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EXPRESSIVES AND IDENTITY  
CONDITIONS

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We present diverse evidence for Pullum and Rawlins's (2007) claim 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).

### 1 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:chap. 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 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

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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, such as German, expressives receive the usual case morphology.

- (4) Du hast kein verdammtes Wort gesagt.  
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, Choueiri, and Hornstein (2001) report that Lebanese Arabic epithets trigger special morphological effects, and Schwarz (2008) observes that German epithets resist determiner-preposition incorporation (e.g., *vom Mann* 'by the man', but \**vom Idioten* 'by the idiot'). And Potts and Roeper (2006) find that phrases like *you fool!* are morphologically impoverished in systematic ways across languages.

The next four sections 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.

## 2 Balanced Constructions

We begin with three English constructions:

- (5) *Water or no water*—I'm not hiking in (NP or no NP)  
this heat.
- (6) Sue is *as crazy as crazy can be*. (as AP as AP can be)
- (7) I'll talk with *the president, and the*  
*president alone*. (X and X alone)

The NP or no NP construction is the focus of Pullum and Rawlins

(P&R) 2007. Examples like (8) seem to indicate that the two NPs in this construction must match.

- (8) a. \*Water or no H<sub>2</sub>O—I'm not hiking in this heat.  
 b. ??likelihood or no probability  
 (P&R 2007:284)

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.<sup>1</sup>

- (9) a. War with Iraq or No War, Innocent People Are Likely to Die.  
 (P&R 2007:(6a))  
 b. . . . its willingness to print this story, anonymous source or no, would seem to suggest there's some legitimacy to it . . .  
 (P&R 2007:(7))

More importantly for our purposes, expressives are free to violate string identity for the NPs, as in (10).<sup>2</sup>

- (10) a. day trip or no bloody day trip  
 (P&R 2007:(9a))  
 b. rain or no damn rain  
 (P&R 2007:(9b))  
 c. end of the frigging world or no goddamn end of the fucking world  
 (P&R 2007:(11b))  
 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!

<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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 judgment 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.

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.<sup>3</sup>

- (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 adjective always depends 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 it as *religiously neutral* in the second AP.

Examples like this strongly suggest that 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 900–1,000 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 1,000 documents, despite reporting very high matching-page counts.

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 other constructions.<sup>4</sup>

- (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 goddamn president, and the president alone!

P&R conclude that NP *or no* NP is governed by a semantic identity requirement, 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, Xs) must have identical *descriptive* semantic content.

Generalization (19) is more conservative than the one P&R (2007: 284) endorse, which seems to entail that identical descriptive content is a sufficient condition as well. (P&R 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 expect-

<sup>4</sup> 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.

tation seems to be borne out by these three constructions, as well as those discussed below.<sup>5</sup>

### 3 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 shown 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.’

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  
 mother-TOP son-DAT that-book-ACC  
 yom-ase-ru koto wa yom-ase-ta.  
 read-CAUS-PRES 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  
 mother-TOP son-DAT that-book-ACC read NML TOP  
 yom-ase-ta.  
 read-CAUS-PST
- (23) a. Sono-hon-wa kodomotachi-ni yoku yom-are-ru  
 that-book-TOP children-DAT often read-PASS-PRES  
 koto wa yom-are-ru.  
 NML TOP read-PASS-PRES  
 ‘That book is often read by children.’ (Possible continuation: ‘But, in my view, the book is not suitable for children.’)

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Gutzmann (pers. comm.) observes 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.

- b. \*Sono-hon-wa kodomotachi-ni yoku yomu koto wa  
that-book-TOP children-DAT often read NML TOP  
yom-are-ru.  
read-PASS-PRES
- (24) a. John-wa tookuni iki-sugiru koto wa  
John-TOP far go-EXCESSIVE NML TOP  
iki-sugi-ta.  
go-EXCESSIVE-PST  
'John went too far.' (Possible continuation: 'But after  
all, he made a great success over there.')
- b. \*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 (25) shows. 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-ANTI-HON-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.

#### 4 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.

- (27) *jis aadmii-se tum bahut pyaar-se baat kar rahe*  
*REL man-with you much love-with talk do PROG.PL*  
the, *us aadmii-ne mujh-pe muqadma* Thank  
*be.PST.PL that man-ERG me-on court.case hammer.in*  
*rakh-aa hai.*  
*keep-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  
*REL man-with* you much love-with talk do PROG.PL  
 the, *us Tiicar-ne* mujh-pe muqadma Thonk  
 be.PST.PL *that teacher-ERG* me-on court.case hammer.in  
 rakh-aa hai.  
 keep-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  
*REL man-with* you much love-with talk do PROG.PL  
 the, *us haraamii-ne* mujh-pe muqadma Thonk  
 be.PST.PL *that bastard-ERG* me-on court.case hammer.in  
 rakh-aa hai.  
 keep-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 crosslinguistically 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.  
*REL standing* be.PRES.SG *that girl* tall be.PRES.SG  
 ‘The girl who is standing is tall.’

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  $[[S \dots NP_A \dots] [S \dots NP_B \dots]]$ , 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 2 become even more striking.

## 5 Ellipsis

Expressives provide important clues about 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 (33) shows.

- (33) A: I saw a shaggy dog in the park.  
 B: I did too. # $\{$ The one I saw/ $\}$  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 strike 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 the only reading available, though. The utterance can also mean that B saw A's dog. Interestingly, the expressive in (32) lacks this nonshifted reading: the negative attitude expressed by *fucking* can be understood only as belonging to speaker A. 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.

## 6 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 have 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.

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