Distinguishing lexical and syntactic exceptions

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A quality that I value in Hubert Haider's work is the consistency he shows where others seek refuge in fuzziness. It was Haider who correctly stated that, in a binary model of grammar, a single counter-example falsifies a rule (see the 'exceptionlessness' quote in my paper in this volume). This fundamental fact is far too often finessed round, and it is particularly important in the context of a discussion of the role of exceptions in the grammar. If it is empirically correct that grammatical rules apply exceptionlessly, then this reveals important information about the nature of the grammatical system. If it does not hold, when all the irrelevant factors which Haider correctly mentions are controlled for, then this finding too has important implications.

I agree with most of what Haider says in his commentary: the criteria he applies, the distinctions he makes, and the type of data he considers relevant. He calls for appropriate methodological standards, for careful distinctions between the various factors which can influence introspective judgements, for the careful selection of the syntactic conditions in syntactic studies like our work on binding and superiority. All of these are concerns which we entirely share.

There are however one or two points which would divide us, and it is these which I shall discuss here. Haider's distinction between an anomaly (an irregularity in the data) and an exception (a restriction on the applicability of a rule) is useful. We should like to see this extended further, however,
so as to differentiate between lexical effects and rule-based effects. In our view, the lexicon is the location of all effects which are related to or restricted to specific lexical items; only patterning which is independent of lexis need be included in the rule system. The rule system, we would argue, should in the ideal case be exceptionless: lexical effects on the other hand need not be. There are naturally patterns to the behaviour of lexically-driven behaviour, but the existence of exceptions to these is in no way problematic for our conception of the linguistic system. If the lexicon is learnt, then the patterns we find in it are mere association-based generalizations, not rules. Lexicon-based exceptions are thus to be expected and rather unexciting.

We would therefore hesitate before attributing to the position of genug ('enough') (Haider's example 3) after a modified adjective any great importance, since we would assume this to be lexical. There are enough other examples of similar behaviour for this to be fairly clear (eg Engl. ago, Germ. entlang 'along'). Potentially more interesting cases of linear ordering are those where structures can optionally appear before or after heads, independent of lexis, such as complements to adjectives in German (stolz auf seine Kinder, auf seine Kinder stolz 'proud of his children'), especially when this behaviour is not even marginally possible in closely related languages (Engl. *of his children proud). A thorough investigation of this phenomenon could reveal insights into head-complement order, I suspect.

We would also take issue with the status of Haider's example (1b, my (1), acceptable in German.

(1) A: Sind es wirklich 47 Umschläge?
   Are it really 47 envelopes
   'Is that really 47 envelopes?'
B: Das sind es.
   That are it
   'That it is'
Here we would argue that the effect is not just a garden path, as Haider suggests, but a lexical exception, or rather perhaps two. The use of expletive *es* ('it') in presentational structures with apparent plural verb agreement, if not reference (*Es sind derer zwei 'There are two of them') is certainly exceptional, but it is not systematic, for the exception is specific to this lexical item.\(^1\) The particular example Haider advances is yet more exceptional however, because these copula structures with *es* normally contain a plural which can license, in whatever way, the plural verb form (*Es kommen jede Woche 47 Studenten 'There come each week 47 students'). *Das sind es* has no overt plural NP, since the pro-form *das* is not marked for plural. This structure is additionally limited to *sein* ('to be'), or perhaps just to copula verbs – (2), (3).

(2)  **Wenn ich zehn hinzufüge? Werden es 47 Umschläge?**
  If ten add become it 47 envelopes
  *Das werden es.*
  that werden it

(3)  **Es kommen jede Woche 47 Studenten zu deiner Sprechstunde?**
  It come each week 47 students to your office hour
  *Das kommen es.*
  that come it

The main aim of my paper was to show linguists scared of gradience that gradience can be good news for syntactic theory. A more empirically adequate model of grammar is at the same time more descriptively adequate but also more explanatorily adequate, because it permits us to reduce the number of exceptions within the rule system, which means that the grammar can be more general, more learnable and/or more universal. Haider and I are largely in agreement about most of the terms of this

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\(^1\) The pronominal *das* seems to allow this more restrictedly too.
important debate, but I have argued here that syntactic and lexical restrictions may have very different qualities.