)/(6) meet with serious challenges when confronted with empirical data, cross-linguistically. For example, Sideltsev (2021, 2022) explicitly rejects (4) as the underlying structure for constructions with vocatives in Hittite. The evidence is as follows:

- quotative *-wa(r)*

This is a morpheme that marks a direct address and behaves as a regular 2nd position clitic (Wackernegel law) no matter what the preceding lexical element is[4]. However, this morpheme never cliticizes on a VocP, so the VocP cannot belong to CP. An example in this respect is provided in (7)[5].

(7) **dutu-*I*** *kāša=**wa**=ta=kan* *Kē* [*šuppala*?
sungod-VOC.SG PRF=QUOT=you=LOCP this.ACC.PL animal.ACC.PL
ḫaddaw]*en* *nu=**war**=at=ši=šš̆an*
slaughter.1PL.PST CONN=QUOT=them=him=LOCP
šarr[*i-zzi* *l*[*ē* *kuiški*]
separate-3SG.PRS PROH anyone.NOM.SG.C
[*ḫa*]*nnari=ia=**wa**=šši=šš̆an* *l*[*ē* *kuiški*]
sue.2SG.PRS=and=QUOT=him=LOCP PROH anyone.NOM.SG.C
"**O Sun-goddess**, look, [we have slaughtere]d these [animals] for you. [May no one] tak[e] them away from him, and may n[o one s]ue him!"
(from Sideltsev 2021; NS (CTH 450.1.1.2.A) KUB 39.35+ obv. i 17"-19")

The significance of (7) is that the quotative particle *wa* behaves systematically like a second position clitic, but it occurs in third place when a vocative is present. Hence, the vocative does not belong to the clause or else it should be able to host the clitic.

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[4] This quotative morpheme resembles the allocutive agreement marker discussed in Antonov (2015); Haddican (2018); Miyagawa (2022) a.o. Further research on the distribution and properties of this morpheme may contribute to the understanding of the types, morphology and syntax of allocutive markers.

[5] In (7), '=' indicates the clitic status of the elements. Abbreviations: CONN connective; LOCP locative phrase; QUOT quotative particle; PRF perfect; PROH prohibitive particle; PRS present; PST past

- Hittite vocatives can host clitics

The absence of *wa* on VocP does not follow from an incompatibility of vocatives with clitics, since other type of clitics do occur with them, as shown in (8). The difference is that the possessive clitic in (8) belongs to the internal structure of VocP, not to the clause.

(8) [zik=ma **dumu=y]a** ***Muršili*** *n=an=za* *zik* *dā*
you=but son=my Mursili CONN=him=REFL you take.2SG.IMP
"But you, my son Mursili, you must heed it."
(from Sideltsev 2021; OH/NS (CTH 6) KUB 1.16+ rev. iii 27)

- Connective *nu*

Beside the observations on (7) and (8), Sideltsev also draws the attention to the connective particle *n(u)* present in these examples. This particle does not belong to a CP but coordinates the CPs. The point is that VocPs and *n(u)* do not cooccur, but seem to be in complementary distribution; that is, *VocP *-nu-* CP, or *VocP *-nu-* VocP. On the basis of these data, Sideltsev (2022) concludes that the proposal in (4) fails to account for Hittite vocatives, and VocP is independent of the CP.

Arabic vocatives are another source of counter-examples for the proposal in (4). Although Shormani, Qarabesh (2018) argued that Arabic data support a CP internal analysis of VocP, Haddad (2020) produced challenging examples, of the type in (9).

(9) [ʒami:ʕ l-qara:ra:t llati: ttaxaðta-ha: **ya:** **bu faysˁal**
All the-decisions that you.took-them VOC Abu Faysal
bi-ʃaʔn l-muwaððafi:n] walladat ʔirtiya:ħ
about the-employees generated relief
"All the decisions that you took, Abu Faysal, with regard to employees generated relief." (from Haddad 2020: 9)

The challenge in (9) is that VocP appears within a subject island (and so it does in the English translation), from which extraction is not allowed, so Remnant movement to the TopP as in (4) cannot apply. Haddad's

analysis will be discussed later in this paper, but at this point it is worth mentioning that his results match Sideltsev's conclusion that VocP is outside the CP, and also, free floating.

Basically, these studies show that the behavior of VocPs cannot be resolved within the confines of CP, notwithstanding its discourse field, and that the external syntax of VocP must involve structure above or independent of CP. Accordingly, VocPs cannot be embedded when a CP is embedded, as proposed for (3b), and its appearance at different locations in main or subordinated clauses should follow from different rules than those established for the elements of a proposition.

2.2. VocP is argumental

Hill (2013) and Haegeman, Hill (2013) approach the external syntax of vocatives from a wider perspective that considers not only the expression of the addressee but also the expression of the speaker, the epistemic state of the speaker and the conversational setup that impacts the speech act. By adopting Speas, Tenny's (2003) idea of a syntactic speech act field (SAP) at the left periphery of clauses, these authors define the speaker and the addressee as pragmatic roles converted to formal features. Their analysis of the speech act field and of the location of VocP in this field is based on data as in (10).

(10) a. Maria, hai că exagerezi.
Maria PRT that exaggerate.2SG
"C'mon Maria you are exaggerating."
b. Fetelor, haideți că exagerați.
Girls.the.VOC PRT.2PL that exaggerate.2PL
"C'mon girls your are exaggerating."
c. La cumpărături, drăguță, hai să mergem mâine.
for groceries darling PRT SBJV go-1PL tomorrow
"Darling, let's buy the groceries tomorrow."

The presence of the complementizer *că* 'that' in (10a,b) indicates the ForceP level, while the speech act related items, including VocP, merge in a field

above this level. This matches the observations made for the VocP relation to the clause in other languages, as mentioned above for Haddad (2020) and Sideltsev (2022).

The formal implementation of this proposal is shown in (11).

(11) a. [$_{SAPspk}$ [$_{SAPaddr}$ **VocP-Maria** SA$_{[addr]}$-hai [$_{ForceP}$ Force- că ….]]]
b. [$_{SAPspk}$ La cumpărături [$_{SAPaddr}$ **VocP-**drăguță SA$_{[addr]}$-hai [$_{ForceP}$ Force/Fin- să ….]]]

In (11), the particle *hai* (injunctive in (10c) but evidential in (10a, b)) has verb-like properties insofar as it comes with pragmatic roles in the structure (*i.e.*, speaker and addressee). The fact that *hai* can undergo allocutive agreement with VocP in (10b) indicates that they find themselves in a local Spec-head relation. Naturally, when the SA head is non-lexical (not all languages have particles like *hai*), its syntactic properties remain the same (e.g., similar to a non-lexical *v*).

Along these lines, VocP merges in the clause when probed by the [addressee] feature of SA, which acts as a pragmatic role in syntax. In other words, Longobardi's (1994) requirements for the syntactic licensing of nouns through argument-hood apply to VocPs as they do to DPs: the SA head containing the [addressee] feature has verb-like properties and assigns the VocP a pragmatic role and structural Case. The structural Case trumps the case morphology displayed on the noun, which explains why a noun phrase can be recognized as vocative/address, although the case ending on the noun could be vocative, dative, accusative or no ending. Thus, according to (11), VocP is argumental, a conclusion that better matches the results coming out of the analysis of VocP internal syntax, where Voc is shown to subsume some of the properties of D.

Cross-linguistically, the analysis of VocP as merged in an addressee related Spec, above CP, was confirmed, among others, for West Flemish in Haegeman (2014), for Greek in Stavrou (2014), for Arabic in Al-Bataineh (2020), for English in Wiltschko (2021), or for Italian in Giorgi (2023), a.o.

Regarding the flexible location of VocP in a clause, as seen in (1c), (3), or (5), the proposal in (11a) entails that it does not involve several structural positions for VocP, but rather the displacement of material to SAP$_{spk}$, as in (11b), in a topic position that reflects the speaker's take on

the situation. This topic position is above $SAP_{addr.}$ where VocP is merged (*i.e.*, phrasal movement to an A'-Spec by-passing VocP in A-Spec) and is reminiscent of the scene setting topics in the discourse framing proposed in Benincà, Poletto (2004).

An interesting piece of evidence for phrasal movement to SAP_{spk} comes, among others, from Costa Moreira (2013), on the basis of Brazilian Portuguese. In this language, the noun *segnor* is reanalyzed as the vocative *sô* 'man', which would merge in SAP_{addr} according to (11). Notably, *sô* has an enclitic status and requires a lexical host. Its distribution is shown in (12).

(12) a. * **Sô**, jogue aí.
man throw.IMP.2SG here

b. Pára com isso, **sô**.
stop.IMP.2SG with this man
"Man, just stop it!"

c. Jogue aí, ô **sô**.[6]
throw.IMP.2SG here PRT man
"For God sake man, throw it here!"

d. Ô **sô**, jogue aí.
PRT man throw.IMP.2SG here
"For God sake man, play here!"

e. Uai, **sô**, pára com isso.
wow man stop.IMP.2SG with this
"Wow, man, just stop it."

f. Essas coisas, uai, **sô**, acaba com a gente.
these things wow man finish with the people
"Wow man, things like that destroy a person."

The ungrammatical word order in (12a) confirms that *sô* requires a lexical host on the left. That lexical host can be a phrasal constituent, such as the CP in (12b) or a particle that merges in the head SA_{spk}, such as *ô* in (12d) or *uai* in (12e). Crucially, phrasal constituents may also precede the sequence *ô-sô*, as in (12c) or *uai- sô*, as in (12f). Knowing that *ô* and *uai* merge in

[6] There is homophony between the particle *ô* and the definite article *o* but no etymological relation; the orthography is also different.

SA_{spk} (see tests on similar particles in Hill 2013; e.g., Rom. *aoleu* and *vai*), the linearization in (12c) signals that phrasal movement targets Spec, SAP_{spk} or higher. In sum, the word order is either *[o so]*-CP or [XP-*so*]-CP, but **so* alone is out. Such data confirm the hierarchy in (11) and indicate that topic-like readings may arise not only from the mapping of certain formal features within CP, but also within other discourse related fields. In these particular cases, the movement allows for a reading that factors in the speaker's attitude: e.g., impatient in (12b, c), inviting in (12d), exasperation in (12e,f).

The adequacy of (11) to cross-linguistic data comes from the flexibility allowed under the derivational rules. In particular, it allows for SAP to split and remerge, and thus, conform to the cross-linguistic variation attested for the ways formal features are bundled or spread out in the projection of the clausal spine[7]. For example, the speaker attitude related features are bundled under SAP_{spk} in (11), but they are mapped separately in West Flemish (Haegeman 2014), where there are concurrent lexical expression (*i.e.*, dedicated morphemes) according to the type of attitude. Consider (13).

(13) a. **Né** Valère, men artikel is gereed **wè**.
PRT Valere my article is finished PRT
b. **Né** men artikel is gereed **wè**, Valère.
PRT my article is finished PRT Valere
"There, Valere, my article is finished (you-know)."

Both particles *né* (an ostensive) and *wè* (for confirmation) in (13) describe the speaker's attitude, and they are concurrent, not recursive. That is, their distribution in relation to each other and in relation to VocP obeys certain constraints that indicate their merge in the same SAP structure, not in the SAP field of two recursive clauses. That would amount to two morphemes in the head SA_{spk}, which is unlikely, since these are free morphemes, and theoretically, one is sufficient to check the [speaker]

[7] Splitting and remerging of heads is not confined to the SAP field, but may occur at any level in the structure. For example, these processes have been shown to generally apply to C (e.g., Henderson 2006) and D (e.g., Choi 2014; Bernstein 2023), and more specifically to Force (e.g., Coniglio, Zegrean 2012) and Fin (e.g., Hill, Alboiu 2016).

feature. Hence, Haegeman (2014) argues that in West Flemish, splitting applies to the SA heads, by mapping each feature separately, and deriving a more complex SAP field compared to (11); *i.e.*, over four projections instead of two.

The opposite is also attested, in the case of constructions as in (14) from Sasson Arabic.

(14) a. [Context: The elder brother addresses his little female sibling]
Āx-**a**, tıtix-e tıcib-e lastiy-ad-i?
brother-3F.CL can.PRS-2F bring.PRS-2F shoe-PL-1SG.POSS
"Speaking as your brother, sister, can you fetch my shoes?"
b. [Context: The elder sister addresses her little male sibling]
Āx-**a**, tıtix tadi-ni bēs-i?
brother-3F.CL can.PRS.2M give.PRS.2M-ME skirt-1SG.POSS
"Speaking as your sister, brother, can you give me my skirt?"
(from Akkuş, Hill 2021)

The peculiarity of (14) comes from the lexical representation of both the speaker and the addressee, and the referential content of these lexical items can be switched between speaker and addressee, under one condition: the common ground knowledge must involve a certain age ranking and an endearment degree. Thus, 'brother' refers to the speaker in (14a) but to the addressee in (14b). Conversely, the enclitic *a* refers to the addressee in (14a) but to the speaker in (14b). Akkuş, Hill (2021) show that this structure involves the bundling of all the features that motivate (11), which amounts to a remerged SAP. In this remerged structure, the noun refers to the addressee when it qualifies as VocP, but to the speaker when the projection is DP. The invariable clitic attached to the relevant noun is then merged as a deictic reference to the other discourse participant.

Despite the extensive coverage the proposal in (11) provides for the distribution of VocPs in the sentence, challenges remain. For example, (11) may account for all the data presented in Sideltsev (2021, 2022) but not for the example in (9) or the one in (15) below.

(15) It is clear, **Mary**, for you and everyone else, **my dear**, that you must accept, **sweetheart**, that tax returns must be filed.

Under an analysis where the position of VocP is fixed (*i.e.*, in Spec, SAP_{addr}), variation in linearization arises only from discourse triggered phrasal movement around VocP. This assumption is not sufficient to account for (15), which displays multiple co-referent but dispersed vocatives. One may suppose that VocP stacking in Spec, SAP_{addr} is at work in (15), e.g., as with multiple *wh*-phrases in stacked Specs. However, that makes it hard to explain the possibility of TopPs in between the stacked phrases. Alternatively, one may suppose that there is SAP recursion, which would provide room for merging each VocP separately, and having each SAP_{spk} filled with moved phrasal constituents. But then a principled account is required to establish under what conditions SAP recursion is allowed and predictable, or else we end up with arbitrary proliferations as in (6).

Such challenges suggest that although, theoretically and empirically, (11) is more adequate than (4) to capture the mechanism of merging VocPs in the clause, it still needs improvements when it comes to accounting for the privileged flexibility VocPs display, when compared to DPs, in their distribution in the sentence.

3. VocP as post-syntactic adjunct

Haddad (2020) discusses data as in (9) and (15), and even provides other challenging evidence from Arabic, as shown in (16).

(16) w-ka:da ʔan ʔitˁtˁahar tura:b-un
and-was.almost.exactly that got.purified soil-their
[taħt **ya: si:d-i:** mawtˁa:-k]
Under VOC sir-my tread-your
"And I could swear that their land got purified under, sir, your tread."

The problem in (16) is that the VocP *ya: si:d-i:* 'sir' occurs in-between a preposition and its DP complement. That is, VocP may merge inside a constituent. This is as baffling as (9), where VocP surfaces in a subject island.

The solution defended in Haddad (2020) is to treat VocP and SAP as a whole as parenthetical, instead of a hierarchical formation as in (11), an idea adopted from Espinal (1991). Parenthetical adjuncts are minimally

constrained in relation to the host clause, and can undergo a last-minute merge after the syntactic structure is complete and before Spell Out. The formal proposal is shown in (17).

(17) [ZP [YP [SAP **VocP**] [YP [XP…

In (17), the analysis adopts elements from the current literature that deals with parentheticals in general (e.g., Vries 2012). The idea is that the CP and the SAP/VocP are derived separately, on different planes. The CP serves as the host plane to which the SAP/VocP phase adjoins before Spell Out. The adjunction points are unconstrained, except for one restriction: only the phrasal nodes allow for adjunction. Thus, VocP can adjoin to a DP that is under a prepositional P head in (16), or to the PP within the relative clause in (9). Another advantage of this analysis is that VocPs are acknowledged as main clause phenomena, *i.e.*, unembeddable, while also accounting for their presence in embedded clauses.

For the plane that contains vocatives, Haddad acknowledges that VocP has to have structure around it that maps the speaker and the speaker's attitude or common ground, and provides a way of licensing the VocP. So SAP is projected, but as an isolated unit, with VocP inside it. Before Spell Out, SAP can adjoin to any maximal projection, as indicated by the reiteration of YP in (17). Frequency of use indicates that some adjunction points (e.g., within a constituent in (16)) are less favored than others, but this tendency concerns the ease of processing, not of grammaticality.

Despite the promising results obtained with the analysis in (17), challenges also arise for this approach as well, when confronted with the data. First, SAP may contain a variety of lexical elements, as seen in (11), and these elements are ruled out around the adjoined VocPs. Furthermore, the insular nature of the parenthetical would prevent binding or agreements to be initiated by the elements of SAP. As a reminder, the entire idea of SAP is based on Ross' (1970) observations on binding phenomena that do not straightforwardly obey the Binding Principles; see (18).

(18) Physicists like myself/*himself were never too happy with the parity principle.

The grammaticality of *myself* versus *himself* follows from the assumption that there is a null pronominal deictic for the speaker that correctly binds the anaphoric pronoun in first person, whereas there is no binding antecedent for the third person form. Such binding cannot occur if the *pro*-speaker is in a parenthetical.

One may suppose that the parenthetical consists of VocP only, as opposed to the entire SAP so the binding from the speaker still takes place in (18). However, the addressee feature, which is paramount for the merge of VocP in the clause, is also paramount for the generation of imperative clauses, according to current studies (Zanuttini 2008; Alcázar, Saltarelli 2014; Isac 2015 a.o.). In fact, some data suggest that even verb movement to SAP_{addr} may take place; e.g., the Rom. *vino* 'come.IMP.2SG' displays the ending seen on nouns marked for vocative case (e.g., *Mario* 'Maria.VOC'). The 'hearer' is a licensor for imperative clauses, and that cannot occur when the parenthetical adjoins to some maximal projection inside the CP host.

Recently, studies on self talk show that vocatives are ruled out from certain configurations. Wiltschko (2025) distinguishes between *I*-centered and *You*-centered self talk, with the illustrations in (19).

(19) a. *Martina$_k$, I$_k$'m an idiot. *I*-centered self talk
b. Martina$_k$, you$_k$ are an idiot. *You*-centered self talk

If VocP or SAP ($Ground_{addr}$ for Wiltschko 2025) merge through adjunction after the clause is projected, as in (17), free of any constraints, then (19a) should be possible, contrary to the fact.

There are further problems for adopting the analysis in (17) when it comes to the possibility of allocutive agreement, as in Basque (Miyagawa 2022 among many others), or the evidence that the speaker/addressee's common ground knowledge impacts the clause typing options in Force (Hill, Miyagawa 2023). All these phenomena require a selection configuration from SAP to the CP and seem irreconcilable with a parenthetical analysis.

That being said, the proposal in (17) should not be dismissed as long as (11) cannot cover all the possible linearizations of VocP. In fact, from the perspective of the economy principle on derivations, (17) is more economic than (11), as the latter resorts to complex Remnant movement to explain the positional flexibility, instead of direct merge. However, at this time, (11) and (17) are the only choices the literature provides when it comes to formal accounts for how VocP merges with the clause.

4. Conclusions

The overview of the literature provided in this paper focused on the external syntax of VocP, namely, the merging of VocP in the clause. Two major approaches were identified: those that maintain a fixed position for VocP on the clausal spine, and those that attribute a parenthetical behavior to VocPs (see Table 1).

It was shown that analytical variations arise within each of these approaches, and none may provide an exhaustive cover for the empirical data while conforming to the current theoretical tenets of generative grammar. A summary of what has been achieved is listed below.

- VocP belongs to the clausal spine versus being an isolated non-syntactic item
- VocP undergoes syntactic licensing on a par with DPs
- Syntactic licensing occurs when VocP undergoes first merge on the clausal spine
- The area of the clausal spine where VocP merges is above CP
- The formal feature that probes for VocP, *i.e.*, [addressee], as well as the formal feature related to the speaker, has binding and selectional power over the CP and/or its elements
- Unlike DPs, whose distribution within sentences conforms to established rules, VocPs display an unrestricted distribution

Further research will have to strike a balance between preserving the analytical progress made and developing new approaches to this issue. In particular, the outstanding challenge at this time concerns the theoretical tools, which, at this stage, do not provide a mechanism for VocP to exit SAP (or equivalent licensing field) and not only float along the clausal spine, but also penetrate closed phases, such as PPs and relative clauses.

Fifty years ago, Ross' (1970) *performative hypothesis* has been summarily dismissed just because his insights and evidence could not be explained on the basis of the theoretical tools the generative grammar provided at that time. About thirty years later, cartography happened (Rizzi 1997, 2004; Cinque 1999), and suddenly, explanations were possible for previously mysterious constructions, and a better understanding emerged of what had been already achieved. Cartography allowed for the re-evaluation

of the performative hypothesis, starting with the seminal proposal in Speas, Tenny (2003). It seems, however, that cartography exhausted its explanatory power with respect to the issue discussed in this paper. Theoretical re-tooling is in order, so empirical and explanatory adequacy can be achieved.

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