

## Semantics of expressives in the S-family sentences in Russian

### 1. Introduction

In [Potts 2005] we find a sound description of the semantics of expressive adjectives (EAs) in positive sentences like in (1):

(1) John brought his damn dog with him.

Now, according to my intuitions, Potts' descriptions hold perfectly for the Russian translation of (1) below:

(2) Джон притащил свою чертову собаку  
*John brought his damn dog*

Potts provides two analyses by means of which we can derive both readings for *damn* in (1): expressing negative attitude towards John's dog and expressing frustration with the whole situation of John bringing the dog with him. The two readings are by no means mutually exclusive and quite often are combined (this may be the case in (1)). The question of what can make one reading, or the other or both seem to be actually meant by the speaker will be discussed below with regard to specific examples.

A very important aspect of Potts' description of the way expressive adjectives like *damn* function is the obligatorily wide scope. Here I quote [Potts 2005]:

Epithets and EAs do not display the kind of rich scope variability that makes a scope-shifting account so appealing for regular quantified expressions. There seem only to be wide-scope, speaker-oriented readings.

Thus, according to this view we can expect expressive content of the EAs to survive in all the sentences in the S-family. But what does it mean that we expect them to survive? In case of an EA being interpreted as conveying the speaker's negative attitude towards an entity named by an NP like 'собаку' in (2), we can simply expect this negative attitude to be preserved.

(3) S-family for (2):

a) Джон не притащил свою чертову собаку! Слава Богу! Такое омерзительное существо эта его шавка!  
*John didn't bring his damn dog! Thank God! What a horrible creature his dog is!*

b) Джон притащил свою чертову собаку? (Я не хочу туда идти, если там будет эта мерзость!)  
*Did John bring his damn dog? I don't want to go there if that monster's gonna be there!*

c) Если Джон притащил свою чертову собаку, она там всех гостей перекусает!  
*If John brought his damn dog it will bite all the guests one by one*

[In these examples the broader context has been designed to emphasize the plausibility of the negative-attitude-towards-the-dog reading]

However, when it comes to the reading of 'frustration with the whole situation', the state of affairs becomes rather more complex. In all three sentences in (3) we have one and the same dog, whereas in different sentences of the S-family 'the whole situation' is different. If in a simple affirmative sentence the whole situation is described by a proposition 'A', then in different S-family sentences we can expect it become 'non-A', 'if A then B' etc. However, things appear to be more complex, as will be shown below.

The modification of the initial 'whole situation' is predicted by the property of EA's to have obligatory wide scope. Suppose we call the sentences in the given A-family  $A_1, A_2$ , etc. Then the EA seems to take the situation, described by the whole sentence  $A_i$  (whichever form from the S-family it might have) as its argument and produces the following expressive output: 'the speaker is frustrated with  $A_i$ '.<sup>1</sup> According to Potts' theory (and its modified version given in [Potts 2007]) effects produced by expressives share certain properties with conventional implicatures. These properties include among others **conventionality**. In case of EA's like 'чертов' and 'damn', their **conventional** meanings are limited to just two general ones, discussed above. However, the meaning of 'frustration-with-the-situation' in many contexts seems to be specified by various non-trivial mechanisms as will be shown below.

## 2. Expressive content in the S-family paradigm: examples and observations

When interpreting the following examples except (4 d), on my assumptions, the addressee is likely to conclude that the speaker doesn't express any bad attitude towards his mobile phone since normally we are satisfied with or are indifferent to our own belongings and if we are not, we usually convey our dissatisfaction by use of EA's only when we make it a specific purpose of our communication act to complain about some item (consider a typical utterance like 'Мой чертов мобильник все время выключается, и клавиши на нем западают! *My damn mobile phone will switch off like that all the time and the keys on it will get stuck!*' where the two conventional meanings of the EA apparently are combined)

- (4) а) Я забыл **чертов** мобильник у Саши!  
*I've left the damn mobile phone at Sasha's!*

[Frustration with the situation of leaving the mobile phone at Sasha's place]

- б) Если я забыл **чертов** мобильник у Саши, Юра до меня два дня не дозвонится!  
*If I've left the damn mobile phone at Sasha's, Jura won't be able to get in touch with me for the next two days!*

[The speaker's frustration with the fact (belief) that **there are good chances that he left the mobile phone and if it is so some negative consequences will take place**]

Now consider the way in which the interpretation of (4b) can be left as it is or modified by extended contexts in (4c) and (4d).

- (4) с) Если я забыл **чертов** мобильник у Саши, Юра до меня два дня не дозвонится! Это же полная лажа будет!  
*If I've left the damn mobile phone at Sasha's, Jura won't be able to get in touch with me for the next two days! That's gonna be a mess!*

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<sup>1</sup> Here we treat expressive content as a proposition/set of propositions on a separate "expressive dimension", thus using Potts' approach to expressives as a sort of conventional implicatures. This approach is presented in [Potts 2005]. Though in [Potts 2007] Christopher Potts suggests another, non-propositional, analysis of the semantics of expressives, I mainly adhere to the previous analysis just in order to present my suggestions in a simpler and clearer form.

d) Если только я забыл **чертов** мобильник у Саши, Юра до меня два дня не дозвонится! Вот это круто! Целых два дня этот говнюк не будет мне нервы трепать!

*If I've left the damn mobile phone at Sasha's, Jura won't be able to get in touch with me for the next two days! Cool! For the next two days that bastard won't be getting on my nerves!*

[supposing, the speaker owes Jura a large sum of money and Jura keeps reminding the speaker that the debt must be paid and it is not convenient for the speaker to just switch off the mobile phone and he doesn't have guts to simply ignore or reject Jura's calls]

The reading of frustration-with-the-situation is blocked in (4d) by extended context which suggest that the speaker is quite satisfied with situation. While some negative expressives **can shift their meanings from 'frustration' to 'excitement'** about the situation (e.g.  *fucking in That was just fan-fucking-tastic!* ), my intuition is that it is **not the case** in (4d) as in case of «чертов» ('damn') in general. The result is that the only natural interpretation of «чертов» (4d) is the one of conveying the speaker's **annoyance with the mobile phone as an indirect source of negative emotions caused by Jura's calls**<sup>2</sup>.

By examining the contrast between (4b-c), where the EA apparently gets interpreted as conveying the speakers "frustration-with-the-whole-situation", and (4 d), where the EA only can be interpreted as conveying a specific negative attitude towards an entity, I've illustrated how the broader context can switch the interpretation of the EAs.

Here is another observation about examples (4 b-c). In case of our examples here it seems that the speaker is rather frustrated by the fact that there are chances that Jura won't be able to call him rather than by the fact that whether Jura will be able to call him or not depends on his having or not having the phone with him. **This means that the actual argument of this "frustration-with-the-whole-situation" function is not just "if A then B" (i.e. the dependence between the two events), but rather the argument is this: "if A then B and it is quite likely that A" (where B is a 'bad' situation).** Compare this with the case of example (5b) below.

Let's consider two more examples of if-sentences, differing in the way the speaker feels about the situation described:

(5) a. Если Джон притащил свою чертову собаку, я там ни на минуту не останусь!  
*If John brought his damn dog, I won't stay there for a minute!*

b. Если Джон притащил свою чертову собаку, то все будет в порядке.  
*If John brought his damn dog, everything's gonna be ok.*

There are no apparent differences in the possible expressive meaning of «чертову» between (5a) and (2). The speaker most likely expresses both his 'disapprobation' of John's dog and his frustration at the prospect of encountering the animal at some place he is going to visit. But in (5b) the dog appears to be crucial for successful completion of some kind of business. Here it is quite natural though not absolutely necessary to suppose that the speaker doesn't express his disapprobation of the dog. Rather, the expressive comment produced by means of «чертову» (whatever meaning this comment might have) refers to the whole situation<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation was proposed by a native Russian speaker (a non-linguist) whom I had asked to tell me her intuitions about the artificial examples which I had designed for this paper. This interpretation seems to have no alternatives: the two other native speakers didn't propose any interpretation of the EA's expressive contribution in (4d) and pointed out that the discourse is strange because the situation described is apparently positive while the use of the EA suggest it is negative.

<sup>3</sup> However, the important thing is that the reading in which «чертову» conveys speaker's disapprobation of the dog is still possible for 3b as well as for 3a. For example, this reading appears quite natural in the following extending version of 3b:

3с) Если Джон притащил свою чертову собаку, то все будет в порядке: это чудовище тут же распугает всех гостей.

Apparently, the whole situation is not limited to John bringing his dog with him. I can support this claim by two arguments: by a “common-sense” non-linguistic argument and by a formal one, based on Potts’ theory behind expressives. The common-sense argument is that in case of (5b) the event of John bringing the dog with him is evidently a desirable event for the speaker. The formal argument is based on the crucial EAs’ property of having obligatory wide scope.

**Taking the contrast between (4 b-c) and (5b) as a guideline, it is reasonable to suggest that the argument of the “frustration-with-the-whole-situation” function in (5 b) is “if A then B and it is quite likely that not-A”**

Now let’s consider the negated version of (4a):

(4) е) Я не забыл чертов мобильник у Саши! [(ура!)]  
*I haven’t left the damn mobile phone at Sasha’s! (Hurray!)*

Here the situation (in most cases) is likely to be evaluated by the speaker as neutral or positive one. Also we have no apparent reason to interpret *чертов* as conveying the speaker’s negative attitude towards his phone. The first interpretation of (4e) that comes to my mind (and was proposed by my native Russian consultants) is the following: **The speaker has a tendency to leave his mobile phone in different inconvenient places and the speaker thinks that his addressee is well aware about this and the speaker is frustrated about having this tendency and this very frustration is expressed in (4e) by the EA, although the whole utterance expresses sort of a relief, reporting to the addressee that this time it’s ok.** This interpretation can be explained by means of Gricean maxims. Here we can use the Maxim of Quantity to argue that (4e) must be informative for the addressee (here we deal with a singular case of this maxim: “at least, be somehow informative”). Normally, not leaving your mobile phone is a default situation and, thus, reporting it to the addressee will make no informative contribution. Therefore, provided that (4e) doesn’t violate the Maxim of Quantity, we can naturally assume that the speaker often does leave his mobile phone in different places. And only at this point, i.e. after calculating this conversational implicature, we find a suitable argument for the ‘frustration-with-the-situation’ function. And here we discover a rather surprising case: the EA (acting as functor) seems to take as its argument not a normal at-issue type proposition (i.e. an object of the type  $t_a$ ) but a **conversationally implicated** proposition. A natural question here is: but if expressive content can not be cancelled and conversational implicatures can, what if we cancel the conventional implicature? What will happen to the expressive content? Won’t such an operation lead to expressive content being suspended in the air, so to speak? I believe that the answer is the following: such an operation is impossible because the non-cancellability of the expressive content blocks the cancellability of the conversational implicature. Thus (4f) is only adequate if it is an answer to a question like “Надеюсь, ты не оставил опять мобильник у Саши?” (*I hope you haven’t left your mobile phone at Sasha’s once again?*) in a situation where such a question for some reasons annoys the speaker, who expresses his annoyance with the EA (the Maxim of Relevance?):

(4f) Я не забыл чертов мобильник у Саши. Я очень организован и никогда не забываю нигде своих вещей.  
*I haven’t left the damn mobile phone at Sasha’s! I’m a well-organized person and I never leave my stuff anywhere*

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*If John brought his damn dog, everything’s gonna be ok: that monster will drive all the guests out*

[The speaker wants some party to fall apart]

All the examples 3a-c illustrate how the context works, making some readings of “чертову” appear more plausible than others.

The first sentence of (4f) can not be interpreted like (4e) if it is followed by the second sentence, unless the speaker, who is frustrated with his own absent-mindedness, tries to persuade himself that he is not absent-minded. But this is an uninteresting case similar to those in which we correct ourselves by contradicting what we've just said.

The last interesting question I will consider here is EA's behaviour in general questions. What happens with interpretation of EA's in general questions which are pragmatically "real" questions (i.e. the speaker wants to obtain some information)?

Examples below illustrate how in a sentence of a form 'A?' the speaker can express both frustration with situation 'A' (5d) and frustration with situation 'Not A' (5c). Again, the interpretation depends of our pragmatic inferences about whether the event 'A' is considered to be "bad" or "good" by the speaker.

(5) c) Джон притащил свою **чертову** собаку? Дети хотят с ней поиграть, и если их не будет чем занять, они будут ныть и действовать мне на нервы весь день!

*Did John bring his damn dog with him? The kids want to play with it, and if there's nothing that can keep them busy, they will be nagging at me and getting on my nerves all day long!*

d) Джон притащил свою **чертову** собаку? Дети ее боятся

*Did John bring his damn dog with him? The kids are afraid of it.*

Before giving my general conclusions, I would like to mention one important observation concerning examples (5a) and (5b), made by Barbara H. Partee during discussion of the present paper:

"There is no linguistic difference between (5a) and (5b), and it is only by our pragmatic reasoning that we may be led to choose "attitude to dog" in (5a) and "attitude to situation" in (5b)." [worded by Barbara H. Partee].

The same holds for all other "extended" S-families of sentences considered in this paper.

### 3. Conclusions

In cases when expressives such as EA's convey speakers' feelings about 'whole situations' and not just about entities or situations named by particular NPs within the sentences, the specific expressive content can not be described as 'conventional', i.e., lexically determined. It is true that in the S-family paradigm such expressive content is never "plugged" by operators like negation in a sense in which we speak of plugging presuppositions. But it is not the case that such expressive content is preserved intact in the S-family paradigm. Rather, while it continues to convey the speaker's actual feelings in the time of utterance, switching between various S-family sentences can change significantly what we assume to be the argument that produces the expressive content as a result of being applied to functors like 'damn', 'чертов', etc. Various pragmatic tools like Gricean maxims can be used to calculate (restore) these arguments in specific contexts.

### Bibliography:

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