Expressive Presuppositions*

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1 Two Directions

When new phenomena are discovered, the semanticist may account for them by enriching his formal framework, or by reducing them to the complex interaction of some of its existing components. The first option may be more exciting; but the second may be more explanatory. Potts provided some welcome excitement with his groundbreaking study of expressives (Potts, to appear). Can a more conservative account be adopted? In this note, we explore a presuppositional analysis of expressives, along the lines of Macià 2002, 2006, Sauerland 2007, and Schlenker 2003. As we will see, most of the action is in the complex interaction of existing components of the semantics and of the pragmatics.

Our hypothesis is simple: *expressives are lexical items that carry a presupposition of a particular sort,* namely one which is *indexical* (it is evaluated with respect to a context), *attitudinal* (it predicates something of the mental state of the agent of that context), and sometimes *shiftable* (the context of evaluation need not be the context of the actual utterance). To make the discussion concrete, we provide in (1) lexical entries for two prototypical expressives, the ethnic slur 'honky' (Kaplan 2001), and the French familiar pronoun *tu*. Our framework is two-dimensional, and thus we evaluate each lexical entry with respect to a context (*c*) and a world (*w*). As usual, # indicates presupposition failure:

(1) a. $[\![\text{honky}]\!](c)(w) \neq \#$ iff the agent of c believes in the world of c that white people are despicable. If $\neq \#$, $[\![\text{honky}]\!](c)(w) = [\![\text{white}]\!](c)(w)$
b. $[\![\text{tu}]\!](c)(w) \neq \#$ iff the agent of c believes in the world of c that he stands in a familiar relation to the addressee of c. If $\neq \#$, $[\![\text{tu}]\!](c)(w)$ = the addressee of c

Let us now see how a presuppositional analysis might derive the main properties that expressives have according to Potts's analysis (which is quoted in (i)-(vi)).

i. *Independence:* 'Expressive content contributes a dimension of meaning that is separate from the regular descriptive content.'
This result is immediate: the lexical entries in (1) are presuppositional, and on any account, presuppositions are a dimension of meaning that is separate from the 'regular' content of an utterance.

ii. *Nondisplaceability:* 'Expressives predicate something of the utterance situation.'
This result follows from the *indexical* character of expressives (Schlenker 2003, Sauerland 2007). It is not entirely common to define presuppositions that are indexical, but nothing prohibits their existence. Furthermore, there might be independent reasons for treating some

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To avoid confusions, I should note that Greene (2000) cites Strawson and Soames (1989) as using the terms 'expressive presupposition' or 'to expressively presuppose' with a different meaning, illustrated in (i). I hope that this use is now sufficiently rare that my title won't create serious confusions.
(i) Sentence S *expressively presupposes* proposition A relative to a context of utterance C iff the truth of A is necessary for S to semantically express a proposition in C. (Soames 1989, 562, cited in Green 2000)

expressions as triggering an indexical presupposition. Thus the pronoun *you* is sometimes analyzed as a variable that carries the presupposition that it denotes the addressee[1]:

(2) $[\![\text{you}_i]\!]^s (c)(w) \neq \#$ iff s(i) = the addressee of c. If $\neq \#$, $[\![\text{you}_i]\!]^s (c)(w) =$ s(i)

The entry we posited in (1) has the same general form[2].

iii. *Perspective dependence:* 'Expressive content is evaluated from a particular perspective. In general, the perspective is the speaker's, but there can be deviation if conditions are right.'
We account for this fact by suggesting that some expressives are *shiftable indexicals* (Schlenker 2003, Saulerand 2007). Standard indexicals are expressions that must be evaluated with respect to the context of the actual speech act. Shiftable indexicals are more promiscuous, and may be evaluated with respect to any context (e.g. the context of a reported speech act). For the sake of concreteness, we adopt the assumptions of Schlenker 2003: context variables are explicitly represented in the object language, with the convention that a distinguished variable *c** represents the context of the actual speech act. A shiftable indexical may take as argument any context variable; a standard indexical may only take the variable *c**. As far as we can tell, *honky* is shiftable (it may be represented as *honky*-c_i or *honky*-*c**), while *tu* is unshiftable (it may only be represented as *tu*-*c**).

iv. *Descriptive ineffability:* 'Speakers are never fully satisfied when they paraphrase expressive content using descriptive, i.e., nonexpressive, terms.'
Although we are not clear on the empirical or theoretical status of this observation, we believe that presuppositions may seem to be 'descriptively ineffable' because a paraphrase would have to include an assertive component, which would not be faithful to the presuppositional character of the original expression (but see Geurts 2007 for skepticism on the import of descriptive ineffability, which he takes to be a property of lots of words).

v. *Immediacy:* 'Like performatives, expressives achieve their intended act simply by being uttered; they do not offer content so much as inflict it.'
We agree that expressives have a performative-like character, and differ in this respect from standard presupposition triggers. But we claim that this fact follows from their indexical and attitudinal character: as we show below, under certain conditions expressive presuppositions are automatically satisfied; we call them 'self-fulfilling presuppositions'.

vi. *Repeatability:* 'If a speaker repeatedly uses an expressive item, the effect is generally one of strengthening the emotive content, rather than one of redundancy.'
We do not derive this fact. But we note that Potts's examples can be explained within our framework: *I left my damn keys in the dam car* differs from *I left my damn keys in the car* in that that former but not the latter indicates that the speaker has a negative attitude towards his car. (Admittedly, this analysis requires that in *my damn X*, the adjective does not just indicate that the speaker is angry, but rather that that he is angry *at* a particular object).

Let us now see in greater detail how the presuppositional analysis can emulate some of Potts's results.

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[1] The motivation for this approach lies in demonstrative uses of second person pronouns: *You* [pointing] *should stop talking to you* [pointing] (Schlenker 2003).

[2] It is easy to combine the analysis in (2) with that in (1):
$[\![\text{tu}_i]\!]^s (c)(w) \neq \#$ iff s(i) is the addressee of c and the agent of c believes in the world of c that he stands in a familiar relation to the addressee of c. If $\neq \#$, $[\![\text{tu}_i]\!]^s (c)(w) =$ s(i)

2 Self-fulfilling Presuppositions

In earlier work, Potts (2005) emphasized that 'conventional implicatures' in general, and expressives in particular, do not share the behavior of standard presuppositions because they do not impose a condition on the common ground, but are informative. His formal framework accounts for this fact. The observation is, we believe, correct; but we reply that *some presuppositions are systematically informative* (Stalnaker 2002, Fintel 2006).

To start with, consider the following examples:

(3) a. The president is stupid.
b. The stupid president will cause a disaster.
a'. The president is fantastic.
b'. The fantastic president will take us out of this quagmire.

(3)b and (3)b' provide information about the speaker's (positive or negative) attitude towards the president; furthermore, I believe that this information need not be presupposed. Still, the adjectives *stupid* and *fantastic* cannot be expressives in Potts's technical sense, because they can figure in predicative positions as in (3)a-a', and must thus have a type that 'ends in t' rather than in ε, as expressive types do for Potts. There are two components to the puzzle.
-First, on compositional grounds (3)b-b' should trigger a presupposition that *there exists exactly one stupid / fantastic president*. It is thus surprising that the information that the speaker has a negative / positive attitude towards the president need not be presupposed.
-Second, in other cases it is infelicitous to include a modifier within a definite description if the noun is known to hold of exactly one individual:

(4) a. #The brown-haired president will cause a disaster.
(Ok if there are several presidents in the context, one of whom is brown-haired).
b. #The president from Texas will cause a disaster.
(Ok if there are several presidents in the context, one of whom is from Texas).

The deviance of these examples is relatively unsurprising: when *the brown-haired president* is known to denote the same individual as *the president*, the adjective does no semantic work, and should presumably not be uttered. But it remains to be explained why modifiers that convey information about the speaker's attitude towards the president (e.g. *stupid* and *fantastic*) escape this generalization.

Both sides of the puzzle could be explained if we could show that these attitudinal adjectives trigger a presupposition that is in fact informative (this would explain why we don't get a standard presupposition, and why the attitudinal adjective does semantic work in the end, and thus escapes the fate of the modifiers in (4)). There are two ways to develop the theory. We could postulate that a presupposition about the speaker's attitudes is particularly easy to *accommodate* because the addressee takes the speaker to be an authority on his own mental states (following Lewis 1979, we take accommodation to be a repair strategy by which the addressee accepts to modify his beliefs in order to prevent a sentence from resulting in a presupposition failure). However, we believe that there is a more principled way to explain these facts: without any kind of 'repair', there are cases in which *presuppositions are systematically informative*.

As Stalnaker 2002 observes, *it is sometime enough to present oneself as presupposing that p to guarantee that p is indeed common belief.* To make the point precise, we assume that accessibility relations for belief operators are reflexive, transitive and euclidean[3]. Since 'timing issues' matter, we must also outline the sequence of events we

[3] R is euclidean just in case (wRw' and wR_iw'') implies that w'Rw".

consider. We start with the sentence *I met a honky,* abbreviated as *H*. Its presupposition *p* is: *the speaker believes that white people are despicable*.

(i) At time t, *p* is not part of the common ground.
(ii) At time t+1, the speaker utters *H*. In so doing, he makes it clear that he believes that, when the presupposition *p* of *H* will be checked, it will be part of the common ground.
(iii) At time t+2, the speech act participants update their beliefs to take into account what happened at time t+1. As we show below, this suffices to make it part of the common ground that *p*.
(iv) At time t+3, the speech act participants check that the presupposition *p* of *H* was indeed satisfied at time t+2.

Using *S* for 'the speaker believes that', *A* for 'the addressee believes that', *C* for 'it is common belief that', and *W* for 'white people are despicable', we obtain:
(i) C S C S W
By the definition of common belief, *C F* entails in particular that *S F* and *A F* (because *C F* means that all combinations of *S* and *A* can be prefixed to *F* to yield a true sentence). Thus it follows from (i) that:
(ii) A S S S W
By our assumptions on accessibility relations for belief operators, *S S F* entails *S F*. It thus follows from (ii) that:
(iii) A S W

A simple but important result mentioned in Stalnaker 2002 is that, with our assumptions, *if it is common belief that the speaker believes that it is common belief that F*, and if in addition *the addressee believes that F*, then it is common belief that *F* (see also Schlenker 2006 for a discussion of this result). Formally:
(iv) If C S C F and A F, then C F
Therefore, taking *F = S W*
(v) C S W

In other words: by the mere fact that the speaker presupposes that *S W*, it becomes common belief that *S W*. This is the sense in which expressives are 'self-fulfilling presuppositions'. Importantly, it is because expressives are both indexical and attitudinal, and thus predicate something of the speaker's mental states, that they are self-fulfilling. This is what allowed us to move from (ii) to (iii): if *S W* were replaced with *F*, we could not in general infer from *A S S F* that *A F* (all we would obtain is *A S F*, but then we would be 'stuck' with the intermediate *S*). In this way, then, we have connected the surprising projection behavior of expressives to their semantic contribution - without appealing to an expressive dimension.

To summarize, we have seen in this section that some presuppositions that are compositionally triggered are systematically informative, and we have explained on theoretical grounds why presuppositions that concern the speaker's attitude might be self-fulfilling. From this it is but a short step to infer that some expressions that carry a *lexical* presupposition which is both indexical and attitudinal should display the same behavior. We submit that this might account for the behavior of expressives.

3 Dynamic Effects

To be complete, our analysis of self-fulfilling presuppositions would have to be embedded within a dynamic framework. There might well be several ways to do this. The important point, however, is that the 'downward monotonicity' that Potts encodes in his lexical entries can be seen in the present framework as a by-product of a process of dynamic update.

Suppose, for concreteness, that we adopt Potts's idea that a speaker's attitude towards a given individual i is encoded by a value between -1 (fully negative attitude) and 1 (fully positive attitude). Naturally, this information should also be encoded in the context parameter. Since the context set encodes the speech act participants' uncertainty about the context they are in, it will typically include contexts that assign different values to the speaker's attitude towards i - some might give it value 0, others value .2, yet others value .4, etc. As the context set is dynamically updated, some of the contexts that were initially present are 'thrown out', and we may thus end up with a context set that only includes expressive values towards i that lie between 0 and .2, excluding the value .4. It seems, then, that we do not need to use *intervals* to model uncertainty about the speaker's attitude towards i; the uncertainty is already handled by the dynamic framework. This might have the advantage of keeping the formal apparatus to a minimum.

4 Shiftability

Potts grants that expressives may sometimes be evaluated with respect to a non-actual context. Within the framework of Schlenker 2003, it was claimed that shiftable indexicals can take as argument a context variable introduced by attitude verbs; more speculatively, it was also suggested that under ill-understood conditions, a context variable different from the distinguished variable c^* (which by convention designates the actual context) may be left free. Together, these assumptions account for some of Potts's cases in which expressives are not evaluated with respect to the context of the actual speech act:

(5) a. My father screamed that he would never allow me to marry that bastard Webster (Kratzer 1999)
b. I am not prejudiced against Caucasians. But John, who is, thinks / claims that you are the worst honky he knows. (Schlenker 2003)

These fall under the category of shiftable indexicals (see Sauerland for more detailed discussion). Potts discusses additional examples in which shifting occurs outside of attitude reports. Their analysis is by no means trivial, but they might conceivably be handled by allowing a context variable different from c^* to be left free, under conditions that must admittedly be clarified.

It might be, of course, that the presuppositional analysis does not fully account for Potts's data, or is incorrect for other reasons. But we hope to have shown that, even if Potts is right, there should also exist presuppositional expressions that display a behavior which is *very* similar to that of Potts's expressives - which should make it particularly interesting to compare their behaviors.

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