
Prosodic Cues to the Interpretation of Expressive Adjectives

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Expressive adjectives (EAs) like *damn* convey a negative speaker attitude towards a discourse referent realized in an utterance (Gutzmann 2019). EAs differ from other adjectives in that they can target any referent irrespective of syntactic embedding due to their status as quasi independent non at issue speech acts (Frazier et al. 2015).

(1) Der Nachbar hat den verdammten Hund geschubst.

,The neighbor has shoved the damn dog.'

☹ Hund Local Referent Reading

☹ Nachbar Preceding Referent Reading

☹ schubsen(Nachbar, Hund) Event Reading

Until now, the interpretation of EAs has been investigated only in the context of pragmatic cues pertinent to written communication. In spoken language, (emotive) prosody can be assumed to operate as an additional formal cue that guides the listener in selecting the speaker intended EA target due to increased perceptual prominence. The current study investigates how the factors (1) valence of discourse referents, (2) linear adjacency and (3) prosodic accentuation interact to determine the speaker intended EA target. Participants will be presented with spoken utterances manipulated by EA position (subject internal vs. object internal) and accentuation (subject noun vs. object noun) in a 2x2 within subject design. Valence is not manipulated as an additional factor across different lists. Instead, the experimental items are constructed in such a way that the referents vary in their relative valence across all trials. Participants listen to the utterances and are required to infer the speaker intended EA target in a binary forced choice task. Both selection and reaction times are measured as response variables. More selectional variation and longer reaction times are expected for conditions where position, accentuation and valence do not align due to increased competition resulting from contradicting cues. Conversely, cue alignment should reduce the probability of non local readings.

References: • Frazier, L., Dillon, B., & Clifton, Jr., C. (2015). A note on interpreting damn expressives: Transferring the blame. *Language and Cognition*, 7, 291-304.. • Gutzmann, D. (2019). *The Grammar of Expressivity*. *Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics* 72. Oxford: Oxford University Press.