

# Beyond Unpluggability

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January 2007

Emotional expressions like damn and bastard seem to bring out the extreme not only in the speakers who use them, but also in the linguists who try to account for them: For Potts, nothing short of a new dimension of meaning can accommodate these expressions. Potts already in earlier work (Potts, 2003) provides one interesting argument for this view: the unpluggability (or nondisplaceability) of these expressions in many cases. Regardless of the position and level of embedding that that damn bastard John occurs in in a sentence, the speaker uttering such a sentence conveys that he, the speaker, does not think all too highly of John. In the present work, Potts still tries to maintain the core of his earlier theory, but slightly retreats from his earlier position accepting examples due to Kratzer and Schlenker where unpluggability is not observed. Potts' interesting work raises two related questions from my perspective: 1) What is the best account for the unpluggability of expressive content? and 2) Is expressive content a uniform phenomenon?

Potts' answer to the first question is to have multiple dimensions of meaning: Separating pieces of meaning out onto

different tiers blocks interaction between the pieces easily and elegantly. Nevertheless, the presuppositional alternative suggested by Schlenker and Macia seems still worth considering further despite Potts criticism of it, which is directly linked to unpluggability. Potts correctly argues, Karttunen in his 1973 paper on presuppositions did not discuss a category of unpluggable presupposition triggers. However, this does not prove that such a category could not exist, perhaps on a different theory of presuppositions. Of course, if such a theory turned out to be horribly complicated, unpluggable presupposition triggers might as well not exist from the perspective of linguistics. However, at least one presuppositional theory that allows for unpluggability does seem to exist and to be not overly complicated. Namely, current theories of presuppositions such as [beaver01] or Heim's (1982) (and probably other's as well) seem to predict such a category of unpluggable, speaker-oriented presuppositions when combined with a theory of indexicality. The qualification when combined with a theory of indexicality is, of course, crucial here - Karttunen's 1973 theory does not cover indexicality, and therefore has no way to account for unpluggability. Now consider though a system with indexicality. Any account of indexicality would probably do, but for concreteness assume the following: there is a special world-time-individual triplet  $(w_0, t_0, x_0)$  which is always bound to the current world of utterance, time of utterance, and the utterer following Cresswell (1990). Indexical elements like actually, now, and I refer to components of this triplet. Now

it is possible to ensure that damn expresses content about the utterance world, time and speaker. In fact, we could introduce this in the semantics as in (1a), or in the syntax in a version where damn takes an explicit evaluation-triplet argument as in (1b). In both versions,  $d$  is required to be an element of  $[-1, -0.5]$  or a similar negative interval to capture strong dislike (cf. Potts's (45)).

- (1) a.  $\llbracket \text{damn} \rrbracket^g = 1$  iff.  $\lambda y \in D_e . g(x_0)$  likes  $y$  to degree  $d$  in  $g(w_0)$  at time  $g(t_0)$
- b.  $\llbracket \text{damn} \rrbracket^g(w, t, x) = 1$  iff.  $\lambda y \in D_e . x$  likes  $y$  to degree  $d$  in  $w$  at time  $t$
- syntactic condition on damn(w,t,x):  $(w, t, x)$  must be the utterance indices

Both versions account for the unpluggability of expressive content in Potts' examples. For reasons of space, consider just Potts' example (9d) repeated in (2a) on the syntactic account. (2b) shows how the evaluation indices are bound in this example: The demonstrative that bastard Kresge presupposes that there is a unique person named Kresge, who the utterer of the current utterance dislikes in the current world of utterance. Since the utterer should know whether he dislikes someone, any listener will add this presupposition to his beliefs about the utterers preferences to his beliefs.

- (2) a. Maybe that bastard Kresge will be late again.
- b. Maybe  $\lambda w$  that bastard( $w_0, t_0, x_0$ ) Kresge will be late again in  $w$ .

Having unpluggability covered with the various accounts, now consider some potential ways of distinguishing the accounts empirically. Of the accounts in (1), the syntactic version (1b) makes an interesting prediction: Expressive content should make a de re interpretation of the entire DP it occurs in obligatory. This is illustrated in the following scenario involving a dog-cat confusion: Thomas owns a big, fat cat, which I dislike strongly. Furthermore, he is under the misimpression that his cat is a dog, and is very concerned that it does not bark. Finally, the cat emits a bark-like sound that makes Thomas happy. Now consider the German examples in (3) and (4): Without expressive content, both a de re and a de dicto interpretation are possible: use of Hund requires the de dicto interpretation, while Katze requires the de re interpretation.

- (3) Thomas freut sich, dass sein Hund/seine Katze gebellt  
 Thomas enjoys self that his dog/his cat barked  
 hat.  
 has

‘Thomas is happy that his dog has barked.’

However, when a DP also contains expressive content, the de dicto interpretation is no longer possible as shown by (4a). (4a) entails that the speaker believes that Thomas has a dog.

- (4) a. #Thomas freut sich, dass sein verdammter Hund gebellt  
 Thomas enjoys self that his damn dog barked  
 hat.  
 has

‘Thomas is happy that his damn dog barked.’

- b. Thomas freut sich, dass seine verdammte Katze  
 Thomas pleases self that his damn cat  
 gebellt hat.  
 barked has  
 ‘Thomas is happy that his damn cat barked.’

The syntactic account of damn (4) predicts the difference in (4) because the conditions on the indexing of evaluation triplets of Percus (2000) apply to LF-structures on this theory. This requires that adjective and noun in the same noun phrase must be coindexed. Since the evaluation triplet of verdammte must be the utterance triplet, Hund must apply to the same triplet. This predicts the obligatory de re interpretation of (4a). As far as I can see neither Potts’ analysis nor the semantic version of damn above predicts the obligatory de re-effect in the same way.

Now consider shiftability, though. I believe it shows that none of accounts under consideration is appropriate because shiftability shows that there are different kinds of expressive content. At the one end, we find non-linguistic gestures; emotional ones like angry tone of voice or unemotional ones like a downward-spiraling gesture. Both of these can shift in direct speech, but need not, as illustrated by (5). The spiraling gesture can either be also quoted from a gesture John made, or it can contain information John is unaware of.

- (5) John said "Bill went down the stairs". (“went down”  
 accompanied by downward-spiraling gesture of the speaker)

In contrast to non-linguistic gestural information, emotional/evaluative expressive content must shift in direct

speech as illustrated by (6). (6) entails that Thomas doesn't like the dog.

- (6) Thomas hat erzählt: "Der verdammte Köter hat gebellt."  
Thomas has narrated the damn dog has barked  
'Thomas said: "The damn dog has barked.'

In indirect speech, on the other hand, this kind of expressive content rarely shifts, but some does as illustrated by (7): (7) could be used by a speaker who loves the relevant dog, as long as Thomas does not.

- (7) Thomas hat erzählt, dass der verdammte Köter gebellt  
Thomas has narrated that the damn dog barked  
habe.  
have-subj  
Thomas said that the damn dog barked.

However, in free indirect speech the content of verdammte Köter shifts again obligatorily as in direct speech. Therefore, (8) can only be used if Thomas dislikes the relevant dog - the speaker, however, could like the dog.

- (8) Der verdammte Köter habe gebellt erzählte Thomas.  
the damn dog have-subj barked narrated Thomas  
'The damn dog had belled, Thomas said.'

Other kinds of so-called expressive content, however, behave differently, especially in free indirect speech. One example, are the formal pronouns of address of German which Potts takes up in this paper. These must shift in direct speech.

- (9) Ann sagte zu Thomas: "Jan hat mir von Ihnen  
Ann said to Thomas Jan has me of you.formal  
erzählt."  
told

‘Ann told Thomas: “Jan has told me a lot about you  
(formal).”

However, in free indirect speech the politeness cannot shift as (10) illustrates: The pronoun ihnen in (10) refers to the current addressee and indicates that the current speaker is not on familiar terms with. Ann and Thomas do not affect the reference of ihnen or use of the polite form.

(10) Jan habe mir von Ihnen erzählt sagte Ann zu Thomas.  
Jan have me of you.formal told said Ann to Thomas  
‘Jan had told me about you, said Ann to Thomas.’

The contrast in shiftability between (8) and (10) is unexpected from an account like Potts’ or the ones sketched above that treat polite pronouns in the same way as emotional expressive content: Such uniform accounts predict that (8) and (10) should behave identical.

Further categories with respect to shiftability may exist: In other work, Potts furthermore assumes appositive relative to expressive content (Potts, 2003). Appositives shift optionally in free indirect speech in German: either Thomas or I could be the ones not liking the dog in (11).

(11) Der Hund, den ich übrigens nicht leiden kann, habe  
the dog who I by the way not stand can have-subj  
gebellt, erzählte Thomas.  
barked narrated Thomas  
‘The dog, which I can’t stand by the way, had belled, said  
Thomas.’

To conclude then, I do not think a satisfactory account of expressive content has been proposed. The shiftability data make

a more flexible account necessary than the three I considered. In some cases, we might find different syntactic-semantic mechanisms for types of expressive content: This seems plausible for formality, which could be analyzed at the level of a phrasal register, rather than at the lexical level, where the accounts considered here applied. However, dividing up types of expressive content into types and describing the shiftability of each type, would be not explanatory. It would be more satisfying to find general pragmatic principles predicting the shiftability and unpluggability. For example, for emotional/evaluative adjectives like damn, an account just like other adjectives might be feasible combined with the following pragmatic principle: the individual strong emotional content is attributed to must be unambiguously recoverable unless it is the speaker of the utterance. Such a principle would also explain why often the emotionally extreme expressions are unpluggable and resist shift. The work that is needed is systematic empirical work comparing indexicality and expressive content in a variety of constructions.

## References

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