

# The Compositionality of Expressives

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The compositional account of expressives in Potts (2007) posits a strategy for the incorporation of expressives in formal semantics. My undergraduate paper extends his theory within a formal framework of semantics and expands areas not considered by Potts. Expressives are lexical items that permit the listener to gather emotional information from the speaker—words such as *damn* and *bastard*. Expressives have unique properties that separate them from descriptive items. Expressive research has also been approached from multiple perspectives including psycholinguistic experimentation by Harris and Potts (2009), a neuro-psycho-social perspective by Jay (2000, 2007), compositional approaches from Geurts (2007) and Zimmermann (2007), theories counter to Potts’ by Lasnik (2007), Sauerland (2007), and Schlenker (2007), and with a growing interest in computational linguistics—see Potts (2011); Kennedy (2012), Ghazi (2012).

My undergraduate research involves expanding Potts’ account of expressives to follow compositional procedure in a wider range of examples. I investigate complex issues involving positive expressives, negative expressives as ‘positives’, expressive-descriptive interaction, and the application of expressives outside of local position. The expressive account is expanded to include positive terms of endearment such as *honey* and positive-‘negatives’ by adding/reinterpreting an index value within an expressive denotation, shown below in (1) b. sections i. and iii.

- (1) a. *honey* :  $\langle e, \varepsilon \rangle$   
b.  $\llbracket \textit{honey} \rrbracket^c$  = the function  $f$  such that  $f(\llbracket a \rrbracket^c)(c) = c'$ , where  
i.  $c \approx_{cJ, \llbracket a \rrbracket^c}^I c'$ ;  $\llbracket a \rrbracket^c$  is the listener in context  $c$   
ii. the length of **I** is not more than .5; and  
iii.  $\mathbf{I} \subseteq [0, +1]$

Continuing from the investigation of positive expressives, I address how negative expressives such as *damn* or *bastard* can be reinterpreted positively by having multiple denotations or some kind of indexical reinterpretation operator. I also look at the interaction of expressive index values and positive description elsewhere in an utterance such as *that lovely bastard* and *that damn sweetheart*. I extend these interactions and investigate the effects and limitations of non-local expressive application within an utterance.

The goal of my research is to expand the account of expressives by investigating their unique contribution to semantic composition. My Master’s Major Research paper will continue on the work I have established as an undergrad. The extensions I offer in my MA will be to analyze data comparing the effects of intonational phrasing on expressive content. My objective is to incorporate intonational information into a semantic analysis of the expressive dimension, explaining how intonational contours on the clause convey expressive information regarding specific entities. To date, few studies have been done exploring the relationship between intonational contours and expressive meaning. Accounting for these problems in the expressive domain will help lead towards a more complete formal interpretation of expressives within a theory of compositional semantics.

## References

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