# Expressive modifiers & mixed expressives

In his influential work on expressives, Potts (2005, 2007*b*) makes the following two claims:

(1) Expressive types are only output types, i.e.: (Potts 2007*b*: 169)
  a. At-issue content never applies to expressive content. (Potts 2005: §3.5.1)
  b. Expressive content never applies to expressive content. (Potts 2005: §3.5.2)

(2) No lexical item contributes both an at-issue and a CI-meaning. (Potts 2005: 7)

Against these generalizations, we claim that both (1) and (2) are too strong, since they exclude attested constructions. We argue that in the end, only (1a) seems to hold. After establishing our claims, we modify Potts' (2005) logic $\mathcal{L}_{\text{CI}}$ to cover the presented examples as well.

**Expressive modifiers** In Potts' (2007*b*: 183) type system, expressive types are strict output types:

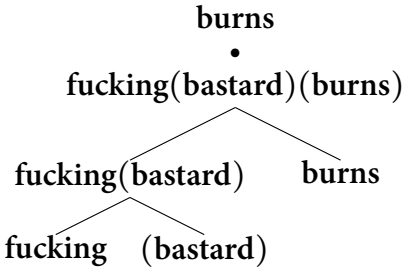
(3) a. $e$ and $t$ are descriptive types.
  b. $\varepsilon$ is an expressive type.
  c. If $\sigma$ and $\tau$ are descriptive types, then $\langle \sigma, \tau \rangle$ is a descriptive type.
  d. If $\sigma$ is a descriptive type, then $\langle \varepsilon, \sigma \rangle$ is an expressive type.
  e. The set of types is the union of the descriptive and expressive types.

From this type system, the generalization (1) follows: There are neither expressions mapping from expressive content to at-issue content nor expressions mapping expressive content to expressive content. The later generalization predicts that there are no *expressive modifiers*. However, such expressions can be attested in natural languages. For instance, *fucking* in (4a) seems to modify the expressive *bastard*, and *holy* modifies the expressive *shit* in (4b).

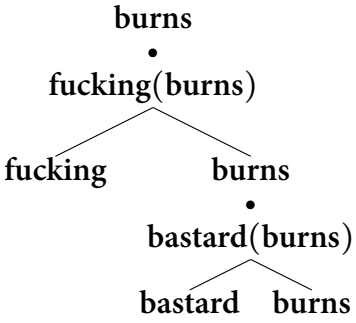
(4) a. That fucking bastard Burns got promoted!
  b. Holy shit, my bike tire is flat again!

Potts (2007*a*,*b*) present as work-around to solve the problem raised for his type definition by cases like the one in (4a). Instead of giving a intuitive semantic structure for *fucking bastard Burns*, in which **fucking** modifies **bastard** which is then applies to **burns** like in (5), Potts (2007*a*,*b*) presents an analysis along the lines of (6), where each expressive item is taken to apply to *burns* one after the other, that is, they are treated like non-restrictive modifiers.

(5)




(6)




Potts then defines the meaning of expressive items in such a way that it somehow models the observation that *fucking* intensifies the expressive meaning of *bastard*. However, this doesn't work for cases like (4b), since *holy* cannot be taken to modify the sentence. This is show by the fact *holy* may be dropped but not the expressive *shit*.

(7) a. Shit, my bike tire is flat again!
  b. *Holy, my bike tire is flat again!

Further examples of this kind are provided in constructions in which we have an intensifier (Schwager & McCready 2009) like *absolutely* that clearly modifies the expressive and not the noun that is modified by the expressive. (cf. also Geurts 2007).

(8) a. That absolutely fucking bastard Burns got promoted!
  b. *That absolutely Burns got promoted!

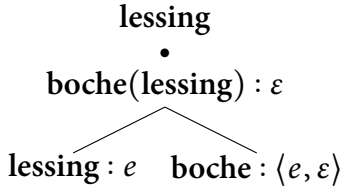
We take such kinds of examples as evidence that there are at least some expression in natural language that map expressive content to expressive content.

**Mixed expressives** The generalization (2) is also too strong as there are clear cases in which an expression carries at-issue as well as expressive meaning. The most obvious examples are racist swear words.

(9) Lessing was a Boche. (Williamson 2009)

In the expressive dimension, *Boche* conveys that the speaker does not like German, thinks of them as being cruel etc. But crucially, *Boche* also has a descriptive component: (9) entails that Lessing was a German (Arguably, that is its truth-conditional content). But $\mathcal{L}_{\text{CI}}$ does not allow for *mixed expressives* that contribute to both dimensions of meaning. Furthermore, $\mathcal{L}_{\text{CI}}$ predicts that the truth-conditional content of (9) is just **lessing** since applying **boche** to its argument passes it up the tree unmodified, but there is nothing left that could be applied to **lessing**.

(10)



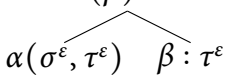

Of course, the truth-conditional meaning of (9) is *not* Lessing but that Lessing was German. A further argument is that the contribution of the past tense in (9) have to apply to the descriptive component since the expressive component cannot be shifted to the past. (For further examples of mixed expressives, cf. McCready 2009).

**Extension of $\mathcal{L}_{\text{CI}}$** To account for expressive modifiers and mixed expressives, we extent Potts' (2005) logic $\mathcal{L}_{\text{CI}}$. First, to allow for expressive modifiers, we allow for expressive types in the input. We call these types *pure expressive types* to distinguish them from the ordinary complex expressive types, which we call *hybrid expressive types*. To account for *mixed expressives*, we adopt the type definition in (11f) from McCready 2009.

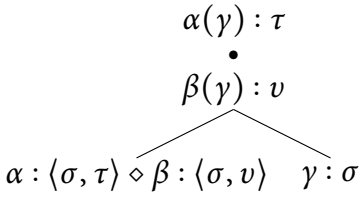
(11)
a. $e$ and $t$ are descriptive types.
b. $\varepsilon$ is an expressive type.
c. If $\sigma$ and $\tau$ are descriptive types, then $\langle\sigma, \tau\rangle$ is a descriptive type.
d. If $\sigma$ is a descriptive type and $\tau$ is a (hybrid or pure) expressive type, then $\langle\sigma, \tau\rangle$ is a hybrid expressive type.
e. If $\sigma$ and $\tau$ are (hybrid or pure) expressive types, then $\langle\sigma, \tau\rangle$ is a pure expressive type.
f. If $\sigma$ and $\tau$ descriptive type and $\upsilon$ is a pure expressive type, then $\langle\sigma, \tau\rangle \diamond \langle\sigma, \upsilon\rangle$ is a mixed type.

To allow for modifying expressives inside the semantic parsetree without isolating them, we introduce a new tree-admissibility condition for *pure expressive application* (12), which is just like ordinary truth-conditional application but involves a pure expressive type as the functional expression (we use a superscribed $\varepsilon$ to indicate that the variables range over expressive types.). The new rule for *mixed application* given in (13) distributes one argument to a descriptive and an expressive component and the isolates the expressive content from the semantic parsetree.

(12)




(13)




Equipped with these rules and types, we can provide very intuitive semantics for the expressions discussed above.

## References

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