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*Expressive meaning and speech acts*

Edited by M.Teresa Espinal and Xavier Villalba

## *Expressive meaning and speech acts: An introduction*

M.Teresa Espinal & Xavier Villalba

The notions of *emotivity*, *expressivity* and *expressive meaning* were coined (Bühler 1934, Jakobson 1960) for one of the functions of language that centers the attention of communication on the speaker of an utterance. As such, these notions must be understood in opposition to the notions of *referentiality* and *descriptive or truth-conditional meaning*.

Language, as an object of scientific enquiry, has been approached in 20<sup>th</sup> century linguistic theory on the basis of its form and structure. Less interest has been reserved to the study of its function and use. Crucially, this corresponds to the competence vs. performance division of labour postulated in generative grammar (Chomsky 1965). However, relying on notions such as speech act and illocutionary force, for the expression of the speaker's intention (Austin 1962, Searle 1969), and common ground management, for the set of propositions that interlocutors assume to be shared at a particular point in conversation (Stalnaker 1974), a growing interest has been noticed in linguistic theory in incorporating the study of the expressive function of language in formal semantics and/or formal pragmatics. Interestingly, this double approach to the study of expressives is also attested by the fact that sometimes is part of handbooks dedicated to semantic topics (Foolen 2015) or pragmatic ones (Amaral 2018).

With this in mind, one might wonder the reason why the study of emotivity, expressivity and expressive meaning has received little attention in formal linguistics, in comparison to the study of denotational and informative meaning. The answer to this question stems from the fact that, beyond studies that aim to relate grammatical information with prosody and gesture, expressive meaning has been mainly associated with the study of individual lexical items, such as discourse particles, vulgar minimizers (so called, squats), intensifiers, a subclass of adjectives, and triggers of exclamations. The overall consequence of this is that the study of expressives has not been considered part of the study of core syntax, traditionally focused on proper grammatical phenomena.

This discussion leads us to another question, which concerns the locus of representation of expressives. Should they be formally represented inside the sentence or at the periphery? The distinction between an inner vs. an outer representation of expressives is at the heart of an increasing body of research on the syntax-pragmatics interface and what is known as the layering of speech acts (Speas & Tenny 2003; Krifka 2019, 2023, 2024a, 2024b; Miyagawa 2022; Wiltschko 2014, 2021). This line of research focuses on the question whether information related to the action of the speaker or addressee, their commitments (Geurts

2019), their epistemic and evidential knowledge should be represented at all in syntax and how the information conveyed by different speech acts should be syntactically represented by means of functional projections. This investigation is not only relevant for the topic of the syntactic representation of expressive meanings outside the sentence (i.e. the layering of speech acts by analyzing different types of speech acts, or by incorporating direct reference to the speaker and the addressee), but also for other topics such as: the difference between inner and outer negation (Ladd 1981), the existence of mitigated speech acts (e.g., the difference between assertions vs. declarations, Krifka 2024b; or the difference between objective vs. subjective declarations, Espinal & Cyrino 2025), the integration of prosody and gesture in a multimodal interaction model of language design (Prieto & Espinal 2020, Goodhue 2021).

An important issue related to the topics presented so far is how common ground updates should be formally represented at the syntax-pragmatics or at the semantics-pragmatics interfaces. It has been argued in the literature that assertions commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition they utter, and that assertions are ways to change the common ground by publicly expressing a commitment that a proposition is true. In this sense assertions involve both a performative update on the side of the speaker and an informative update on the side of the addressee (Krifka 2024a). Other types of speech acts may alter this commitment strength. Thus declarations appear not to involve an informative update on the addressee. This opens interesting areas of research such as: the commitment strength or mitigation involved by different types of speech acts; the role of mood, epistemic and evidential modality at the time of conveying different degrees of commitment strength; the role of judge-dependent expressions (Stephenson 2007) sentence-internally and their relationship to peripheral projections (such as Judgment Phrase and Commitment Phrase) outside the sentence proper; finally, in association with an autocentric vs. exocentric perspective (Lasersohn 2005), the role of commitment and judgment modifiers at the time of constraining common ground updates.

Despite the current oversimplification of the role ascribed to the social aspects of conversation (role of the speaker, role of the addressee, existence of commitment to the truth of  $p$ , existence of epistemicity and evidentiality with respect to  $p$  on the side of the speaker), it is important to highlight the existence of recent advancements in the modelling of the language faculty, by including a representation of the actors of a communicative interaction (i.e., the speaker and addressee roles and their epistemic states), by rethinking the role of bias and rhetorical utterances (infinitives and imperatives) in common ground updates, and by reconsidering the competence vs. performance division as well as the syntax-pragmatics interface.

This volume aims to contribute to these topics in various ways, with a great emphasis on the role of commitments. For example, Ausensi & Buchczyk's "Exploring rhetorical imperatives" describe a kind of imperative which lacks the distinct characteristics of canonical imperatives. They argue that they involve an infraction of a (shared) commitment, reflecting uncooperative behaviour of one party towards another.

In a similar line, Borik & Teomiro's contribution "Datives at the syntax-pragmatics interface" argues that a subkind of ethical datives (commitment datives) enhance and emphasize the commitment of one of the participants of the speech situation, usually the speaker, to achieving a communicative goal. They show that commitment datives must be first person, are restricted to directive speech acts, and operate at the not-at-issue level of meaning, introducing the speaker's commitment to the goal that the hearer made the content of the proposition true.

The contribution by Buchczyk "How mood determines the nature of updates" considers the choice of indicative or subjunctive mood in Catalan within the idea of commitment spaces. He argues that whereas the use of the indicative corresponds to an update of the commitment space, the subjunctive is associated with a meta-speech act GRANT restricting possible future conversational moves within a commitment space.

The contribution by Kocher "Commitment strength and modification in Spanish: An experimental study" offers a novel experimental approach to the role of judgment and commitment modifiers in Spanish regarding the strength of the commitment a speaker expresses. She shows that speakers had a higher justification expectation with unmodified and commitment-modified assertions, but a clearly lower one with judgment-modified assertions. These findings confirm Krifka's layered model of assertions, where the relative scope of the commitment and judgment operators can explain the strengthening and weakening effects of the modifiers.

Parallel to the contribution by Ausensi & Buchczyk's, and Borik & Teomiro's, Mari's "The landscape of negative biases: modality, exclamative-questions and exclamatives" studies non-assertive speech acts. She addresses the interaction between epistemic modality and speech acts operators, by rethinking the notion of modal bias. She contends that bias is a ranking mechanism subject to manipulation, particularly when questions and exclamations interact with modal meaning.

In a similar line, Tsiakmakis's "Greek outside negation and mitigated speech acts" is concerned with the biases found when the Greek negative marker *dhen* 'not' appears in focus-fronted biased polar questions and suggestive questions. He argues that, in both cases, *dhen* is interpreted as a negative operator scoping over the illocutionary part of the clause structure, thus leading to a mitigated speech act.

Bosch's "The case of Rita: expressives and negative indefinites in Catalan and Spanish" offers an analysis of a subkind of negative items grounded on proper nouns and person-referring DPs, which display an expressive behaviour. Based on experimental data, she shows that this class does not fit in any of the well-established classes of negative elements, but rather overlaps with them, which raises important theoretical issues for our knowledge of negation.

Finally, Munaro's "Non-integrated (concessive) conditionals and the internal layering of the speech-event domain" studies a particular class of sentence-adjunct clauses, which provide information about the dialogic roles of discourse participants in the utterance situation. Henceforth, he analyses them as speech event modifiers, allowing the speaker to link his/her speech act to the discourse context, with consequences at the syntactic level, particularly when interacting with interjections and discourse markers.

Overall, the chapters composing this volume offer a rich panorama of the lively interaction between expressive meaning and speech acts, with important empirical and theoretical consequences for our understanding of the interface between semantics and pragmatics, and its impact in syntax. It is our hope that this book will provide some inspiration to semanticists, pragmatists and syntacticians alike.