1 Expressive meaning across linguistic levels and frameworks

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1.1 Introduction

The expression of emotions has received much recent attention in the humanities and social sciences, and research is conducted within diverse approaches and across a wide range of disciplines (e.g., Fox 2008; Davidson et al. 2009; Lewis et al. 2010; Smith 2015; Jacobsen 2018). Work in this domain is of interest to disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, cognitive as well as cultural psychology, and sociology. One of the key modalities through which humans express emotions is language. It thus comes as no surprise that there is a considerable amount of research in different frameworks of linguistics as well (see Bednarek 2008; Wilce 2009; Foolen 2012, 2016).

Seminal work by both Bühler (1934) and Jakobson (1960) has already highlighted the important role that emotivity plays in defining the central characteristics of human language. As Jakobson (1960: 354) has put it, “[t]he emotive function, laid bare in the interjections, flavors to some extent all our utterances, on their phonic, grammatical, and lexical level.” In other words, the function of interjections like ouch! and wow!—i.e., conveying emotions—can be found in many linguistic domains and at all complexity levels. Recent years have seen a huge interest in this ‘emotive function’ of language, and work in semantics and pragmatics, in particular, has investigated relevant phenomena by using the term ‘expressive meaning’ or ‘expressive dimension of language’ (Potts 2007). While this more recent interest in the expressive phenomena of natural language has produced a lot of work on lexical means such as expressive adjectives like damn and fucking and their semantic and pragmatic behavior, there is still a considerable gap between those recent efforts in semantics and pragmatics, and research that focuses on the formal linguistic expressions of different emotions.

Most of the linguistic work on the topic of emotions is concerned with the ‘conceptualization’ of emotions. It is thus unsurprising that many researchers have investigated the so-called emotional lexicon of different languages, carrying out cross-linguistic comparisons to find out which conceptualizations might be universal and which are language- and/or culture-specific (e.g., Wierzbicka 1999;
Harkins and Wierzbicka 2010; Jackson et al. 2019; and Majid 2019 for seminal work). Within this research tradition, particular emphasis is placed on content words such as nouns (joy), verbs (enjoy), and adjectives (happy). And indeed, interesting cross-linguistic variations can be observed. For example, Foolen (2012) points out that the German (and English for that matter) distinction between Eifersucht (‘jealousy’) and Neid (‘envy’) does not exist in Dutch because in this language the noun jaloerie refers to both these emotional concepts. We thus see that even in closely related languages, such as Dutch and German, the emotional lexicons can be organized quite differently. Another topic within this research tradition concerns the questions of how and to what extent emotional concepts are expressed via figurative speech (e.g., metaphors and idioms)—and needless to say, languages once again vary widely in this regard. All in all, emotions are conceptualized differently in the lexicon across languages, and emotion terms differ cross-linguistically in both their numbers and in the intensities they refer to.

Previous work on the conceptualization of emotions illustrates that we can speak about emotions such as happiness and anger in descriptive terms (I’m enjoying my time with you vs. I’m angry at you). But do emotions only manifest themselves in what we say, i.e. in content? The answer clearly is ‘No,’ and a more recent question is to what extent emotions are conveyed by how we say things, i.e. in form. In this context, Foolen (2012, 2016) has proposed a useful distinction between the conceptualization of emotions (sketched above) and the ‘expression’ of emotions. While the former focuses on the referential function of emotion words and more complex expressions (figurative speech etc.), the latter explores which (formal) linguistic elements feature emotional meaning.

While, so far, the study of the language-emotion interface has mainly concentrated on the conceptual dimension, this volume contributes to the exploration of the linguistic expression of emotions at different linguistic complexity levels—and it does so by integrating work from different linguistic frameworks: generative syntax (Chapters 2–6), functional and usage-based linguistics (Chapters 7 and 8), formal semantics/pragmatics (Chapters 9–11), and experimental phonology (Chapter 12).

Before we now sketch the individual chapters of the volume, we would like to thank all scholars who reviewed the contributions to this volume and who provided extremely helpful feedback. Thanks also to Julia Steer, our editor at Oxford University Press, and to Joy Mellor for extremely careful copyediting. Last but not least, we would also like to thank the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Innovation for financially supporting the research project FFI2017-82547-P ‘The interpretation of functional categories.’ Andreas Trotzke additionally acknowledges financial support from the Generalitat de Catalunya / Secretariat for Universities and Research of the Catalan Ministry of Economy and Knowledge for his project ‘Functional categories and expressive meaning’ (EU Horizon 2020 COFUND scheme; grant no. 2017-BP00031).
1.2 The individual chapters

Chapter 2 by Norbert Corver, ‘On classifiers and affect in the nominal domain: Organizing “disorganization,”’ investigates the syntactic encoding of affective-expressive interpretations in the Dutch nominal domain. Based on six case studies, Corver argues that the disorganization that can be observed in the data presented by him is only apparent and that the expression of affects and emotions in the nominal domain is in fact organized and structured, in accordance with the variation space postulated in a generative theory of Universal Grammar. The author demonstrates that the syntactic Classifier Projection is key in understanding and analyzing this organization, and he points to further cross-linguistic phenomena that could be addressed in future studies by adopting his perspective and analysis.

Chapter 3 also addresses expressive meaning from a generative syntactic perspective and focuses ‘On the illocutionary force of exclamatives and non-canonical questions in German and Italian.’ The authors Roland Hinterhölzl and Nicola Munaro explore this topic from a syntactic perspective where they encode the pragmatic differences between non-canonical wh-questions and wh-exclamatives in the functional architecture of the clause. In particular, they claim that non-canonical wh-questions, even if expressing emotions such as surprise, are still directive speech acts, while wh-exclamatives are more akin to assertions. On the syntactic side, those differences are reflected by the presence or absence of the Verb-second property in German and by distinct syntactic landing sites for the wh-element in Italian.

Chapter 4 also touches on exclamative sentences, but as related to negation. More specifically, in ‘Function words and polarity: The case of negation,’ Matteo Greco argues that the contrast between standard and expletive negation typically displayed in exclamative sentences is more complex than previously assumed because expletive negation appears in a weak and a strong version: Weak expletive negation licenses negative polarity items and neg-words, whereas strong negation cannot license those items. Moreover, the author contends that all cases of negation are based on the same negative word, whereas the interpretive differences are derived from the syntactic configuration in which this negative marker is merged. Greco’s analysis is supported by experimental work based on eye-tracking, showing that expletive negation patterns with affirmative sentences, in sharp contrast to standard negation sentences; these findings confirm the basic idea that expletive negation is placed outside the core of the sentence.

Chapter 5 by Silvio Cruschina and Valentina Bianchi deals with ‘Mirative implicatures at the syntax-semantics interface: A surprising association and an unexpected move.’ The authors investigate two distinct Romance constructions involving a mirative reading, namely ‘Mirative Focus Fronting’ and the ‘Doubly Inflection Construction.’ They show that both constructions share a similar
mirative implicature regardless of the fact that they are triggered by linguistic means encoded at two different syntactic levels. In both cases, mirativity can be analyzed as a conventional implicature, and Cruschina and Bianchi additionally show that the mirative meaning is not necessarily anchored to the speaker’s perspective, as usually assumed, but it may also involve the hearer(s) in the context of building a joint evaluative commitment.

The final chapter to address the linguistic expression of emotions from a syntactic perspective is Chapter 6 by Andreas Trotzke and Xavier Villalba. Their chapter explores ‘Expressive insubordination: A cross-linguistic study on that-exclamatives,’ comparing so-called ‘that-exclamatives’ (i.e., exclamatives introduced by the complementizer ‘that’) in both Germanic and Romance languages. The authors first demonstrate for Catalan and German that there are important semantic differences between the two language groups, and they then explain those differences by means of a detailed syntactic account of the different systems of syntactic complementation in the expression of that-exclamatives in Germanic and Romance languages. Trotzke and Villalba’s conclusion is that only German that-exclamatives can be referred to as cases of ‘insubordination’ (i.e., subordinated syntactic configurations used as root clauses), whereas Catalan that-exclamatives instantiate a syntactic form that is distinct from both wh-exclamatives and subordinated syntactic configurations.

The next two chapters deal with the linguistic expression of emotions from the perspective of functional and usage-based linguistics. In particular, Chapter 7 by Patrizia Noel Aziz Hanna, ‘Connectors as emotive signs: Expressivity in the right sentence periphery,’ investigates the emotive function of sentence-final connectors, focusing on German triple und (‘and,’ i.e., . . . und und und). Noel analyzes und und und as a sentence-final particle and, more generally, as an emotive sign, and the author supports her account by a variety of corpus examples. Based on her empirical evidence, she claims that und has shifted from the syntactic Wackernagel position to the right sentence periphery, and she highlights cross-linguistic implications for accounts of the emotional potential of both left and right sentence peripheries.

Chapter 8 by Agnès Celle, Anne Jugnet, and Laure Lansari explores ‘Expressive questions in English and French: What the hell versus Mais qu’est-ce que’ from a usage-based perspective. The authors make a compelling case for distinguishing between expressive questions in English and French: English what-the-hell questions encode emotional expressivity, which is, according to the authors, speaker-oriented and involves a marker in the left sentence periphery; French mais-qu’est-ce-que questions on the other hand encode iconic expressivity, which is claimed to be unrelated to the speaker’s emotional attitude and triggered by enactment markers that can be found in several positions of the sentence.

The next three chapters investigate expressive meaning from a formal semantics/pragmatics perspective. Chapter 9 by Victoria Escandell-Vidal and Manuel Leonetti
investigates the so-called Spanish ‘mirative future.’ The authors introduce an interpretation of the Spanish future form as an inferential evidential, and they demonstrate that this reading is associated with a mirative reading that is contextually inferred as a result of a combination of a variety of factors. Based on their semantic analysis, Escandell-Vidal and Leonetti claim that the mirative uses they are focusing on are essentially rhetorical questions, and they point out cross-linguistic parallels where mirative readings arise once indirect or inferential evidential markers are used in non-canonical contexts.

Jessica Rett also deals with the notion of mirativity and undertakes ‘A comparison of expressives and miratives’ in Chapter 10. In particular, the author discusses literature and cross-linguistic empirical data showing that exclamations and other mirativity markers at the illocutionary level are more closely related to so-called expressives than previously thought. In contrast to most of the literature on expressives, Rett argues that expressives should be grouped with illocutionary content rather than being identified as a subclass of conventional implicatures. She outlines her approach to expressives and mirativity markers in this chapter as part of a bigger project that could be characterized as a comprehensive typology of not-at-issue content.

Finally, Chapter 11 by Osamu Sawada and Jun Sawada, ‘Cross-linguistic variations in the interpretation of tense in mirative sentences: A view from Japanese mirative expressions nante/towa’ focuses on the interpretation of tense in Japanese mirative sentences using the expressions nante and towa, and they point out relevant cross-linguistic observations that indicate variation in the interplay of mirative readings and tense. In particular, they show that the combination of mirative markers with the non-past form ru in Japanese yields an unexpected past reading, combining an accomplished fact and the interpretation of unexpectedness. The authors also show that this non-canonical past interpretation is present in English polar exclamatives introduced by the complementizer that and Korean mirative tani sentences, which, again, point to cross-linguistically consistent patterns.

The last chapter of this volume is by Lisa Brunetti, Hiyon Yoo, Lucia Tovena, and Rachel Albar and deals with ‘French reason-comment (“how”) questions: A view from prosody,’ considering how emotions can be encoded prosodically. The authors study French reason-comment questions in comparison to manner-comment questions, both from a prosodic and semantic/pragmatic perspective. They show that reason-comment questions express the speaker’s doubts about the truth of the proposition, while asking the hearer to help her to revise her expectations about the proposition. Moreover, the speaker’s doubt is often accompanied by additional emotions of expectation disconfirmation and surprise. The results of a production experiment confirm that these emotional nuances are encoded prosodically, and the prosodic cues allow hearers to detect and draw a clear distinction between reason and manner interpretations.
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