Wonder nouns and the emergence of a mirative constructional network

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Introduction: mirativity

- Qualify something as being "unexpected" (DeLancey 2001: 369)
  [in the typological literature mirativity is generally taken to subsume "sudden discovery, surprise and unprepared mind of the speaker (and also the audience or the main character of a story)" (Aikhenvald 2012: 435)]

Or

- [applied to English] "The opposite meaning… lack of surprise" (Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer 2007: 35; Gentens et al. 2016; Van linden et al. 2016)

Outline

- Introduction
- Data and methodology
- *Wonder*
- *Marvel*
- *Surprise*
- *Coincidence*
- Synchronic network
- Conclusions

Introduction: *wonder* nouns

- Constructions with shell nouns that denote something unexpected or astonishing → OED entries:

  - *Wonder* (OE *Wundor*): 1. Sth that causes astonishment; 2. a miracle involving supernatural powers; Phrases: *it (or † that) BE wonder; no wonder; It is († great), little, small wonder; It is (a) wonder; No wonder that/if/though: (and) no wonder!; The wonder is*

  - *Marvel* (< Anglo-Norman *merveille c*1050): 1. miracle (*c*1300, now obsolete); 2. A wonderful or astonishing thing, a cause of surprise, admiration or wonder; a wonder (*c*1300). Phrases: *It is (great) marvel; Is it any marvel?; It is no marvel; no marvel; what marvel* (obsolete)

  - *Surprise* (< Anglo-Norman, Old French *surprise*): 1. act of attacking unexpectedly or without warning (military, 1457); 3. sth that takes by surprise, anything unexpected (1592); Phrases: *surprise, surprise* (ironic, 1953)

  - *Coincidence* (< French *coïncidence*): 1. the occupation of the same place or part of space (1626) 4. A notable concurrence of events or circumstances having no apparent causal connection (*a*1682)

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Introduction: *wonder* nouns

- Topic: constructions with shell nouns that denote something unexpected or astonishing in various **structural patterns**: complementation (1), parataxis (2), adverbial (3)

  1) I**t's no wonder** Norwegians hunt whale. There's nothing else left to catch. (WB) (Van linden et al. 2016: 385)
  2) But when I started full training I started to get headaches and **it's no wonder** because I'd woken up with a massive lump on my head. (WB) (Van linden 2020: 4)
  3) George [Clooney] […] and Renee [Zellweger] […] seemed to make the perfect couple. But the only permanent fixture in George's life would appear to be his pet potbellied pig Max, which sleeps in his bedroom. **No wonder** Renee moved out. (WB) (Van linden 2020: 4)

Paraphrase with an expectation adverb like *of course* (discourse marker)

Introduction: *wonder* nouns

- Aim: posit as a macro-construction the **anti-concessive discourse schema** instantiated by all these examples, irrespective of the structural variation: complementation (1), parataxis (2), adverbial (3)

This schema, established by a mirative qualifier (MQ), signals that even though a certain proposition (P) seems unexpected, it is not, given the justification (J) invoked

→ emphasizes the **expected** relation between justification and proposition + invites inference of a rhetorical causal relation between justification and proposition

    → speaker attitude + discourse organization (beyond sentence level!)

    ↔ concessive relations signal the *unexpected* relation between two situations:

       a situation occurs 'in spite of' another situation that functions as an anti-cause and could have been expected to prevent it (Martin 1992: 199)

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- Full inheritance of anti-concessive macro-cxn in 'allostructions' (1) to (3) (Cappelle 2006), but also cases of partial inheritance with other wonder nouns + different levels of schematicity

- Focus on structural variation in the mirative qualifier slot within macro-cxn

Data and methodology

Corpus query: lemma search (noun) in the British subcorpora of the WordbanksOnline corpus (written and spoken):

Wonder(s): random sample of 250 hits

Marvel(s): exhaustive sample of 430 hits

Surprise(s): random sample of 250 hits

Coincidence(s): random sample of 250 hits

Data and methodology

- Analysed for lexical vs. grammatical uses of the wonder nouns: different frequencies per noun (Gentens et al. 2016; Van linden et al. 2016; Davidse et al. Forthc.)

  - Lexical: (un)expectedness is discourse-primary; can be 'addressed' by 'how much of a surprise was it?' and thus shows lexical use (cf. Boye & Harder 2012)

    (4) The Grotta Azzurra is a **marvel**. (WB)

    (5) She kept looking at him in a way. He sipped his cup of tea. She was looking at him in that way again … he finished his cup of tea … Dear reader, **it's a wonder** <u>how</u> one bed can take so much punishment. The springs groaned under the combined assault of two activated bodies. (WB)

  - Grammatical: a mirative qualifier, commenting on the complement proposition in terms of its (un)expectedness → anti-concessive relationship; paraphrase with *of course*; (un)expectedness is discourse-secondary; cannot be 'addressed' by 'how much of a wonder was it?' (Boye & Harder 2012)

    (6) After all the scaremongering since September 11 regarding good versus evil, with us or with the terrorists, it is no **wonder** Arab-phobia has hit new heights. (WB)

  → Mirative constructional network: restricted to grammatical uses

Data and methodology

- Mirative constructional network: restricted to grammatical uses

  - Focus on the wonder nouns as part of the mirative qualifier in different structural patterns

  - Check preferences between wonder nouns and allostructions

  - Constructional network with (partial) inheritance with different levels of schematicity

Wonder

Complementation [39.6% of sample; 43.4% of MQ uses]

(7)   After all the scaremongering since September 11 regarding good versus evil, with us or with the terrorists, it is no wonder Arab-phobia has hit new heights. (WB)

Parataxis [1.6% of sample; 1.8% of MQ uses]

(8)   But when I started full training I started to get headaches and it's no wonder because I'd woken up with a massive lump on my head. (WB) (Van linden 2020: 4)

Adverbial [50% of sample; 55% of MQ uses]

(9)   George [Clooney] […] and Renee [Zellweger] […] seemed to make the perfect couple. But the only permanent fixture in George's life would appear to be his pet potbellied pig Max, which sleeps in his bedroom. No wonder Renee moved out. (WB) (Van linden 2020: 4)

Lexical uses: 9% of sample

Marvel

Complementation [3.6% of sample; 100% of MQ uses]

(10)   So drastic a series of atrocities worried even Lord Burleigh, who compared them with the much-condemned Spanish activities in the Low Countries: "as things be altered it is no marvel the people have rebellions here, for the Flemings had not so much cause to rebel by the oppression of the Spaniards, as is reported to the Irish people" (WB)

No paratactic use

No adverbial use

Predominantly lexical uses [96.4% of sample]

(11)   The Grotta Azzurra is **a marvel**. (WB)

(12)   The director, cameraman and crew (if there were any) are completely absent. You can chew over the implications of this for weeks – even 40 years. That Kiarostami stitched this intimate film together from 23 hours of tape without once setting foot inside Akbari's cab is **a marvel**. (WB)

Surprise

Complementation [13.6% of sample; 72% of MQ uses]

(13)   If you live and work in a society so respectful of the occult, you get things done more effectively by swimming with the stream, so it's no surprise that Sir David Akers Jones, who has spent more years dealing with the New Territories than any other colonial officer, regularly consulted a leading almanac authority. (WB)

No paratactic use

Adverbial [0.4% of sample; 2% of MQ uses]

(14)   THE odd couple of Kate Moss and Pete Doherty looks like a good publicity stunt to me. Doherty is promoting his new band and, what a surprise, Kate Moss is launching her own perfume. (WB)

Adverbial: WN, WN [4.8% of sample; 26% of MQ uses]

(15)   Apparently, the insurance industry suddenly has woken up to the fact that the over-50s are – surprise, surprise – less likely to prang their cars, and more likely to look after their possessions and be at home to deter burglars. (WB)

→ Adverbial patterns lack overt justification (part of common ground) → only **partial inheritance** of anti-concessive macro-construction

Coincidence

Complementation [19% of sample; 100% of MQ uses]

(16) The clubs are built on the same foundations and cherish the same values. It's no coincidence their anthems are the same. They're twins. Blood brothers. (WB)

(17) The last year has seen countless hysterical reports in newspapers about the burgeoning numbers of shark attacks on humans. But what these reports fail to mention is that, as usual, we humans are to blame. It's no coincidence that it's Australia, Florida and South Africa where the majority of shark attacks occur; all three employ the dubious practice of chumming. This involves throwing bloody meat into the water to attract the sharks for the delectation of sightseers. (WB)

No paratactic use

No adverbial use

Predominantly lexical uses [81% of sample]

(18) On returning from his holiday on April 16, he delivered his letter making it clear he would not be returning to work. Clearly **it was an extraordinary coincidence** <u>that</u> Mr Gill and Mr Bird should find life so intolerable they both had to leave simultaneously. (WB)

Overview: structural variation within mirative qualifier (WN=wonder noun)

	wonder	*surprise*	*marvel*	*coincidence*
It BE (det) *WN*	✓	✓	✓	✓
There BE (det) *WN*	✓	✗	✗	✗
No/little/small WN	✓	✗	✗	✗
What a WN	✗	✓	✗	✗
It COME as (det) *WN*	✗	✓	✗	✗
WN WN	✗	✓	✗	✗

Constructional approach

Traugott (2008): 4 levels of schematicity within a taxonomic network of constructions:

macro-constructions: meaning-form pairings that are primarily defined by function (as well as structure)
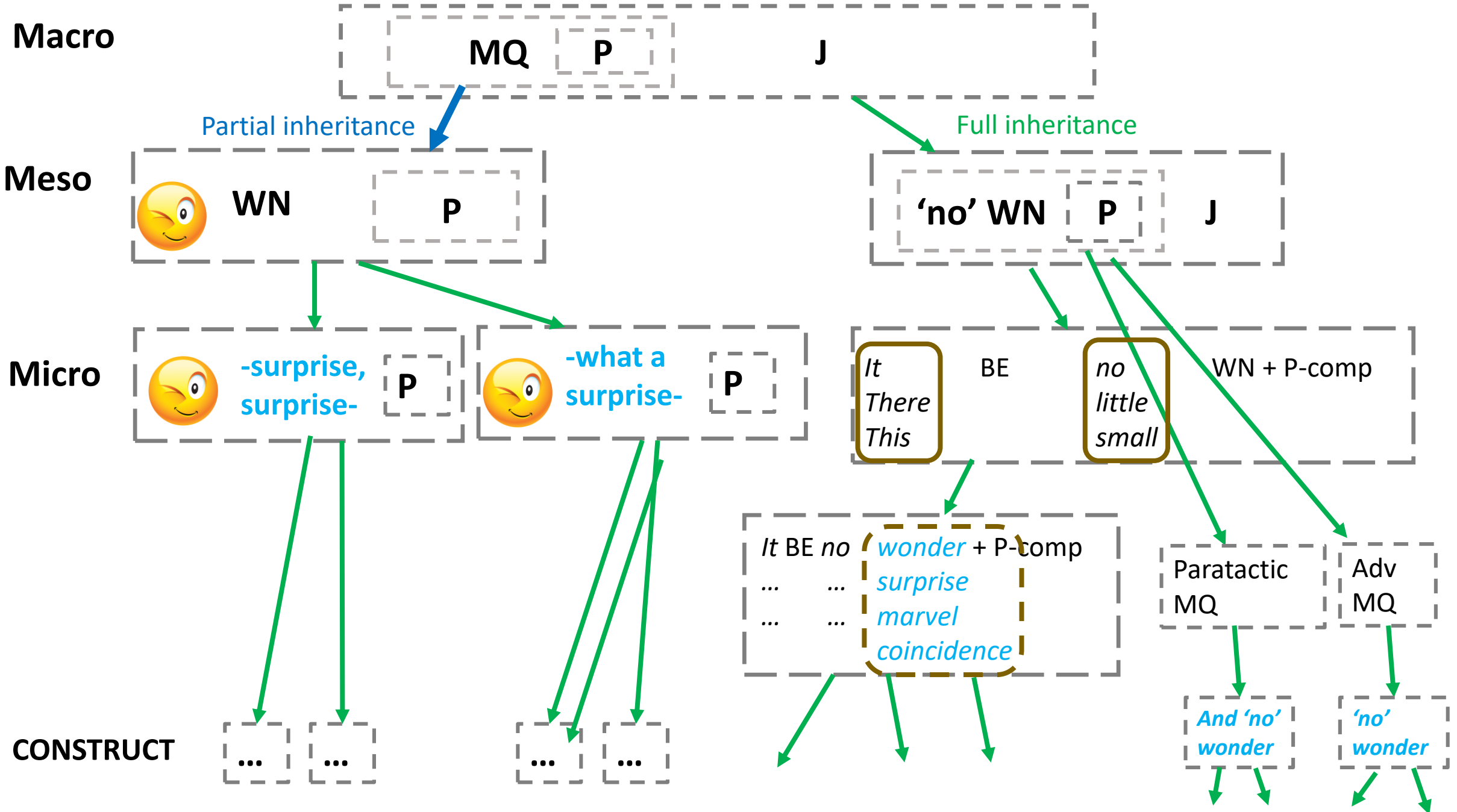
meso-constructions: sets of similarly-behaving specific constructions

micro-constructions: individual construction-types

constructs: the empirically attested tokens

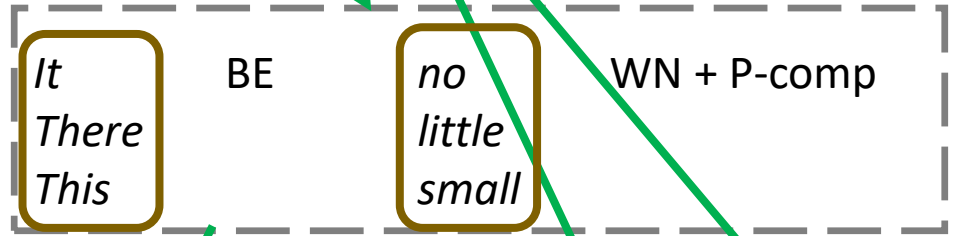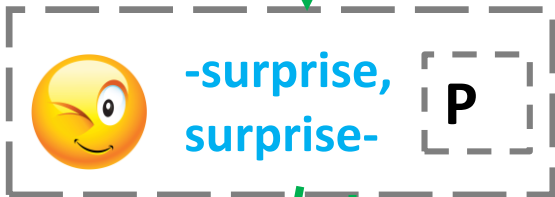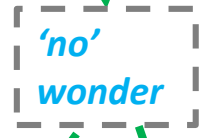→ Difficult to apply to wonder nouns dataset

Macro

MQ P J Anti-concessive schema
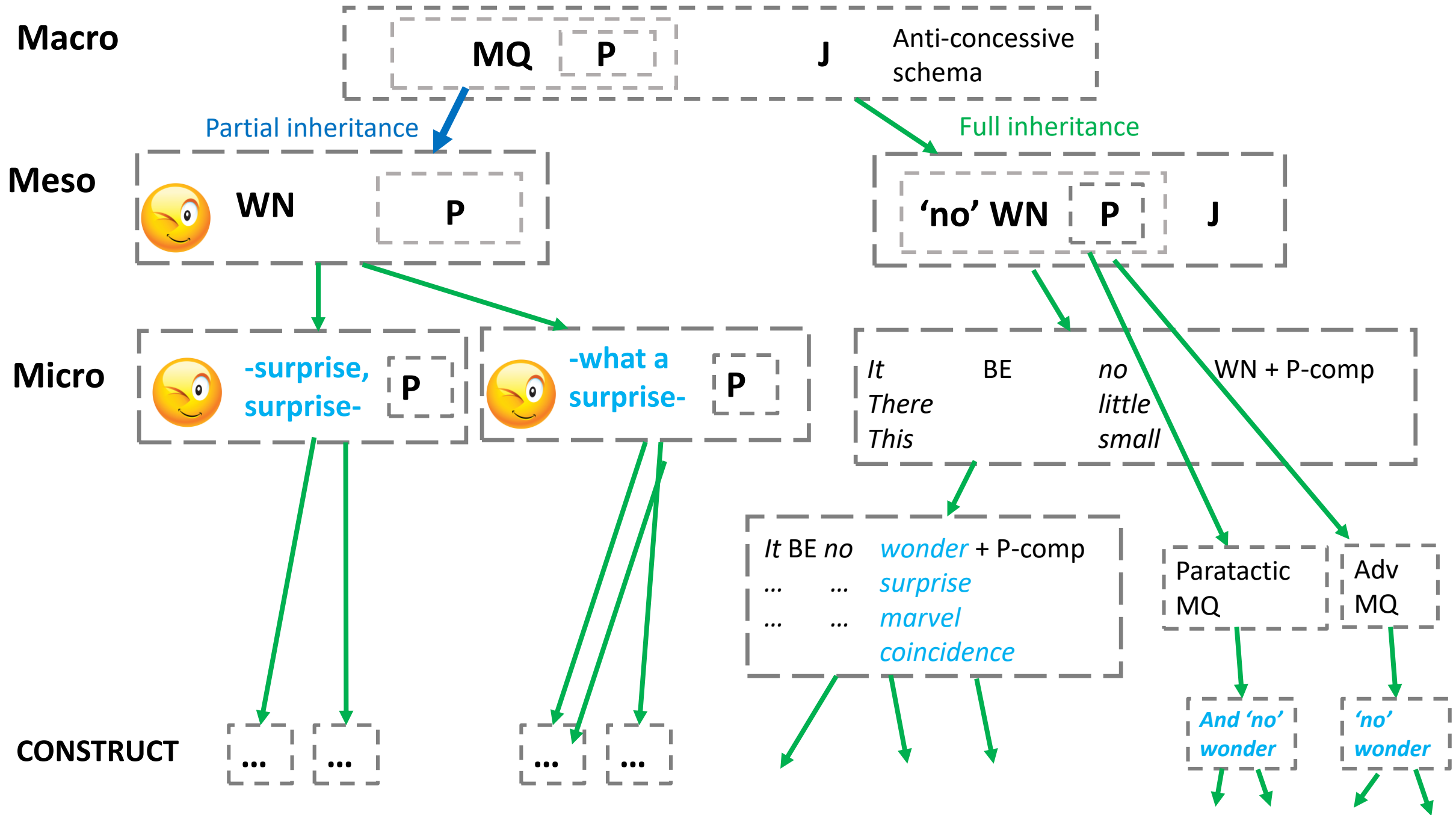
Partial inheritance Full inheritance

Meso

WN P 'no' WN P J

Micro

-surprise, surprise- P -what a surprise- P

It BE no WN + P-comp
There little
This small

It BE no wonder + P-comp
... ... surprise
... ... marvel
coincidence

Paratactic MQ Adv MQ

CONSTRUCT

... ...

And 'no' wonder 'no' wonder
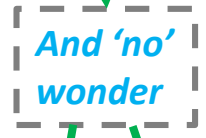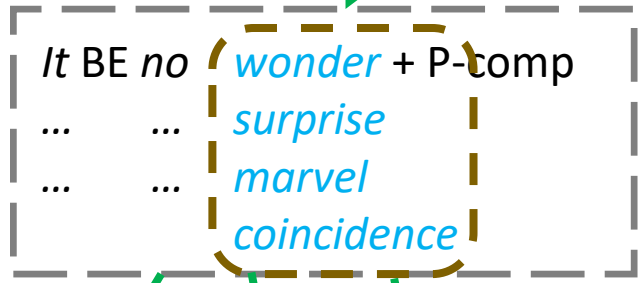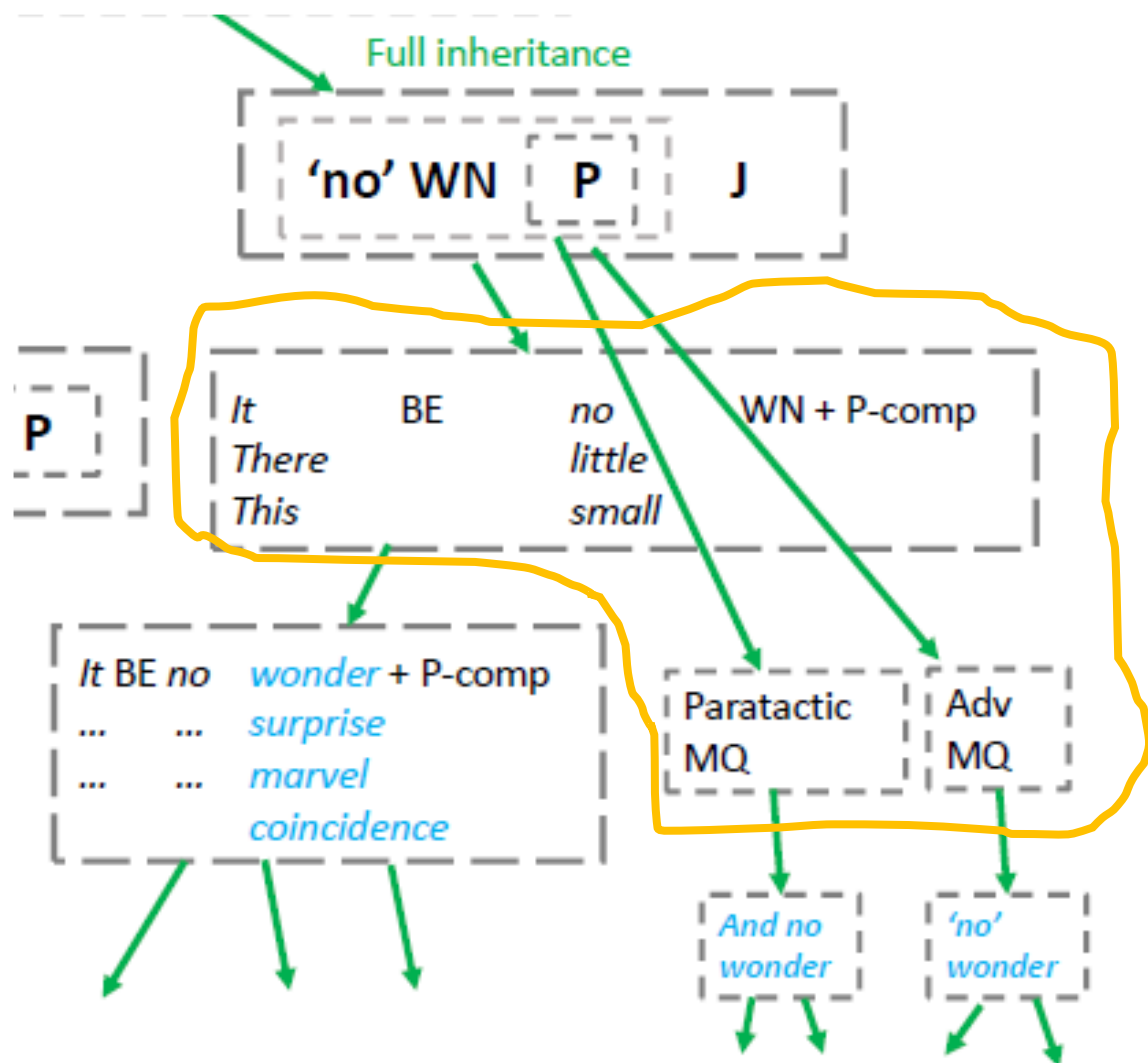
Constructional approach

Paradigmatic relations at micro-level (yellow)

- 'complement', paratactic & adverbial pattern are 'sisters' which show different (but not mutually exclusive) lexical preferences at lower levels (*wonder* vs. other nouns)
  → different from 'alternations' (e.g. collostructional analyses by Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004)
- Two 'sisters' can be assigned an identical syntagmatic analysis (scoping) (Davidse et al. Forthc.), but paratactic pattern is different (merely cohesive links between items of identical status)
- Three sisters potentially differ in discourse salience conferred on P-MQ-J because of different ordering in discourse
  → Family of micro-constructions?
  → or paradigm at discourse level?

too little functional opposition for a paradigm, if this notion can at all be extended to discourse level

Constructional approach

- Single mother node at macro-level?

(19) [He] lost so much blood **it's a wonder** he's still got anything for his heart to do. (WB)

(20) A state created out of some 17,000 islands, a mix of races and religions, based on an artificially created philosophy - the five principles of "Pancasila" - **it is a marvel** that Indonesia has been kept together at all. (WB)

→ Wonder nouns are also used in concessive discourse schema: speaker surprise + concessive relation (Van linden et al. 2016)

Concessive relations signal the ***unexpected*** relation between two situations:

a situation occurs 'in spite of' another situation that functions as an anti-cause and could have been expected to prevent it (Martin 1992: 199)

→Concessive & anti-concessive macro-constructions as daughters of a schematic mother node: clear functional opposition within the mirative category at high level of schematicity

→ "paradigm" at discourse level (rather than family of constructions, cf. Diessel 2021)

Conclusion

Mirative paradigm in PDE:

- *wonder*, *marvel*, *surprise and coincidence* enter the anti-concessive macro-construction in different frequencies in PDE:
  - *wonder > coincidence > surprise > marvel*
- Inheritance of this macro-construction:
  - Partial inheritance: covert justification → *surprise* (no negative Q, but irony)
  - Full inheritance: overt justification → *wonder*, *marvel*, *surprise and coincidence* (negative Q)
- *wonder*, *marvel*, *surprise and coincidence* show variation in the mirative qualifier allostructions they occur in
- The mirative qualifier + proposition can be seen as a partially filled construction in its own right with a number of slots whose fillers are related in terms of similarity (WN) or contrast (pronoun, DET/Q paradigms) → how many levels of schematicity are needed in the constructional network?
- New upper schematic level: concessive discourse schema (more recent development) → functional opposition at discourse level → MIRATIVE PARADIGM

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