Draft 2.1, February 7, 2008

Expressives and identity conditions[*]

Christopher Potts
UMass Amherst

Luis Alonso-Ovalle
UMass Boston

Ash Asudeh
Carleton University

Rajesh Bhatt
UMass Amherst

Seth Cable
UMass Amherst

Christopher Davis
UMass Amherst

Yurie Hara
Kyoto University

Angelika Kratzer
UMass Amherst

Eric McCready
Aoyama Gakuin University

Tom Roeper
UMass Amherst

Martin Walkow
UMass Amherst

1   Introduction

We present diverse evidence for the claim of Pullum and Rawlins (2007) that *expressives* behave differently from descriptives in constructions that enforce a particular kind of semantic identity between elements. Our data are drawn from a wide variety of languages and construction types, and they point uniformly to a basic linguistic distinction between descriptive content and expressive content (Kaplan 1999; Potts 2007).

2   Expressives

We use the label *expressive* to pick out the class of emotive morphemes, words, and constructions studied by Cruse (1986: 271–273), Kaplan (1999), and Potts (2005: §5). Typical examples are epithets like *the jerk*, expressive attributive adjectives like *damn*, honorifics, some discourse particles, and some uses of diminutive suffixes. We do not venture a definition of 'expressive' here (see Potts

1

2007). For our purposes, an intuitive characterization is preferable, since we aim to provide additional descriptive tests for expressivity.

Expressives can be (and often are) fully integrated into the phonology and morphosyntax of the phrases that contain them. For the most part, they can be characterized in familiar terms. For example, expressive adjectives are strictly prenominal, which places them in a syntactic class with *former* and *main*:

(1)   a.   the main road

        b.   *This road is main.

(2)   a.   the damn dog

        b.   *The dog is damn

(3)   a.   the bloody television

        b.   #The television is bloody.   (literal reading only)

In languages with case-marking on prenominal adjectives, expressives receive the usual case morphology:

(4)   Du hast kein   verdammtes Wort gesagt.   (German)
        you have no.ACC damn.ACC   word said
        'You didn't say a damn word.'

Similarly, epithets have roughly the distribution of typical argument nominals (Lasnik (1989) and Büring (2005: 123) provide more fine-grained characterizations). Honorifics in languages like Japanese and Korean trigger predictable morphosyntactic changes that are in keeping with other facets of those languages (Harada 1976; Boeckx and Niinuma 2004). And expressive particles in German are governed by diverse conditions on their position in the clausal hierarchy. Thus, in general, we find considerable evidence that expressives are part of the morphosyntactic system.

A growing body of evidence suggests that expressives form a linguistically coherent class. For instance, Aoun and Choueiri (2000) and Aoun et al. (2001) report that Lebanese Arabic epithets trigger special morphological effects, and Schwarz (2008) observes that German epithets never permit determiner–preposition incorporation (e.g., *vom Mann* ('by the man'), but *vom Idioten* ('by the idiot)). And Potts and Roeper (2006) study phrases like *you fool!* and find that they are morphologically impoverished in systematic ways across languages.

The next five subsections present additional evidence for the linguistic coherence of expressives and suggest furthermore that this coherence is rooted in a basic semantic distinction between expressive content and descriptive content.

3 Balanced constructions

We begin with three English constructions:

(5)   <u>Water or no water</u> — I'm not hiking in this heat.   ('NP *or no* NP')

(6)   Sue is <u>as crazy as crazy can be</u>.   ('*as* AP *as* AP *can be*')

(7)   I'll talk with <u>the president, and the president alone</u>.   ('*X and X alone*')

The NP *or no* NP construction is the focus of Pullum and Rawlins (2007) (henceforth P&R). Examples like (8) seem to indicate that the two NPs in this construction must match.

(8)   a. *Water or no H_2O — I'm not hiking in this heat.

        b. $^{??}$likelihood or no probability   (P&R, 284)

However, P&R provide corpus evidence that the matching condition cannot be stated in terms of string identity. They observe first that one of the NPs can be an elided version of the other:[1]

(9)   a.   War with Iraq or no War, Innocent People are likely to die.

                                                        (P&R, (6a))

        b.   . . . its willingness to print this story, anonymous source or no, would seem to suggest there's some legitimacy to it . . .

                                                        (P&R, (7))

More importantly for our purposes, expressives are free to violate string identity for the NPs, as in (10).[2]

(10)   a.   day trip or no bloody day trip   (P&R, (9a, b))

        b.   rain or no damn rain

        c.   end of the frigging world or no goddamn end of the fucking world
              (P&R, (11b))

---

1 P&R also provide the attested example *DSB (Deep Sand Beds) or no DSB?* If the parenthetical (whatever its contribution) is analyzed in the terms of Potts 2005, which places parenthetical content in a nondescriptive dimension, then this example falls together with the expressive cases in (10).

2 Example (10f) is important because, unlike (10e), it cannot be bracketed with the expressive outside of the matching construction. Some speakers find this example marginal, but we think this is due to a general preference for placing expressive adjectives outside of all other modifier phrases in the NP. We note also that, if expressives can modify the entire NP *or no* NP construction, then they are special in this respect as well.

> d. Water or no fucking water — I'm not hiking in this heat.
>
> e. I'm not hiking in this heat — fucking cold water or no cold water!
>
> f. I wouldn't buy that stock, hot fucking tip or no hot tip!

In this sense, expressives are unlike regular descriptive modifiers:

(11) a. *day trip or no arduous day trip

b. *rain or no terrible rain

c. *end of the miserable world or no dismaying end of the horrible world

d. *I'm not hiking in this heat — cold water or no water!

We observe similarly exceptional behavior in the construction *as* AP *as* AP *can be,* where AP is headed by a gradable adjective. The construction seems to involve a matching condition similar to that of NP *or no* NP:[3]

(12) a. as sure as sure can be   [G]

b. as gun nut as gun nut can be   [G]

c. as washed up as washed up can be   [G]

d. as average and vanilla as average and vanilla can be   [G]

(13) a. *I'm as sure as certain can be.

b. *I'm as sure as absolutely sure can be.

As with NP *or no* NP, ellipsis seems to be possible as long as it maintains the descriptive semantic identity of the two adjectival phrases. For instance, in (14), the coordinated adjectives are reversed and only the first AP contains the adverb *religiously*.

(14) their society is as secular and religiously neutral as neutral and secular can be.   [G]

This seems at first to involve a serious mismatch. Crucially, though, the two coordinated adjectival phrases must have identical descriptive meanings. There is no absolute sense of *neutral*, so our understanding of unmodified versions of this

---

3 We henceforth mark examples we found using the Google search engine with "G". Our procedure for the Net-based corpus work for this squib was to search the Net with a rough string like "as * * as * * can be", download the top 900-1000 hits to a local hard-drive, and then search those documents using more powerful search tools. We found that Google would not deliver more than 1000 documents, despite reporting very high matching-page counts.

adjective are always dependent on an implicit or explicit relativization to some property. Thus, since *neutral* has no overt modifier in the second coordination in (14), one might expect it to be free to take on many different senses. However, because it is in this matching construction, we are forced to construe *neutral* as *religiously neutral* in the second AP.

Examples like this strongly suggest a semantic identity condition governs this construction. However, expressives, though clearly contentful in some sense, provide the freest and most systematic apparent exceptions to the matching condition:

(15) a. I'm as sure as fucking sure can be.

  b. I'm as fucking sure as sure can be.

  c. He's as fucking crazy as motherfucking crazy can be.

The facts are parallel for the *X and X alone* construction, though we have yet to find attested examples involving ellipsis of the sort that creates a string-level imbalance, so the identity condition looks stronger than it is for the others:[4]

(16) a. the Pittsburgh Steelers, and the Pittsburgh Steelers alone   [G]

  b. the Orange Bowl's and the Orange Bowl's alone   [G]

  c. the volitional act and the volitional act alone   [G]

(17) a. *I'll talk with the president, and the chief executive alone.

  b. *I'll talk with the president, and the American president alone.

(18) a. I'll talk with the president, and the goddamn president alone!

  b. I'll talk with the goddam president, and the president alone!

---

4 A reviewer provides (i)–(ii):

  (i) ?I'll talk with my lawyer, and my famous lawyer alone.

  (ii) ?I'll talk with my famous lawyer, and my lawyer alone.

As indicated, the judgments are uncertain, and we are unsure whether the meanings favor a semantically elliptical treatment. Our sense is that parallel indefinite examples like (iii)–(iv) point to ellipsis:

  (iii) ?I'll talk with a lawyer, and a famous lawyer alone.

  (iv) ?I'll talk with a famous lawyer, and a lawyer alone.

We were unable to find attested examples of the form suggested by (i)–(iv), though this does not, of course, show that they are impossible.

P&R conclude that NP *or no* NP is governed by a semantic identity require-
ment, rather than a syntactic one. We agree with this assessment, and we claim
that it extends to *as* AP *as* AP *can be* and *X and X alone*. In (19), the relevant
restriction is formulated as a necessary condition:

(19)   In the construction NP *or no* NP (*as* AP *as* AP *can be*, *X and X alone*),
         the NPs (APs, *X*s) must have identical *descriptive* semantic content.

Generalization (19) is more conservative than the one P&R (284) endorse,
which seems to entail that identical descriptive content is a sufficient condition
as well. (They offer a pragmatic explanation for the markedness of examples
like (8b).) But (19) suffices for our purposes, because, in light of (10), (15),
and (17), it demands that descriptive and expressive content be treated as
separate dimensions of meaning. If we make this division, then we expect to
find phenomena that are sensitive to just one of the two dimensions, and this
expectation seems to be borne out by these three constructions, as well as those
discussed below.[5]

4   Japanese predicate clefts

We turn now to a doubling construction in Japanese, the *predicate cleft* (Nishiyama
and Cho 1998), which seems to have a fairly direct analogue in Korean (Sells and
Kim 2007). The canonical form is as in (20). The construction is characterized
by the doubled predicate, the nominalizer *koto*, and the contrastive marker *wa*.
The meanings are closely related to those of English contrastive topics.

(20)   yomu koto wa yon-da.
         read   NML TOP read-PST

         'I read.' (Possible continuation: 'But I didn't necessarily understand')

Example (21) shows that even slight changes to the form or sense of the verb
result in ungrammaticality.

(21)   *yomu koto wa jukudoku   si-ta.
         read   NML TOP read.carefully do-PST

         'I read/read carefully.'

---

5 Daniel Gutzmann observes (personal communication) that Gricean tautologies like *boys will
be boys* and *war is war* seem to provide similar evidence: *War is fucking war* retains its special
flavor, whereas *War is hellish war* and *Hellish war is war* do not — the first is informative and the
second is genuinely tautologous.

Affixes can also disrupt the requisite identity condition. We illustrate with causative (22), passive (23), and excessive (24) morphemes:

(22) a. hahaoya-wa musuko-ni sono-hon-o yoma-seru koto wa yoma-se-ta.
    mother-TOP son-DAT that-book-ACC read-CAUS NML TOP read-CAUS-PST

    'The mother made her son read that book.' (Possible continuation: 'But she didn't force him to do anything more with the book.')

  b. *hahaoya-wa musuko-ni sono-hon-o yomu koto wa yoma-se-ta.
    mother-TOP son-DAT that-book-ACC read NML TOP read-CAUS-PST

(23) a. sono-hon-wa kodomotachi-ni yoku yoma-reru koto wa yoma-reru.
    that-book-TOP children-DAT often read-PASS NML TOP read-PASS

    'That book is often read by children.' (Possible continuation: 'But, in my view, the book is not suitable for children.)

  b. *sono-hon-wa kodomotachi-ni yoku yomu koto wa yoma-reru.
    that-book-TOP children-DAT often read NML TOP read-PASS

(24) a. John-wa tookuni iki-sugiru koto wa iki-sugi-ta.
    John-TOP far go-EXCESSIVE NML TOP go-EXCESSIVE-PST
    'John went too far.' (Possible continuation: 'But after all he made a great success over there.)

    *John-wa tookuni iku koto wa iki-sugi-ta.
    John-TOP far go NML PRT go-EXCESSIVE-PST

However, honorifics and antihonorifics, which fall under the rubric of expressives (Potts and Kawahara 2004; Sells and Kim 2007) do not interfere with the identity requirement, as we see in (25). The secondary expressive meanings we provide are, by necessity (Potts 2007), very rough approximations to what can be communicated by particular utterances of these sentences.

(25) a. kyooju-wa   yomu koto wa o-yomi-ninat-ta.
          professor-TOP read   NML TOP HON-read-HON-PST

   i. 'The professor read.' (Possible continuation: 'But he didn't necessarily understand.')

   ii. 'I hold the professor in high regard.'

   b. aitsu-wa   yomu koto wa yomi-yagat-ta.
       that.guy-TOP read   NML TOP read-ANTIHON-PST

   i. 'The guy read.' (Possible continuation: 'But he didn't necessarily understand.')

   ii. 'It sucks that the guy read.'

   iii. 'I hold the guy in low regard.'

The relevant identity condition seems to parallel (19):

(26) In the predicate cleft construction 'V$_A$ *koto wa* V$_B$', V$_A$ and V$_B$ must have identical descriptive content.

5 Hindi correlatives

Hindi correlatives involve a free-relative clause followed by a main clause that obligatorily contains a demonstrative that denotes the same entity as the free relative denotes:

(27) jis aadmii-se tum bahut pyaar-se baat kar rahe   the,   us aadmii-ne
      REL man-with you much love-with talk do PROG.PL be.PST.PL that man-ERG
      mujh-pe muqadma Thonk rakhaa hai
      me-on   court.case 'apply'-PFV   be.PRES.SG

   'The man that you were talking with so nicely, that man is suing me.'

In general, if both the relative operator and the demonstrative have complements, then those complements must match, as in (27). In (28), we attempt to vary the complements slightly, and the result is ungrammatical.

(28) *jis aadmii-se tum bahut pyaar-se baat kar rahe   the,   us Tiicar-ne
      REL man-with you much love-with talk do PROG.PL be.PST.PL that teacher-ERG
      mujh-pe muqadma Thonk rakhaa hai.
      me-on   court.case 'apply'-PFV   be.PRES.SG

   'The man that you were talking with so nicely, that teacher is suing me.'

But epithets are fine as the anaphoric device in the correlative:

(29) jis aadmii-se tum bahut pyaar-se baat kar rahe   the,   us haraamii-ne
      <u>REL man-with</u> you much love-with talk do PROG.PL be.PST.PL <u>that bastard</u>-ERG
      mujh-pe muqadma Thonk rakhaa hai.
      me-on   court.case 'apply'-PFV   be.PRES.SG

      'The man that you were talking with so nicely, that bastard is suing me.'

Once again, we seem to be seeing a semantic identity requirement, where the relevant notion of identity is restricted to the descriptive content. We expect to find this pattern cross-linguistically in correlatives.

We note one complication. Srivastav (1991: 664) discusses examples like (30), in which the relative operator has no overt complement, but the demonstrative in the main clause does.

(30) jo   khaRii   hai vo laRkii lambii hai.
      <u>REL</u> standing is <u>that girl</u> tall   is

Thus, the matching requirement on descriptive content holds only for overt material, making pairs like (28) and (29) the most useful when highlighting the special properties of expressive content. We state the full condition, which parallels (19) and (26), as follows:

(31) In Hindi correlative constructions of the form $[[_S \dots \text{NP}_A \dots] [_S \dots \text{NP}_B \dots]]$, if NP_A has overt descriptive content, then NP_A and NP_B must have identical descriptive content.

If examples like (30) involve a cataphoric ellipsis relationship between the two NPs, then the principle can be simplified and the similarities between this example and the English constructions of section 3 become even more striking.

6 Ellipsis

Expressives provide important clues as to the nature of the identity requirements for VP ellipsis and related constructions. We observe first that expressive content can be 'factored out' of elided phrases:

(32) A: I saw your fucking dog in the park.

      B: No, you didn't — you couldn't have. The poor thing passed away last week.

The distressed speaker B doesn't adopt or endorse speaker A's negative characterization. There are two ellipsis sites in B's reply, though, both anaphoric to

see your fucking dog in the park. We have the usual shift in the meaning of the indexicals (Fiengo and May 1994; Chung 2000), and we also find that *fucking* seems to have been removed. However, such removal is normally impossible for prenominal adjectives, as we see in (33).

(33)   A: I saw a shaggy dog in the park.

        B: I did too. #{The one I saw/It} had no hair.

B's continuation would be fine if we could interpret the ellipsis as being of the form *a dog*, with the prenominal adjective factored out. But this is evidently impossible. Only expressives can be ignored in this way.

   A reviewer suggests that these data might harbor important clues concerning the indexical nature of expressive content and the influence that purely contextual information can have on ellipsis identity. We agree with this assessment. Since this squib is purely descriptive, we cannot explore the theoretical consequences of these facts in full detail. Still, we would like to note some related data that strikes us as suggestive.

   As noted above, indexicals can shift in ellipsis contexts. Example (34) highlights the ambiguity.

(34)   A: I saw my dog.

        B: I did too.

B's utterance in (34) can mean that he saw his own dog. This is not, though, the only reading available. The utterance can also mean that B didn't see A's dog. Interestingly, the expressive in (32) lacks this non-shifted reading: the negative attitude expressed by *fucking* can be understood only as belonging to speaker B. If we take the content of expressives to be in some sense indexical in nature, we are left with the question of why the nonshifted reading is unavailable for expressives. Once again, then, we find expressives behaving differently. The ellipsis examples support indexical treatments like that of Kaplan (1999), but they also show that expressives are governed by their own principles.

7   Conclusion

The above data uniformly indicate that expressives are different from descriptives when it comes to satisfying identity conditions in a variety of constructions across languages. We proposed, building on insights by Pullum and Rawlins (2007), that the relevant identity conditions concern only *descriptive* semantic content. This generalization presupposes that we can locate expressive content and descriptive content in separate dimensions of meaning.

Draft 2.1, February 7, 2008

References

Aoun, Joseph, and Lina Choueiri. 2000. Epithets. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 18:1–39.

Aoun, Joseph, Lina Choueiri, and Norbert Hornstein. 2001. Resumption, movement, and derivational economy. *Linguistic Inquiry* 32:371–403.

Boeckx, Cedric, and Fumikazu Niinuma. 2004. Conditions on agreement in Japanese. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 22:453–480.

Büring, Daniel. 2005. *Binding theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Chung, Sandra. 2000. Close encounters with pronouns in VP ellipsis. URL `http://ling.ucsc.edu/Jorge/chung.html`, Jorge Hankamer's WebFest.

Cruse, D. A. 1986. *Lexical semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fiengo, Robert, and Robert May. 1994. *Indices and identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Harada, S. I. 1976. Honorifics. In *Syntax and semantics*, ed. Masayoshi Shibatani, volume 5: Japanese Generative Grammar, 499–561. New York: Academic Press.

Kaplan, David. 1999. What is meaning? Explorations in the theory of *Meaning as Use*. Brief version — draft 1. Ms., UCLA.

Lasnik, Howard. 1989. *Essays on binding and anaphora*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Nishiyama, Kunio, and Eun Cho. 1998. Predicate cleft constructions in Japanese and Korean: The role of dummy verbs in TP/VP-preposing. In *Japanese/Korean linguistics*, ed. Noriko Akatsuka, Hajime Hoji, Shoichi Iwasaki, and Sung-Ock Sohn, volume 7, 463–479. Stanford, CA: CSLI.

Potts, Christopher. 2005. *The logic of conventional implicatures*. Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Potts, Christopher. 2007. The expressive dimension. *Theoretical Linguistics* 33:165–197.

Potts, Christopher, and Shigeto Kawahara. 2004. The performative content of Japanese honorifics. In *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory 14*, ed. Kazuha Watanabe and Robert B. Young, 235–254. Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications.

Potts, Christopher, and Tom Roeper. 2006. The narrowing acquisition path: From declarative to expressive small clauses. In *The syntax of nonsententials: Multi-disciplinary perspectives*, ed. Ljiljana Progovac, Kate Paesani, Eugenia Casielles-Suárez, and Ellen Barton, 183–201. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Pullum, Geoffrey K, and Kyle Rawlins. 2007. Argument or no argument? *Linguistics and Philosophy* 30:277–287.

Schwarz, Florian. 2008. Two types of definites. Paper presented at the LSA Annual Meeting, Chicago, January 3-6.

Sells, Peter, and Jong-Bok Kim. 2007. Korean honorification: A kind of expressive meaning. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 16:303–336.

Srivastav, Veneeta. 1991. The syntax and semantics of correlatives. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 9:637–686.