

## Only to forget it in the fridge – Some notes on the syntax and semantics of telic clauses

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**In a nutshell** I propose a compositional account for the meaning of German prospective *um*-clauses (term by Leys 1971) with *nur* ‘only’ as in (1). I argue that the meaning of ‘unexpected outcome’ arises compositionally from (i) Zeevat (2009)’s mirative analysis for *only* and (ii) *um* expressing a factive outcome, building on the intuition by Whelpton (2001). The account presents arguments for a scalar analysis of *nur* ‘only’ and raises questions about the meaning of purpose connectives like German *um* or French *pour*.

**The Puzzle** The *nur-um*-clause in (1) (called ‘prospective’ or ‘telic’ clause) conveys an unexpected, factive outcome (forget it in the fridge) of the event described in the matrix clause (make pasta salad) (c.f Leys 1971, 1988, Jdrzejowski 2022, Whelpton 2001)

- (1) Hugo hat einen Nudelsalat gemacht, [nur um ihn im Kühlschrank zu vergessen.]  
Hugo has a pasta-salad made, only UM it in.the fridge to forget  
‘Hugo made a pasta salad, only to forget it in the fridge.’

The meaning of (1) is surprising, considering its morphological parallel to the purpose clause in (2), which clearly has a modal (non-factive) meaning. Whereas (2) permits a paraphrase like: ... *only because Hugo wanted to impress his mother*. The prospective clause in (1) does not: ... *#only because Hugo wanted to forget it in the fridge*. A better suited paraphrase for (1) seems to be ... *and then surprisingly Hugo forgot it in the fridge*.

- (2) Hugo hat einen Nudelsalat gemacht, [nur um seine Mutter zu beeindrucken.]  
Hugo has a pasta-salad made, only UM his mother to impress  
‘Hugo made a pasta salad, only to impress his mother.’

Two main questions arise: ① How does the meaning of ‘unexpected outcome’ arise compositionally from *nur* ‘only’ and its complement? ② What is the semantic link between purpose and prospective clauses, evidenced by the fact that cross-linguistically the same element is used to express both purpose and prospect (e.g. French *pour*, German *um*, Italian *per*)?

**Proposal for** ① The meaning of prospective clauses with *nur* derives compositionally from (i) a meaning for *um* expressing an outcome building on Whelpton (2001), who to my knowledge, provides the only semantic account of these clauses, and (ii) an analysis of *nur* ‘only’ following Zeevat (2009), where *only* presupposes the prejacent *p*, negates all stronger alternatives to *p* and crucially introduces a weak presupposition that there is one true stronger alternative to *p* (paraphrasable by *It might be thought that...*). By uttering (2), the speaker expresses that she held an expectation ( $\approx$  weak presupposition) that a stronger alternative to the prejacent is true (i.e. a more likely outcome). The weak presupposition is denied by the assertion of *only*, negating stronger alternatives, thus a mirative meaning arises.

**Suggestion for** ② The meaning for *um* at its core expresses an outcome. In the case of rationale clauses, a modal operator RATIO relating to the goals of an attitude holder *x* is present. An

informal suggestion to be refined in future research is provided in (3), where (3b) includes the meaning of (3a). Evidence for assigning the more complex underlying structure to the rationale clause comes from English, where *in order to* expresses a rationale reading whereas the bare infinitive *to* is underspecified.

- (3) a.  $p \text{ um } q \approx q \text{ is an outcome of } p$   
b.  $p \text{ um}_{+\text{RATIO}} q \approx p \text{ because } x \text{ wants that } q \text{ is an outcome of } p$

## References

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