



© 2026 Turhani and Telhaj. This article follows the  Open Access policy of CC BY NC under CC v 4.0.



Submitted: 26/07/2026 - Accepted: 11/09/2026 - Published: 28/09/2026

From Formal Syntax to the Classroom: Clause-Type Classification and the Exclamative Sentence in Albanian Grammar

Lura Turhani^{1*}, Resul Telhaj¹

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Human Sciences, "Aleksandër Xhuvani" University of Elbasan, Albania

*lura.turhani@uniel.edu.al

DOI: 10.26417/1x9j26a6

Abstract

How a grammar classifies clause types is not a question that stays inside the grammar. The classification adopted by a standard reference grammar passes into the national curriculum and into school textbooks, and so determines what learners are taught about the relationship between grammatical structure and emotional expression. In Albanian, the classification sanctioned by the standard academic grammar denies the exclamative the status of a basic clause type, treating exclamative value as an affective or intonational modification of declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives. This paper argues that the classification is descriptively inadequate and pedagogically costly. Combining the cartographic model of the split left periphery with the tools of formal semantics, it shows that the Albanian exclamative is subject to formal constraints that no intonational account can derive: obligatory A-bar movement of the operators *sa*, *ç'* and *çfarë* to the focus position of the left periphery, a factivity constraint restricting embedding to emotive and factive predicates, and a gradability requirement on the predicates modified by *sa*. The analysis rests throughout on the distinction between the sentence, an abstract unit of the linguistic system, and the utterance, a dynamic unit of discourse. That distinction is also the principle a curriculum needs if it is to separate what learners perform in discourse from what they know as grammar. A cross-linguistic comparison with English, Italian and Modern Greek shows the relevant constraints to be parametric rather than language-specific, and the paper closes by setting out what follows for textbook description, teacher education and curriculum design, in Albanian and in any language curriculum that classifies clause types by expressive force.

Keywords: clause typology; pedagogical grammar; curriculum design; exclamative clause; left periphery; factivity; admirativity; Albanian

1. Introduction

A description of clause types rarely stays inside the grammar that produced it. In Albania, as in most education systems, the classification adopted by the standard academic grammar is transmitted, largely unaltered, into the national curriculum for Albanian language and into the textbooks used in lower and upper secondary education. What a fourteen-year-old is taught about the difference between a sentence type and an emotionally charged sentence is therefore a downstream consequence of a decision taken in theoretical syntax. When that decision is descriptively wrong, the consequence is not confined to a monograph; it is reproduced in classrooms every year, and it shapes the metalinguistic vocabulary with which learners are expected to reason about their own language.

This paper takes one such decision as its object: the status of the exclamative sentence in Albanian. The classification of sentences according to the purpose of the utterance (or communicative function) constitutes one of the oldest, yet also one of the most contentious, pillars of both descriptive and theoretical syntax of the Albanian language, as is evidenced by the classic international treatment of this typology (Sadock & Zwicky, 1985), and, for the exclamative type specifically, in typological handbook treatments (Michaelis, 2001). The traditional fluctuations in determining the status of the exclamative sentence stem primarily from the lack of a clear-cut methodological division between formal-structural criteria and functional-semantic ones.

In twentieth-century Albanian linguistics, approaches to this issue can be divided into two main currents:

1. The autonomist current: represented in monographic syntactic studies (Çeliku, 2012) and partly in early works on the syntactic structure of Albanian (Cipo, 1952), this current regards the exclamative sentence as a parallel and fully autonomous type alongside declarative, interrogative, desiderative (optative), and imperative sentences. This position is grounded in the fact that exclamative structures possess a rigorously specified intonational contour (exclamative intonation) and are frequently accompanied by formal elements such as exclamative operators or interjections.
2. The modificational/affective current: sanctioned in the Academy Grammar (ASHSH, 2002), this current does not recognize the exclamative sentence as a basic communicative type. According to this framework, any declarative, interrogative, or imperative sentence can be transformed into an exclamative variant if a high emotional charge, expressed through intonation, is superimposed on it. Consequently, reference is made to declarative-

exclamative or interrogative-exclamative sentences, thereby reducing exclamative value to a merely affective or suprasegmental modification of other existing structures.

For readers without Albanian, the descriptive facts underlying both currents are accessible in the reference grammars of Newmark et al. (1982) and Buchholz and Fiedler (1987).

The disagreement between these two currents is not confined to specialist literature. It is the second, modificational account that has passed into the school curriculum, and its consequences there are concrete. A teacher working with that account has no principled way of explaining why some structures resist an exclamative reading no matter how much emotional force is placed on them, and no criterion for identifying an exclamative other than the presence of an exclamation mark, an orthographic property of a written utterance rather than a grammatical property of a sentence. The pupil is left with a rule that cannot be applied and a category that cannot be tested.

This paper undertakes to demonstrate that reducing the exclamative sentence to a mere affective coloring is theoretically insufficient in light of modern formal linguistics. Starting from the principle that syntax must operate with abstract structures that are modulated at the periphery of the sentence, we argue that Albanian has encoded clear morphosyntactic mechanisms, including wh-operator movement, the presence of factive structures, and the distinctive use of the admirative mood, which demonstrate that the exclamative sentence possesses its own fixed and independent template within the grammatical system.

The paper is accordingly organised around three questions:

- (i) Does Albanian encode the exclamative as a formally distinct clause type, or is exclamative value, as the Academy Grammar holds, a modification superimposed on other types? (Sections 2–6)
- (ii) Are the constraints that emerge from that analysis specific to Albanian, or are they parametric realisations of properties found across languages? (Section 7)
- (iii) If the exclamative is formally autonomous, what follows for the way clause types are described in grammar teaching, for teacher education, and for curriculum design, in Albanian and elsewhere? (Section 8)

The first two questions belong to formal syntax and semantics. The third is the reason the first two matter beyond the discipline, and it is the question the paper is ultimately written to answer.

2. The Sentence vs. Utterance Dichotomy

To resolve the classificatory confusions that characterize the traditional literature, it is essential to rigorously apply the Saussurean dichotomy between language (*langue*)

as an abstract system and speech (*parole*) as its concrete realization. In syntactic and pragmatic terms, this distinction translates into the opposition between the sentence and the utterance.

According to the framework of theoretical syntax (Pěrnaska, 2015), the sentence is a structural unit of the linguistic system, an abstract scheme composed of lexical and grammatical elements combined according to fixed rules. It exists outside any specific communicative context and outside time. In contrast, the utterance is the product of an individual speech act, a dynamic unit defined by spatio-temporal coordinates and anchored in an actual pragmatic context, as elaborated within the framework of stylistics and pragmatics (Lloshi, 2005). The utterance encompasses the sentence, but adds to it context, speaker intent, hearer assumptions, and illocutionary force.

In the analysis of exclamative structures, the failure to distinguish these two levels has given rise to two principal theoretical risks:

- Hyper-grammaticalization of emotion: treating every emotional outburst of the speaker as a new syntactic category. If a speaker utters the sentence "The train has left!" with a shout or with raised intonation, this does not, from a syntactic standpoint, turn the structure into an exclamative sentence; it remains structurally a declarative sentence, even though at the level of discourse it is realized as an utterance with high exclamative force.
- Under-grammaticalization of exclamative structures: disregarding structures that are built exclusively to express exclamative meaning (e.g., sentences beginning with *Sa...!* 'How...!' or *Ç'...!* 'What...!'). These latter can never be mere affective variants of declaratives, since they are subject to strict syntactic constraints not found in standard declarative sentences.

To illustrate this asymmetry between structure and function, one may observe cases of word-utterances or elliptical structures in which particles or interjections acquire full communicative force:

[Utterance (speech act)] → *Mirë!* 'Fine!/Good!' (illocutionary force: assertion/approval)

In this case, within the context of a dialogue, *Mirë!* ('Good!/Fine!') performs the entire function of a full declarative or exclamative sentence, yet it does not possess a syntactic predicative structure. It is a complete utterance, but it is not a sentence in the formal sense of the term (Pěrnaska, 2015).

3. Methodology

To fulfil the scientific aims of this paper and to ensure as rigorous and representative a treatment as possible of the exclamative sentence in Albanian, this study follows the standard methodology of generative-formal syntax and semantics: a theoretical-deductive analysis grounded in grammaticality judgments and in contrastive minimal pairs, through which the predictions of the Split-CP cartographic model and of the

semantic criteria of factivity and gradability are tested. This is precisely the approach followed by most of the foundational literature on exclamative sentences (Grimshaw, 1979; Zanuttini & Portner, 2003; Rett, 2011), in which arguments are built on controlled grammaticality contrasts rather than on corpus frequency counts. Our approach seeks to integrate the descriptive observations of the Albanian linguistic tradition with the formal tools of modern generative syntax and semantics.

The examples presented below have been constructed or selected so as to isolate, as cleanly as possible, the syntactic or semantic property under discussion (e.g., the obligatoriness of A-bar movement in (2), the factivity constraint in (4), the gradability constraint in (6)). They are informed by the attested use of the relevant structures in Albanian literary writing and in everyday speech, without relying on a quantitatively calibrated corpus; such a systematic corpus-based investigation remains a productive avenue for future research (see Section 9).

The analytical process follows three main stages:

- Stage One – Selection criteria: the formal features that qualify a structure as exclamative are established (the operators *sa* 'how', *ç'* 'what', *çfarë* 'what', or the presence of the verb in the admirative mood), excluding from the analysis declarative sentences that acquire exclamative intonation only in discourse, so that the analysis focuses exclusively on exclamative sentences as an autonomous structural category.
- Stage Two – Cartographic deconstruction: each structure type identified according to the criterion above is subjected to syntactic tests of A-bar movement. Through this, the behavior of the operators is analyzed in relation to functional heads such as the complementizer *që* ('that'), by mapping them onto syntactic tree diagrams according to Rizzi's Split-CP model.
- Stage Three – The semantic-pragmatic interface: the examples are analyzed in light of the logical criteria of factivity and gradability. In this stage, particular attention is devoted to cases in which syntactic templates interact with mirativity morphemes (the admirative), in order to observe how the Albanian language semantically encodes the speaker's evaluation of an unexpected fact.

Through this methodological approach, the paper moves beyond a purely taxonomic or intonational description of exclamative sentences, offering a coherent theoretical argument, grounded in grammaticality contrasts and cross-linguistic comparison, for the hypothesis of the syntactic autonomy of the exclamative sentence within the Albanian linguistic system.

One methodological clarification is needed regarding the curricular argument developed in Section 8. That argument is analytical rather than empirical: it derives consequences from the formal results for the way clause types can be described and taught, and it does not report classroom data, learner performance, or teacher interviews. A study measuring the effect of a revised description on learners'

metalinguistic understanding would be the natural empirical continuation of the present work, and we return to it in Section 9. The claim advanced here is the prior one, that a curriculum cannot teach a distinction its underlying description does not make.

4. Generative Syntax and the Left Periphery

Within the framework of modern generative syntax, specifically within the Minimalist Program and the cartographic theory initiated in studies of surface structure (Rizzi, 1997; for an overview of the programme, Cinque & Rizzi, 2010), the left periphery of the sentence (the structure above IP/TP) is no longer regarded as a simple monolithic projection called CP (Complementizer Phrase). Rather, CP is split into several specialized functional projections, as represented in the following sequence:

$$[\text{ForceP}] > [\text{TopP}^*] > [\text{FocP}] > [\text{FinP}]$$

where (1):

- ForceP (Force Phrase): encodes the sentence type (declarative, interrogative, exclamative, imperative) and specifies illocutionary force at the interface with pragmatics.
- FocP (Focus Phrase): hosts elements bearing new or contrastive information, including interrogative and exclamative (wh-)operators.
- FinP (Finiteness Phrase): links the left periphery to the tense-modal system of the sentence-internal domain (IP/TP).

In Albanian, exclamative sentences with operators such as *sa* 'how', *ç* 'what', or *çfarë* 'what' activate precisely this left periphery. When a speaker says *Sa e bukur ishte ajo shfaqje!* ('How beautiful that show was!'), the exclamative operator *sa* does not remain in its base position within the Adjective Phrase (AP) but is displaced via A-bar movement to the [Spec, FocP] position, the very same position activated by contrastive focalization and by interrogative movement. As argued below, it is precisely this re-use of an independently existing position, rather than the creation of a projection *sui generis* dedicated solely to the exclamative, that is predicted by the analysis of Zanuttini and Portner (2003).

This syntactic movement is evidenced by the impossibility of the operator remaining in situ without the sentence losing its exclamative value. Compare (2):

- a) *Ajo shfaqje ishte shumë e bukur.* ('That show was very beautiful.') (standard declarative, with no movement of the degree modifier)
- b) **E bukur ishte ajo shfaqje sa!* (ungrammatical if the operator *sa* remains in situ)
- c) *Sa e bukur ishte ajo shfaqje!* ('How beautiful that show was!') (displacement of the operator to the left periphery)

Furthermore, the presence of the complementizer *që* ('that') in constructions such as *Sa i mirë që qenka!* ('How good it turns out to be!') attests to the split structure of CP

in Albanian. The operator *sa* occupies the [Spec, FocP] position, while the complementizer *që* is realized as the head of a lower projection, namely FinP.

It is important to clarify precisely what, from a formal standpoint, makes this structure "exclamative," rather than treating this as a mere matter of labeling. Following directly Zanuttini and Portner's (2003) analysis, we do not assume that there exists a primitive force feature encoded directly on the Force head as "[+exclamative]." Rather, exclamative "force," what Zanuttini and Portner call the widening of the quantificational domain of the *wh*-operator, arises indirectly from the interaction of two independent syntactic components: (i) the presence of the *wh*-/degree operator in [Spec, FocP], and (ii) an abstract factivity morpheme (FACT), located on the Force head, which imposes the factive presupposition discussed in Section 5. The syntactic autonomy of the exclamative sentence in Albanian therefore derives not from a projection dedicated exclusively to it, but from the interaction of these two features within the very same left periphery that also serves interrogative sentences, a theoretically stronger result, since it does not require positing an ad hoc projection.

To illustrate this formal configuration, the syntactic tree below represents the structuring of the expanded left periphery (Split-CP) and the movement of the exclamative operator:

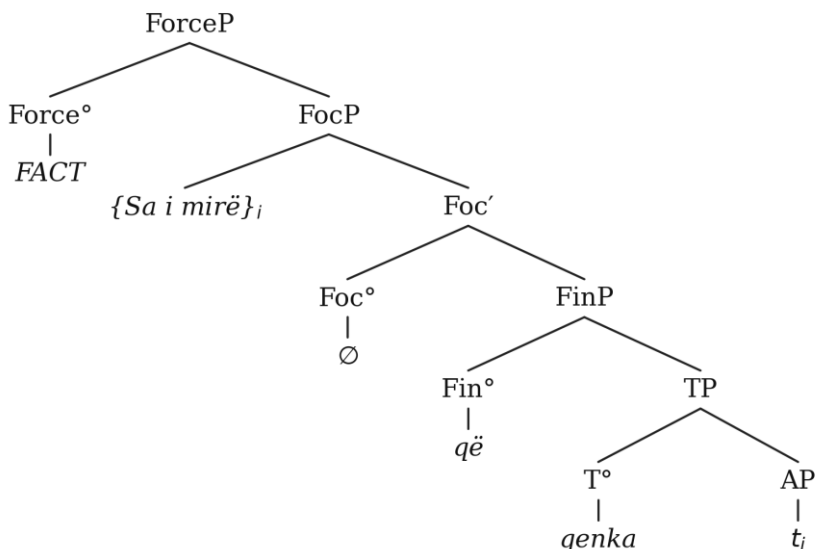


Figure 1. The cartographic configuration of the Albanian exclamative sentence and A-bar movement.

This structure (Figure 1) demonstrates that the Albanian exclamative sentence is not simply a declarative uttered loudly, but a well-defined structural template: the

syntactic trace attests to the obligatory displacement of the degree operator toward the communicative periphery, while the abstract factivity morpheme on Force supplies the factive presupposition required for exclamative interpretation. It is these two interacting features, not a single primitive force label, that render the exclamative structure formally distinguishable from the standard declarative.

5. Formal Semantics: Factivity and Gradability

From the standpoint of formal semantics, the concept of factivity itself (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1970), early studies on the grammar of exclamatives (Elliott, 1974), studies on complement selection (Grimshaw, 1979), the analysis of Paduan that first set out this interface approach (Zanuttini & Portner, 2000), and later analyses at the syntax-semantics interface (Zanuttini & Portner, 2003) have established two principal criteria distinguishing true exclamatives from other clause types: the Factivity Constraint and Scalar Semantics.

5.1 The Factivity Constraint

Exclamative sentences are logically factive. This means that they presuppose their base proposition as true; the speaker does not doubt whether the event or property exists, but rather expresses an evaluation of it. For example, if a speaker says (3):

Sa shumë shi paska rënë! ('What a lot of rain it turns out to have fallen! / How much it has rained!')

the proposition p = 'it has rained a great deal' is accepted in advance as true (a fact). This property also shapes the syntactic behavior of exclamative sentences when they occur as embedded complement clauses. They can depend only on factive or emotive verbs or predicates (such as *çuditem* 'I am surprised,' *më habit fakti se...* 'the fact that... surprises me,' *është e jashtëzakonshme* 'it is extraordinary'), but never on non-cognitive or non-factive verbs such as *mendoj* 'I think' or *supozoj* 'I suppose' (4):

- a) *Çuditem se sa lart fluturonte ai avion.* ('I am amazed at how high that plane was flying.')
- b) **Mendoj se sa lart fluturonte ai avion.* (ungrammatical)

It is worth noting that (4a) also carries a surface-level ambiguity with the indirect question (is "I am amazed" about the fact that it was so high, or "amazed" at the specific degree of height?), a phenomenon extensively discussed since Grimshaw (1979) and treated specifically for emotive verbs in Gutiérrez-Rexach and Andueza (2017). The contrast with *mendoj/supozoj* in (4b) remains a valid diagnostic of factivity *per se*, but does not by itself resolve this ambiguity; a complete diagnostic would require additional tests (e.g., the incompatibility of *çuditem* with 'whether... or not' complements, which are natural only with question-selecting verbs). This structural affinity between interrogatives and exclamatives is not limited to embedded complements: a similar formal parallelism is also observed at the root level in rhetorical exclamatives, which share considerable properties with rhetorical

questions (Chernilovskaya, 2010; Andueza & Gutiérrez-Rexach, 2010), a subtype which this paper, focused on true exclamatives, acknowledges but does not develop further.

5.2 Scalar Semantics

According to the model developed in recent semantic theories (Rett, 2008, 2011, 2015), exclamative sentences operate by means of a degree operator that signals that some degree d exceeds a reference point or standard expectation s in a given context. Formally, a sentence such as *Sa i gjatë që ishte!* ('How tall he was!') can be represented in degree semantics as (5):

$$\exists d [d > s \wedge \text{tall}(x, d)]$$

where s is the speaker's threshold of expectation for height. This semantic interpretation implies a strict syntactic constraint on which elements can be modified in exclamative sentences: the adjectives or adverbs involved must necessarily be gradable predicates. Relational or categorical adjectives that do not admit gradation cannot form well-formed exclamative sentences (6):

- a) *Sa e bukur qenka kjo vajzë!* ('How beautiful this girl turns out to be!')
(grammatical; the adjective *e bukur* 'beautiful' is gradable)
- b) **Sa juridik qenka ky vendim!* (ungrammatical in the exclamative sense, since *juridik* 'legal/juridical' is a relational adjective)

This constraint follows from the scale structure of the predicates themselves: relational adjectives such as *juridik* 'legal' denote no ordered dimension along which a degree argument could be measured, and for this reason resist degree modification generally, not only in exclamatives (Kennedy & McNally, 2005).

5.3 The Operator *çfarë/ç*: Nominal Exclamatives

The apparatus of scalar semantics presented above applies directly only to the operator *sa*, which necessarily requires a gradable predicate, as shown by the constraint in (6). The operators *çfarë/ç* ('what') do not share this same requirement: in *Ç'njeri budalla!* ('What a foolish man!') or *Ç'ditë e bukur!* ('What a beautiful day!'), the element directly modified by the operator is a noun (*njeri* 'man,' *ditë* 'day'), not necessarily a gradable predicate in the sense of Section 5.2. One can say *Ç'libër!* ('What a book!') with no adjective at all, whereas **Sa libër!* ('*How book!') without an adjective is ungrammatical. This corresponds to the distinction well known in the international literature between nominal exclamatives (of the English type *What a beautiful day!*, where the operator directly takes nouns) and gradable exclamatives (of the type *How beautiful!*, where the operator requires gradable predicates), a distinction specifically analyzed by Portner and Zanuttini (2005).

The same bifurcation has since been argued to be more than a descriptive convenience: Nouwen and Chernilovskaya (2015) treat nominal and degree exclamatives as formally distinct types rather than as variants of a single degree

construction, a conclusion that the Albanian *sa / ç'-çfarë* contrast independently supports. For a critical survey of the competing analyses, see Villalba (2008) and Castroviejo Miró (2008).

Accordingly, the formalism in (5) should be understood as an analysis valid specifically for the *sa*-exclamative branch of the paradigm; the *çfarë/ç'*-nominal branch requires a parallel but distinct semantics, operating over sets of individuals rather than over degrees.

6. Mirativity and the Admirative Mood

Within the framework of linguistic typology and Balkan linguistics, the Albanian language offers a distinctive contribution to the study of exclamative sentences through the existence of the admirative mood. Whereas many European languages rely exclusively on intonational or syntactic means to express surprise or astonishment, Albanian has grammaticalized this category at the morphological level.

The term "admirative," itself originating in the Balkanist tradition (Friedman, 1986, 2003), chronologically precedes the more general typological category of "mirativity," proposed by DeLancey (1997) on the basis of a broader cross-linguistic comparison; the Albanian verbal system itself was one of the sources that inspired DeLancey's concept. However, as Friedman (2012) argues in a direct reassessment of this relationship, the general category of "mirativity," conceptually restricted to surprise, does not fully cover the semantic complex of the Albanian admirative, which simultaneously encodes surprise, disbelief or doubt, and hearsay reporting (indirect evidentiality), without being necessarily restricted to surprise. The status of mirativity as an autonomous grammatical category was debated in the same volume, with Aikhenvald (2012) defending it as a cross-linguistically robust category and Hengeveld and Olbertz (2012) arguing for a narrower delimitation. The Albanian admirative sits awkwardly within that debate precisely because of the evidential component Friedman emphasises. For this reason, in what follows we use the term "admirativity" when referring specifically to the semantic complex of the Albanian and Balkan admirative, and reserve "mirativity" for the broader cross-linguistic typological category.

The admirative mood in Albanian (*paska rënë* 'has apparently fallen,' *qenka* 'apparently is,' *shkuaka* 'has apparently gone') functions as the genuine marker of admirativity, in this narrower and more precise sense. For the historical development of this form within the Albanian verbal paradigm, see the diachronic treatments in Demiraj (1986) and Topalli (2011).

It should be emphasized that the admirative is not restricted to exclamative sentences: it occurs freely also in wholly declarative sentences, with no *sa/çfarë* operator and no A-bar movement whatsoever (e.g., *Erdhi Agimi*. 'Agimi arrived' versus *Paska ardhur Agimi!* 'Agimi has apparently arrived!', where the speaker simply discovers or reports the fact of the arrival, with no evaluation of degree). This shows

that admirativity, expressed by the admiring mood, and exclamative structure, expressed by operator movement, are two formally independent mechanisms, which can simply co-occur when both features are present at once. When they do co-occur, as in (7), the result is a cumulative interaction, not a necessary structural fusion of one system with the other:

- (7) *Sa shpejt që kaluakan vitet!* ('How quickly the years have apparently gone by!')

In this structure, the operator *sa* in the left periphery encodes the semantics of a high degree, while the verb in the admiring mood (*kaluakan*) morphologically encodes admirativity: the fact that the speed with which the years have passed has just been discovered by the speaker, and causes surprise.

This co-occurrence demonstrates that, in Albanian, the exclamative sentence can rely simultaneously on two independent grammatical systems, the syntactic periphery and the verbal paradigm, which enriches the argument for its syntactic autonomy without being a necessary condition of that autonomy itself.

7. Cross-Linguistic Comparative Analysis

To further substantiate the formal nature of the exclamative sentence, it is productive to carry out a structural comparison between Albanian and other languages, such as English, Italian, and Modern Greek. This allows us to observe how the abstract properties of CP are realized through different linguistic parameters.

7.1 Albanian and English

In English, true exclamative sentences use the operators *what* and *how*, displaying operator movement but without subject-auxiliary inversion, unlike interrogative sentences. In Albanian, operator movement occurs similarly, but Albanian allows greater flexibility in word order owing to noun case and its rich verbal morphology.

- English: *How beautiful she is!* (Subject-predicate inversion is not permitted: **How beautiful is she!* turns it into a question.)
- Albanian: *Sa e bukur që është ajo!* or *Sa e bukur është ajo!* (Albanian allows the structure with or without the complementizer *që*, and subject order can be free without jeopardizing the exclamative interpretation.)

7.2 Albanian and Italian

The comparison with Italian is essential, since Rizzi's (1997) cartographic model itself originated from the analysis of the left periphery in this language. Like Albanian, Italian allows subject drop (pro-drop) and uses specific exclamative operators such as *che* ('what') and *quanto* ('how much/how'). The behaviour of these operators in the northern Italian dialects, and their partial overlap with non-canonical interrogatives, is analysed in detail by Munaro and Obenauer (1999).

The greatest syntactic similarity between Albanian and Italian in this clause type lies in the use of a complementizer to anchor the left periphery to the sentence-internal domain (the *wh*- plus complementizer structure):

- Italian: *Che bello che è!* (literally: 'What beautiful that it is!')
- Albanian: *Sa i bukur që është!* or *Ç'i bukur që është!*

In both cases, the exclamative operator occupies the focus position [Spec, FocP], while the complementizer (*che* / *që*) spells out the FinP projection. However, Italian has no morphological equivalent of the admirative mood for expressing mirativity, relying entirely on intonation or lexical means to convey the coloring of unexpectedness.

7.3 Albanian and Modern Greek

Within the framework of the Balkan Sprachbund, Albanian and Modern Greek share important syntactic isoglosses. In forming exclamative sentences, Greek chiefly uses the operators *ti* ('what') and *poso* ('how much/how'). The most significant point of convergence with Albanian is the tendency to use a relational linking word, specifically *pou* ('that'), immediately after the phrase containing the exclamative operator:

- Greek: *Ti orea pou ine!* (literally: 'What beautiful that it is!')
- Albanian: *Sa e bukur që është!* ('How beautiful it is!')

This shows that the strategy of filling the finiteness projection (FinP) with a complementizer is an areal Balkan-Romance feature that sharply distinguishes these languages from English. Nevertheless, just as in Italian, Greek likewise lacks a dedicated admirative-mirative verbal paradigm of the kind found in Albanian (*qenka*, *paska qenë*), which makes Albanian distinctive in its ability to combine left-peripheral *wh*-operators with analytic mirative morphology.

7.4 The Structural Comparison Matrix

Table 1 presents a summary comparative overview of the morphosyntactic characteristics of exclamative sentences in these four language systems.

Syntactic / Morphological Feature	Albanian	English	Italian	Greek
Wh-operator movement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Complementizer structure permitted	Yes (<i>që</i>)	No	Yes (<i>che</i>)	Yes (<i>pou</i>)
Dedicated morphological (mirative) marker	Yes (admirative)	No	No	No

Syntactic / Morphological Feature	Albanian	English	Italian	Greek
Obligatory verb–subject inversion	No	No	No	No
Logical factivity constraint	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1. Characteristics of exclamative sentences from a cross-linguistic perspective.

This detailed comparison shows that, although exclamative sentences share the same universal semantic properties (factivity and gradability), they differ at the parametric level in how these properties are manifested on the surface. Albanian, Italian, and Greek share the feature of using a complementizer (*që / che / pou*) to anchor the operator to the left periphery, but Albanian remains exceptionally distinctive thanks to its admirative verbal system.

8. Discussion: Implications for Grammar Teaching and Curriculum Design

The preceding sections established a result in formal syntax and semantics. This section sets out what follows from it for the description of clause types in grammar teaching. The argument has three parts: what the current description costs in the classroom, what principle should replace it, and how far the problem extends beyond Albanian.

8.1 The Descriptive Cost in the Classroom

Under the modificational account, an exclamative sentence is a declarative, interrogative, or imperative sentence delivered with heightened emotional charge. A teacher working from that definition can describe the phenomenon, but cannot explain any of the three contrasts that the preceding analysis established.

The first is the gradability constraint. A pupil taught that exclamatives are ordinary sentences said with feeling has no way to account for the contrast in (6): no quantity of emotional charge rescues **Sa juridik qenka ky vendim!*, while *Sa e bukur qenka kjo vajzë!* is unremarkable. The difference lies in the scale structure of the predicate, and it is invisible to a definition framed in terms of affect.

The second is the selection constraint in (4). *Çuditë se sa lart fluturonte ai avion* is well formed and **Mendoj se sa lart fluturonte ai avion* is not. A pupil who has been taught that the exclamative is a species of declarative should expect both to embed under any verb that takes a declarative complement. The factivity requirement that produces the contrast has no place in the modificational description at all.

The third is the operator asymmetry of Section 5.3. *Ç'libër!* is fine without an adjective; **Sa libër!* is not. Two operators traditionally listed together as markers of the same affective value behave differently, and the difference is systematic.

What remains, once these contrasts have been set aside as beyond explanation, is a single operational criterion: the exclamation mark. Pupils learn to identify clause type by locating a punctuation symbol. This is not a minor pedagogical infelicity. It teaches, as a matter of method, that grammatical category is read off the surface of a written utterance, which is precisely the confusion that Section 2 was concerned to dissolve.

8.2 The Sentence–Utterance Distinction as a Curricular Principle

The distinction between sentence and utterance is normally presented as a theoretical nicety. It is in fact the organising principle a language curriculum requires, because the conflation it prevents is the conflation curricula most often make: describing what learners *do* with language in discourse as though it were what they *know* as grammar.

A clause type is defined by the structures the grammar permits, not by the force with which a token of it is delivered. This yields a description that a pupil can actually apply, because it is stated in terms of operations rather than impressions. Can the operator remain in its base position without loss of the exclamative reading? Can the modified predicate be graded? Which verbs will embed the structure? These are tests, with outcomes, that a learner can perform and a teacher can assess, unlike the instruction to detect heightened emotion, which has no procedure and no wrong answer.

None of this argues against teaching pragmatic and communicative competence. The expressive force of an utterance is a proper object of instruction, and has been since the notion of communicative competence entered language education (Hymes, 1972), and it is embedded in the descriptive apparatus of the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001). The argument is that force should be taught as what it is, a property of utterances in context, rather than allowed to absorb the structural category it is distinct from. A curriculum that keeps the two apart can teach both; a curriculum that merges them can teach neither precisely.

8.3 Beyond Albanian: Transferability and Limits

The Albanian case is a particularly clear instance of a general pattern rather than a local curiosity. The history of grammar teaching in English-medium education shows a comparable detachment of school grammar from linguistic description, with school categories persisting long after the analyses that motivated them were abandoned (Hudson & Walmsley, 2005). The broader movement to reconnect the two has argued that classroom grammar becomes useful precisely when its categories are conceptually accurate and applicable (Denham & Lobeck, 2010), and there is evidence that grammar instruction affects writing and metalinguistic understanding when it is embedded and coherent rather than taxonomic (Myhill et al., 2012). Teachers themselves discriminate sharply between grammatical concepts they find explanatory and concepts they find inert, and the distinction tracks whether a concept licenses a testable operation (van Rijt & Coppen, 2017).

The transferable claim is therefore stated at the level of the classification rather than the language: any curriculum that defines clause types by expressive force will reproduce the three gaps identified in Section 8.1, because those gaps follow from the form of the definition and not from any property of Albanian. The comparison in Section 7 supports this directly. The constraints at issue are parametric; the complementizer strategy varies across Albanian, Italian and Greek, and the admirative morphology is Albanian-specific, but factivity and gradability hold across all four systems examined. A curricular description built on those constraints is portable in a way that a description built on intonation is not.

Two limits should be stated plainly. First, as noted in Section 3, no classroom data are presented here; the argument concerns what a description makes teachable, not what learners have been measured to learn. Second, the intervention proposed is at the level of description, and a revised description is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for improved teaching: sequencing, teacher preparation, and assessment design all mediate between a grammar and a classroom. What the present analysis establishes is that the current description withholds from teachers the means to explain facts about Albanian that their pupils can readily be shown.

9. Conclusions

This study has analyzed the exclamative sentence in the Albanian language through a threefold lens, syntactic (the cartography of the left periphery), semantic (factivity and gradability), and pragmatic-typological (admirativity and comparative analysis), in order to establish what a grammar curriculum can and cannot say about clause types. From this analysis, four conclusions can be drawn.

1. The exclamative sentence possesses syntactic autonomy from the declarative sentence in Albanian, a direct contrast supported by the evidence presented in this paper. It cannot be reduced to a merely intonational modification of the declarative sentence, since it is subject to strict formal constraints, such as the obligatory movement of the *wh*-operator to [Spec, FocP] and the gradability constraint on predicates. The full extension of this autonomy argument to the desiderative (optative) and imperative sentence types, both mentioned in Section 1 as possible rival types, remains a matter for future study, one that would require specific syntactic diagnostics for each contrast.
2. The dichotomy between the sentence, as an abstract unit, and the utterance, as a unit of discourse, is the principal epistemological tool for avoiding confusion in grammatical classification. Emotion and illocutionary force are properties of the utterance in context, whereas the true exclamative sentence is a structure encoded in the grammar itself.
3. The Albanian admirative mood serves as a morphosyntactic bridge that heightens the degree of grammaticalization of admirativity in exclamative

sentences, making the Albanian exclamative structure an object of considerable interest for both Balkan and world-wide typology.

4. The classification currently transmitted to Albanian classrooms withholds from teachers the means to explain facts their pupils can be shown, and leaves punctuation as the only operational criterion of clause type. A description organised around the formal diagnostics established here, operator displacement, factivity, and gradability, is both more accurate and more teachable, because it states tests a learner can perform.

The practical recommendation that follows is specific. School and academic textbooks on Albanian grammar, and the curricular documents that stand behind them, should treat the exclamative as a basic clause type and should define clause types by structural diagnostics rather than by expressive force, reserving affective and illocutionary description for the separate and equally necessary treatment of pragmatic competence. Teacher-education programmes require the corresponding revision, since a teacher cannot apply a distinction that was absent from their own training.

The implications are not confined to Albanian. As argued in Section 8.3, the deficiency identified here follows from the form of the definition rather than from any property of the language, and any curriculum that classifies clause types by the emotional charge of the utterance will reproduce it. For curriculum designers and researchers in language education working in other systems, the Albanian case offers a diagnostic: where a grammar syllabus defines a sentence type by how it is delivered rather than by what it permits, the same explanatory gaps should be expected, and the same remedy applies.

Two lines of further research follow directly. The first is empirical and educational: a study measuring whether a description built on formal diagnostics improves learners' metalinguistic understanding relative to the intonational description currently in use. The second is descriptive: a quantitative corpus study systematically verifying the relative distribution of exclamative operators (*sa* versus *çfarë/ç'*) and the frequency of their interaction with the admiring mood, across different registers of contemporary Albanian (literary, journalistic, colloquial), which would provide the usage evidence on which graded curricular sequencing should rest.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the very thesis of the syntactic autonomy of the exclamative, defended here by following Zanuttini and Portner (2003), is not beyond challenge: very recent contributions (Trotzke & Giannakidou, 2025) argue that the exclamative can be analyzed as an assertion with an emotive presupposition, without necessarily requiring a distinct illocutionary force or clause type. Our paper acknowledges this open debate and regards the analysis proposed here as compatible with the cartographic-formal tradition, rather than as a definitive resolution of the issue itself.

References

- [1] Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2012). The essence of mirativity. *Linguistic Typology*, 16(3), 435–485. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lity-2012-0017>
- [2] Andueza, P., & Gutiérrez-Rexach, J. (2010). Negation and the interpretation of Spanish rhetorical exclamatives. In C. Borgonovo, M. Español-Echevarría, & P. Prévost (Eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 12th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium* (pp. 17–25). Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- [3] Akademia e Shkencave e Republikës së Shqipërisë. (2002). *Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe II: Sintaksa* [Grammar of the Albanian language II: Syntax]. Akademia e Shkencave e Republikës së Shqipërisë.
- [4] Buchholz, O., & Fiedler, W. (1987). *Albanische Grammatik*. VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie.
- [5] Castroviejo Miró, E. (2008). Deconstructing exclamations. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics*, 7, 41–90. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/catjl.123>
- [6] Çeliku, M. (2012). *Sintaksë e gjuhës shqipe: Përbërësit sintaksorë* [Albanian syntax: Syntactic constituents]. ILAR.
- [7] Chernilovskaya, A. (2010). *Exclamatives and rhetorical questions: A semantic comparison* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Utrecht University.
- [8] Cinque, G., & Rizzi, L. (2010). The cartography of syntactic structures. In B. Heine & H. Narrog (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of linguistic analysis* (pp. 51–65). Oxford University Press.
- [9] Cipo, K. (1952). *Sintaksa* [Syntax]. Ndërmarrja Shtetërore e Botimeve.
- [10] Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- [11] DeLancey, S. (1997). Mirativity: The grammatical marking of unexpected information. *Linguistic Typology*, 1(1), 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lity.1997.1.1.33>
- [12] Demiraj, Sh. (1986). *Gramatikë historike e gjuhës shqipe* [Historical grammar of the Albanian language]. 8 Nëntori.
- [13] Denham, K., & Lobeck, A. (Eds.). (2010). *Linguistics at school: Language awareness in primary and secondary education*. Cambridge University Press.
- [14] Elliott, D. E. (1974). Toward a grammar of exclamations. *Foundations of Language*, 11(3), 231–246.
- [15] Friedman, V. A. (1986). Evidentiality in the Balkans: Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Albanian. In W. Chafe & J. Nichols (Eds.), *Evidentiality: The linguistic coding of epistemology* (pp. 168–187). Ablex.

- [16] Friedman, V. A. (2003). Evidentiality in the Balkans with special attention to Macedonian and Albanian. In A. Y. Aikhenvald & R. M. W. Dixon (Eds.), *Studies in evidentiality* (pp. 189–218). John Benjamins.
- [17] Friedman, V. A. (2012). Perhaps mirativity is phlogiston, but admirativity is perfect: On Balkan evidential strategies. *Linguistic Typology*, 16(3), 505–527. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lity-2012-0019>
- [18] Grimshaw, J. (1979). Complement selection and the lexicon. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 10(2), 279–326.
- [19] Gutiérrez-Rexach, J., & Andueza, P. (2017). Embedded exclamatives and the ingredients of grounded belief. In I. Bosque (Ed.), *Advances in the analysis of Spanish exclamatives* (pp. 181–210). The Ohio State University Press.
- [20] Hengeveld, K., & Olbertz, H. (2012). Didn't you know? Mirativity does exist! *Linguistic Typology*, 16(3), 487–503. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lity-2012-0018>
- [21] Hudson, R., & Walmsley, J. (2005). The English Patient: English grammar and teaching in the twentieth century. *Journal of Linguistics*, 41(3), 593–622. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022226705003464>
- [22] Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Penguin.
- [23] Kennedy, C., & McNally, L. (2005). Scale structure, degree modification, and the semantics of gradable predicates. *Language*, 81(2), 345–381. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2005.0071>
- [24] Kiparsky, P., & Kiparsky, C. (1970). Fact. In M. Bierwisch & K. E. Heidolph (Eds.), *Progress in linguistics* (pp. 143–173). Mouton.
- [25] Lloshi, Xh. (2005). *Stilistika e gjuhës shqipe dhe pragmatika* [Albanian stylistics and pragmatics]. Toena.
- [26] Michaelis, L. A. (2001). Exclamative constructions. In M. Haspelmath, E. König, W. Oesterreicher, & W. Raible (Eds.), *Language typology and language universals: An international handbook* (Vol. 2, pp. 1038–1050). Walter de Gruyter.
- [27] Munaro, N., & Obenauer, H.-G. (1999). On underspecified wh-elements in pseudo-interrogatives. *University of Venice Working Papers in Linguistics*, 9(1–2), 181–253.
- [28] Myhill, D., Jones, S. M., Lines, H., & Watson, A. (2012). Re-thinking grammar: The impact of embedded grammar teaching on students' writing and students' metalinguistic understanding. *Research Papers in Education*, 27(2), 139–166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2011.637640>
- [29] Newmark, L., Hubbard, P., & Prifti, P. (1982). *Standard Albanian: A reference grammar for students*. Stanford University Press.

- [30] Nouwen, R., & Chernilovskaya, A. (2015). Two types of exclamatives. *Linguistic Variation*, 15(2), 201–224. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lv.15.2.03nou>
- [31] Përnaska, R. (2015). *Gjuhësi... gjuhësore* [Linguistics... linguistic]. Maluka.
- [32] Portner, P., & Zanuttini, R. (2005). The semantics of nominal exclamatives. In R. Elugardo & R. J. Stainton (Eds.), *Ellipsis and nonsentential speech* (pp. 41–55). Springer.
- [33] Rett, J. (2008). A degree account of exclamatives. In T. Friedman & S. Ito (Eds.), *Proceedings of SALT 18* (pp. 601–618). Cornell University. <https://doi.org/10.3765/salt.v18i0.2470>
- [34] Rett, J. (2011). Exclamatives, degrees and speech acts. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 34(5), 411–442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-011-9103-8>
- [35] Rett, J. (2015). *The semantics of evaluativity*. Oxford University Press.
- [36] Rizzi, L. (1997). The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman (Ed.), *Elements of grammar* (pp. 281–337). Kluwer Academic.
- [37] Sadock, J. M., & Zwicky, A. M. (1985). Speech act distinctions in syntax. In T. Shopen (Ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description* (Vol. 1, pp. 155–196). Cambridge University Press.
- [38] Topalli, K. (2011). *Gramatikë historike e gjuhës shqipe* [Historical grammar of the Albanian language]. Botimet Albanologjike.
- [39] Trotzke, A., & Giannakidou, A. (2025). Exclamation, intensity, and emotive assertion. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 51(1–2), 1–51.
- [40] van Rijt, J., & Coppen, P.-A. (2017). Bridging the gap between linguistic theory and L1 grammar education: Teachers' beliefs about useful and useless grammatical concepts. *Linguistics and Education*, 40, 51–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.06.002>
- [41] Villalba, X. (2008). Exclamatives: A thematic guide with special reference to Hispanic languages. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics*, 7, 9–40. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/catjl.122>
- [42] Zanuttini, R., & Portner, P. (2000). The characterization of exclamative clauses in Paduan. *Language*, 76(1), 123–132. <https://doi.org/10.2307/417416>
- [43] Zanuttini, R., & Portner, P. (2003). Exclamative clauses: At the syntax-semantics interface. *Language*, 79(1), 39–81. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2003.0105>