

Lecture 7: Expressives

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Readings:

- (1) (Potts 2007c) The expressive dimension. *Theoretical Linguistics* 33:165-197.
<http://people.umass.edu/potts/papers/potts-expressives06.pdf>.
- (2) Potts, Christopher. (Potts 2007b) Conventional implicatures, a distinguished class of meanings.
<http://people.umass.edu/potts/papers/potts-interfaces.pdf>.
- (3) (Potts and Kawahara 2004) Japanese honorifics as emotive definite descriptions.
<http://people.umass.edu/potts/papers/potts-kawahara-salt14-paper.pdf>

Suggestions for additional reading:

- (4) (Potts et al. 2008) Potts, Christopher et al 2008. Expressives and identity conditions. *Linguistic Inquiry*. <http://people.umass.edu/potts/papers/expressives-and-identity-v2.pdf>.
- (5) Commentaries on Potts 2007b article: (Geurts 2007, Jay and Janschewitz 2007, Lasersohn 2007, Sauerland 2007, Schlenker 2007, Zimmermann 2007) and Potts's reply: (Potts 2007a). These were all in the same issue of *Theoretical Linguistics*, and they are all on your CD in the Potts folder.
- (6) (Bylinina 2008) Depreciative indefinites: Evidence from Russian. Lisa will present this in Seminar on April 24: try to read it in advance.

See also the separate APPENDIX to this lecture, in which I have collected definitions and "tests" for entailments, conversational and conventional implicatures, semantic and pragmatic presuppositions.

0. Introduction: What are expressives?

Examples, from (Potts 2005):

- (5.1) a. Japanese verbal (subject) honorification
Sensei-wa eiyo ga o-wakari-ni nar-u
the-teacher-subj English nom hon-understanding-dat become-imp
'The teacher understands English.' (Toribio 1990: 535, (1a))
- b. expressive attributive adjectives
Shut that blasted window! (Cruse 1986: 272, (19b))
- c. epithets
saami ha-l-maZduub n'se 1-maw?ad
Sami 3-the-idiot.sm forgot.3sm the-appointment
'Sami, this idiot, forgot the appointment.' (Aoun et al. 2001: 385, (37a))

And we mentioned in Lecture 4 that Potts regards expressives as a class of conventional implicatures. One of the examples we gave then used the expressive *damn*:

- (1) Bob brought his *damn* dog with him.

Assertion: Bob brought his dog with him.

Implicature: Speaker has a negative attitude toward the dog, or toward Bob's bringing the dog with him.

It is also possible to treat formal/familiar contrasts in 2nd person pronouns, like German *Du/Sie*, French *vous/tu* and Russian *Ты/Вы*, as an expressive contrast, similar to honorifics and anti-honorifics in Japanese (Potts 2007c). Just as example (5.1a) carries expressive meaning something like "Speaker acknowledges the superior social status of the teacher", the use of a formal second person pronoun carries an expressive meaning conveying something like the speaker's respect for or social distance from the addressee.

Several properties make expressives linguistically interesting, and there has been an increasing amount of research on them in recent years. Although they are not a "central topic" in semantic or pragmatic research, I consider it very interesting to look at some of the issues they raise, and to see how linguists go about studying them and arguing about how to analyze them. I am using the work of my colleague Christopher Potts as my primary source for this topic.

1. Expressives and typology

Chris Potts currently has an NSF grant at the University of Massachusetts to study expressives in a cross-linguistic perspective; his website is here: <http://people.umass.edu/potts/expressives/>. An extract from his summary of their Year 1 activities shows some ways in which expressives could be a very interesting subject for typological study:

As discussed above, the project participants devoted much of year 1 to broadening the empirical foundations of the project. The picture that is emerging from this work is a complex one. Expressives are morphologically, syntactically, and semantically diverse. Some are bound morphemes, and others are constructional. They are often functional, closed-class elements (as in Japanese honorifics), but there are open-class expressives as well — subclasses of common noun that allow for considerable inventiveness, for example. However, an abstract pattern emerges from a full survey of these data: expressives are, in an important sense, privileged. They are often freed from the normal morphological and syntactic restrictions of the language. This is a major lesson of the short collaborative paper 'Expressives and identity conditions' (Potts et al. 2008): in a wide variety of constructions that require matching between two elements, expressives constitute a systematic class of exceptions in that they are freed from the matching requirement. Similarly, project research assistant Florian Schwarz discovered that epithets do not participate in the process of prepositional incorporation normally found with definite nominals in Standard German. The facts are reminiscent of the special definiteness marking possible with epithets in Lebanese Arabic, and they arguably emerge subtly in English too, as a preference for demonstratives in epithets (e.g., That bastard Kresge). Project research assistant Christopher Davis has been investigating some productive bound expressive morphemes in Japanese, and they seem to permit what would otherwise be violations of restrictions on gemination and syllable final segments in that language. The facts indirectly recall the oddity of English that one can infix swear words (abso-friggin-lutely), but no other modifiers (*abso-stunning-lutely).

2. Potts's analysis of some expressives

2.1. Potts's analysis of conventional implicatures of appositives.

First let's review how Potts analyzes conventional implicatures. That was in the handout of Lecture 4, but we didn't have time for it. So I repeat it here.

From (Potts 2007b).

A major innovation of Karttunen and Peters (1979) is that meaning-language terms are marked as either at-issue or CI (their 'extensional' and 'implicature' meanings, respectively). I implement the distinction via the set of types in (21). (I provide intensional types but work almost exclusively with extensional ones.)

- (21) i. e_a , t_a , and s_e are basic at-issue types.

that are “plugs” for presuppositions, i.e. contexts out of which presuppositions do not project to become presuppositions of the whole sentence. Propositional attitudes are plugs: a presupposition in the scope of a propositional attitude is often not interpreted as a presupposition of the whole – see (3).

(3) Sue believes that Ed realizes that ultraviolet rays invigorate the mind. (Potts 2007)

Realize is a factive verb; but the speaker needn't believe that UV rays invigorate the mind – the choice of a factive verb may be signaling that Sue has that presupposition. But with expressives, there is no such possibility.

(4) Sue believes that that bastard Kresge should be fired. (#I think he's a good guy.)

Here the speaker is committed to a negative attitude toward Kresge; the sentence cannot be signaling just Sue's attitude. (Sue may but need not share the speaker's attitude.)

A failed attempt to signal an attitude holding only in the past:

(5) I had trouble with my damn car all last year. (#This year I love the dear car.)

Exceptions are possible with quotation or quasi-quotation:

(6) My father screamed that he would never allow me to marry that bastard Webster. (Kratzer 1999)

But that is accountable for; many context-dependent expressions shift their anchors under quotation. There is controversy about whether those are the only kinds of exceptions.

Perspective dependence is similar and I won't discuss it separately; Potts's discussion presupposes familiarity with the contextual *judge* argument proposed in (Lasnik 2005, 2007) in connection with predicates of personal taste like *fun*, *delicious*.

As noted above, with respect to these first three properties, expressives are like conventional implicatures, and Potts (2005) analyzed them that way.

In the 2005 analysis, the content of expressives like *damn* and *f-ing* was treated as contributing an entailment on a separate dimension, very roughly characterized using the predicate (function) **bad**, applied to the constituent that *damn* combined with. The result for a sentence like (7) can be compared with the result for an appositive example like (8); the expressive, like the appositive, takes part of the ordinary meaning as its argument and contributes a resulting entailment on a different dimension.

(7) The damn dog ate the potato salad.

Analysis: *damn* combines with *the dog*; the result *damn(the dog)* is of type f , and stays separate from the compositional semantics of the rest of the sentence, in which *the dog* contributes just as if *damn* weren't there.

At-issue meaning: *Ate (the dog, the potato salad)*
Conventional implicature: **bad** (*the dog*)

Note: There is a second analysis proposed for a different use of *damn*, in which *damn* contributes a function from propositions to (expressive) propositions, expressing the speaker's negative attitude to the entire situation described by the rest of the sentence.

(8) Lance, a cyclist, has come out of retirement.

At-issue meaning: *Come-out-of-retirement (Lance)*
Conventional implicature: *Cyclist(Lance)*

Potts's 2005 analysis of expressives captures what expressives and appositives have in common, including the first three properties in the list above.

But it does not capture the last three in the list, and Potts (2007a) offers a different account designed to capture all 6 properties. The last three properties suggest that something different from conventional implicatures is needed.

2.3. Expressives and the new type ϵ

(Potts 2007c) introduces a new type ϵ (epsilon), a type for expressive content. The new type ϵ is allowed to enter into a very limited class of functional types, always as the output:

(9) If σ is a descriptive type, then $\langle \sigma, \epsilon \rangle$ is an expressive type.

This limitation on types already captures a number of the properties of expressives, (i, ii, iii, and v). To capture properties (iv) and (vi), we have to see how the semantics works.

In this more recent work, Potts no longer regards the output of the expressive's contribution as having the type of a proposition; instead, the result is a contribution to an expressive *index*, which is part of the *context*, and encodes the speaker's emotive attitude to someone or something.

(10) An *expressive index* is a triple $\langle a, \mathbf{I}, b \rangle$, where a and b are entities and \mathbf{I} is a subinterval of the interval $[-1, 1]$. (Potts 2007a, (23), p.11 in preprint)

We are to read $\langle a, \mathbf{I}, b \rangle$ as indicating that individual a is at “expressive level \mathbf{I} for individual b .” When \mathbf{I} is the whole interval $[-1, 1]$, a has no feelings about b ; a narrow subinterval close to 1 would indicate very positive feelings, one very close to -1 would indicate very negative feelings.

In using a continuous scale to indicate expressive attitudes, Potts indicates their similarity to such things as gestures and tone of voice, and their difference from normal discrete lexical elements and structures. He acknowledges that using a single numerical scale for all expressive meaning may wrongly treat all expressives as if they were more alike than they are, and offers the following speculation: “As the model theory for semantics gets closer to the theory of cognition, we might seek to deal directly with emotions (however realized) in this position.” (Potts 2007a, p. 12 in preprint).

The effect of uttering an expressive: In his 2005 treatment, *the damn dog* led to an entailment **bad** (*the dog*) in a separate dimension. In the 2007 treatment, it does not lead to any propositional entailment, but to an **operation on the context**.

The context contains various parameters, including an *expressive setting* c_s , consisting of a set of expressive indices. A consistency requirement states that c_s may contain at most one expressive index $\langle a, \mathbf{I}, b \rangle$ for every salient pair of entities a and b .

If an utterance containing *the damn dog* is uttered, and the speaker is j and the dog referred to is rex , then the context will be updated by adding or modifying an expressive index of the form $\langle j, \mathbf{I}, rex \rangle$, where \mathbf{I} is a subinterval of the negative part of the scale, and \mathbf{I} is equal to or narrower than the interval previously associated with j and rex .

It is a lexical property of *damn* that it always leads to an interval in the negative part of the scale; it is a general property of expressive updates that they always lead to narrower and narrower intervals, signaling increasing strength of emotive expression.

The way these updates work helps to capture all three of the properties *ineffability*, *immediacy*, and *repeatability (non-redundancy)*.

3. Some debates and open questions about expressives

3.1. Expressives in predicate position

Malte Zimmermann notes (Zimmermann 2007) that if the expressive type ϵ is only an output type, then either it must stand alone (as in simple exclamatives) or it must have an argument; it cannot be a simple predicate in a copular sentence. But then there is no account of (11).

- (11) a. Yesterday, little Kresge was a real bastard. But today I like him again.
b. It's not true that little Kresge is a real bastard. In fact, I feel sorry for him.
c. If little Kresge should be a real bastard again, I will send him home.

Predicate uses of epithets like *bastard* and *idiot* appear to carry both expressive and descriptive content, which Potts's theory has been designed to disallow.

3.2. Multiple kinds of expressives

As Potts slightly hints, and as several of his respondents asserted more strongly, it seems that there is considerable variation in behavior and properties among the different expressives. Sauerland especially emphasizes the diversity of kinds (Sauerland 2007). Sauerland examines which kinds of expressivity can or must shift (i) in quotation contexts, (ii) in indirect speech (*said that ...*), (iii) in free indirect speech. He shows that emotive content (like *damn*) must shift in quotation and in free indirect speech, and optionally in indirect speech, while the formal pronouns of address in German must shift in quotation but cannot shift in free indirect speech. Sauerland is concerned that accounting for the differences in restrictions may require a different theoretical perspective, perhaps combining theories of indexicality with more fine-grained pragmatic principles, rather than attempting to divide the lexicon into expressive vs. descriptive.

3.3. Arguing for expressives as presupposition triggers

(Schlenker 2007) argues that *expressives are lexical items that carry a presupposition of a particular sort*, one that is *indexical* (evaluated with respect to a context), *attitudinal* (predicating something of the mental state of the agent of that context), and sometimes *shiftable*. (Lasnik 2007) also argues that the content of expressives is a kind of presupposition.

3.4. Are expressives really a distinctive natural class?

(Geurts 2007) is skeptical about dividing the lexicon into “expressive” vs. “descriptive.” One issue he and several others point to is the predicative use of many epithet words, which is not sharply distinct from their epithet use, as shown in his example (12).

- (12) A: That bastard Schmidt is playing Schubert again.
B: Schmidt is not a bastard.

A's use of *bastard* is expressive on Potts's account, B's use is descriptive; yet B contradicts A. And Potts also has no account of why (13) is contradictory.

- (13) That bastard Schmidt is not a bastard.

Geurts also draws attention to the polysemy of many of Potts's expressives, and important differences among them. Both *fucking* and *damn(ed)*, for instance, seem to have uses as intensifiers like *very*, with no negative affect, and with a real contribution to descriptive content; are they totally separate ‘descriptive’ words? But their morpho-syntactic distribution seems the same as in their ‘expressive’ uses (e.g. they must precede all purely descriptive adjectives.) In some of its uses, Geurts has examples to show that *fucking* is displaceable, contra Potts:

- (14) a. Scary thing is that I don't feel that fucking brilliant. I don't feel that fucking deep or talented.
b. Even if you're fucking brilliant, you can still lose the role just because you're not exactly the right height, look, or body type.

Geurts believes that in these cases, *fucking brilliant* allows for a construal that is (a) expressive, (b) entails “very brilliant”, and (c) is evaluated within the scope of an operator. But if that is right, then “Potts's concept of expressiveness does not correspond to a natural class.” (Geurts 2007, p. 212).

3.5. Potts replies.

Potts (2007a) replies to the commentaries. He suggests ways in which his theory can be refined and enriched to account for the insights of the commentators, but defends the central claims of his theory. His main strategy is to work on enriching and clarifying the role of the expressive indices, and doing more work to connect them to theories of presupposition and quotation. The polysemy noted by Geurts is taken to be a call for more attention to type-shifting and meaning-shifting operations that connect related meanings of words. And there is ongoing discussion about whether the output of the expressive meanings corresponds to a “proposition” expressing the speaker's attitude toward something, or whether those expressive outputs that Potts puts into the context, encoded in expressive indices, are fundamentally non-propositional.

4. Using expressives to probe linguistic “identity conditions”

(Potts et al. 2008) is a very short, interesting typological study that shows that expressives behave differently from descriptive phrases in constructions that demand “semantic identity” of a particular kind between different elements, a phenomenon first described in (Pullum and Rawlins 2007).

Water or no water ... Their first example concerns three English constructions, of which I'll mention just the first, ‘NP *or no* NP’, studied in (Pullum and Rawlins 2007). The two NP's must match, although the second may be an elliptical variant of the first. Potts et al observe that expressives are free to violate morphosyntactic identity in all three constructions.

- (15) a. Water or no water – I'm not hiking in this heat.
b. *Water or no H₂O – I'm not hiking in this heat.
c. War with Iraq or no War, innocent people are likely to die.
d. Day trip or no bloody day trip -- ; rain or no damn rain -- ; hot fucking tip or no hot tip –

A second construction they examine is the Japanese *predicate cleft* construction¹, for which the canonical form is as in (16a) below. Even small changes to the form or sense of the verb result in ungrammaticality, as in (16b). But honorifics and anti-honorifics do not interfere with the identity condition: see (16c). The relevant identity condition seems to be that the two verbs must have identical descriptive content.

- (16) a. yomu koto wa yon-da.
read NML TOP read-PST
'I read.' (Possible continuation: 'But I didn't necessarily understand.')
- b. *yomu koto wa jukudoku si-ta
read NML TOP read.carefully do-PST
'I read/ read carefully.'
- c. kyooju-wa yomu koto wa o-yomi-ninat-ta
professor-TOP read NML TOP HON-read-HON-PST
(i) 'The professor read.' (Possible cont.: 'But he didn't necessarily understand.)
(ii) 'I hold the professor in high regard.'

Other constructions that give similar results include Hindi correlatives and English VP ellipsis.

¹ This construction looks similar to the Russian reduplicated infinitive construction *Spat' ja spala, no ...* ‘Sleep I slept, but ...’ ‘Well, I did sleep, but ...’; does the Russian construction show similar identity conditions with similar exemptions for expressives?

Their conclusion is that in all these cases, the relevant identity conditions concern only *descriptive* semantic content, supporting the idea that descriptive and expressive semantic content are located in separate dimensions of meaning.

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