

Expressives and Alternatives

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Short abstract: This paper explores the interaction of expressive content (Potts, 2007) with the alternatives generated in *wh*-questions (Hamblin 1973, Karttunen 1977). We take as test cases expressive antihonorifics appearing in *wh*-words, *wh*-phrases and verbal morphology, and argue that expressive content within the *wh*-phrase applies to all alternatives, while expressives outside the *wh*-phrase apply only to true alternatives. On the basis of such contrasts we argue for a mixed theory of question meaning, with Hamblin alternatives within the *wh*-phrase but only true propositions at the clause level.

Expressives and Alternatives

Overview. This paper explores the interaction of expressive content (Potts, 2007) with the operation of alternative generation in question denotations. We take as test cases expressive antihonorifics appearing in WH-words, WH-phrases and verbal morphology, and show that expressive content within the WH-phrase applies to all alternatives, while expressives outside the WH-phrase apply only to true alternatives, closing with implications for the theory of expressive meaning.

Anti-Honorifics. The example in (1) illustrates two means of expressing antihonorification of the subject in Japanese. The first means is by use of a nominal in subject position, such as the antihonorific pronoun *koitsu*, which is lexically specified for antihonorification of the referent, or by an NP headed by an expressive noun like *kusogaki* ‘little shit’. The second means is by use of the verb suffix *yagar*, which attaches to the verb root and expresses antihonorification of the sentential subject (cf. Potts and Kawahara 2004).

- (1) {kare / **koitsu** / kono **kusogaki**}-ga saigo-no biiru-o {non-da/nomi-**yagat**-ta}
 {he he.ANTIHN this shit.kid}-NOM last-GEN beer-ACC {drink-PST/drink-ANTIHN-PST}
 ‘He / this little shit drank the last beer.’

Either or both of the two antihonorific strategies can be used in (1) with similar effects. The semantics of the antihonorific pronoun *koitsu* is spelled out in (2). For the abstract, we assume a primitive (expressive) relation ANTIHN (cf. Potts and Kawahara 2004; Sells and Kim 2007; McCready 2010, 2015); details of the semantics of honorifics (McCready 2014) are given in the full paper.

- (2) $[[koitsu_i]]^g = \{ANIM(g(i)) \wedge MASC(g(i))\}.g(i) \blacklozenge ANTIHN(g(i))$

The denotation of *koitsu* is a *mixed expressive* (McCready, 2010). In the at-issue dimension, it denotes a variable, valued by the assignment function g , the value of which is presupposed to be masculine and animate, and expressively indicates antihonorification toward that entity.

We can also create antihonorific subjects compositionally, by adding the determiner *kono* ‘this’ to an expressive nominal, such as *kusogaki*, lit. ‘shit kid’, which we treat as a mixed expressive.

- (3) $[[kusogaki]] = \lambda x. child(x) \blacklozenge \lambda x. bad_s(x) : \langle e, t \rangle^a \times \langle e, \varepsilon \rangle$

We analyze *yagar* as a function from at-issue to mixed type predicates (improving on the proposal of Potts and Kawahara 2004). It combines with a predicate meaning of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ and yields an object of mixed type $\langle e, t \rangle \blacklozenge \langle e, \varepsilon \rangle$. The resulting verbal predicate applies to the subject argument to return a predicate which expresses antihonorification of the subject (modeled using politeness register) and an emotive attitude of the speaker with respect to the proposition denoted by the sentence (modeled using attitudinal semantics); again, a fuller exposition will be given in the talk.

- (4) $[[yagar]] = \lambda P \lambda x. P(x) \blacklozenge \lambda P \lambda x. ANTIHN(x) \wedge bad_s(P(x)) : \langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle^a \times \langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, \varepsilon \rangle \rangle$

Questions and Expressives. The examples in (5) are subject WH-questions corresponding to the declarative in (1). As with the non-WH pronouns in (1), there is a plain and an antihonorific variant of the WH-pronoun in (5a). In addition to the default WH-word *dare* ‘who’, Japanese also has an

antihonorific WH-word *doitsu* ‘who’. These two forms are clearly related to the non-WH pronouns *kare* and *koitsu*, and share the same presuppositions, except that *kare* is masculine whereas *dare* is gender-neutral. The only difference in the two WH-pronouns is the antihonorific content of *doitsu*. We can also build an antihonorific WH-expression compositionally, by combining the WH-determiner *dono* ‘which’ with an expressive nominal like *kusogaki*. In (5b), the subject-oriented antihonorific *yagar* is added to the predicate. The two strategies can also be combined, but as we show below they exhibit different pragmatic effects, and so they are kept separate here.

- (5) Context: A teacher is at a restaurant with his students. Returning from the bathroom, he finds his beer glass, and all the remaining beer bottles, empty.
- a. [{**doitsu** / dono **kusogaki**]-ga] saigo-no biiru-o non-da (nda)
 [{who.ANTIHON / which shit.kid]-NOM] last-GEN beer-ACC drink-PST (PRT)
 ‘Which little shit drank the last beer?’
- b. [dare-ga] saigo-no biiru-o nomi-**yagat**-ta (nda)
 [who-NOM] last-GEN beer-ACC drink-ANTIHON-PST (PRT)
 ‘Who fucking drank the last beer?’

Now we reach the main issue of this paper: what is the semantic contribution of the expressive in sentences like these? In particular, what is the target of denigration in the case of a WH-expression? Given an alternative semantics for questions, there are at least two possibilities: (i) the individual(s) corresponding to the *true* answer(s) to the question (Karttunen 1977), and (ii) the individuals corresponding to the set of all *possible* answers, ie. the full set of alternatives (Hamblin 1973). We now show that both of these possibilities are realized depending on the syntactic position of the expressive. The examples in (5) show a contrast in the behavior of WH-phrase-internal (*doitsu*, *kusogaki*) and WH-phrase-external (*yagar*) subject-oriented antihonorifics (WH-phrases are demarcated by square brackets). The use of either variant in (5a) conveys a negative attitude on the part of the speaker toward *all* the students at the table, regardless of which one drank the last of the beer. By contrast, the use of (5b) seems only to target the student who actually did the drinking. Although the sentence in (5b) is *compatible* with a context in which the teacher is upset with all of the students, it doesn’t require such an interpretation.

We argue that contrasts like these are instances of the following more general principle governing how expressive content is interpreted in WH-questions:

- (6) Expressive operators *within* a WH-phrase apply to *all* alternatives, while expressive operators *outside* the WH-phrase only apply to *true* alternatives.

We interpret this principle as indicating that Hamblin-style alternatives with pointwise function application is the mode of composition within WH-phrases, but not outside.

We now sketch how this plays out formally, beginning with a Hamblin-style alternative semantics of WH-phrases, following the approach developed by Kratzer and Shimoyama (2002). The WH-pronoun *doitsu* introduces a set of contextually restricted alternative humans, and at the same time expresses antihonorification of each alternative in the set:

- (7) a. $[[dare]] = \{x \mid \text{human}(x) \wedge x \in C\}$

$$b. \llbracket \text{doitsu} \rrbracket = \{x \blacklozenge_{\text{ANTIHON}}(x) \mid \text{human}(x) \wedge x \in C\}$$

Note that the predication of humanity serves to restrict the set, whereas the antihonorific targets whatever entities are in the set. This is a fundamental difference, we propose, in how presuppositional and expressive content are used in the generation of alternatives. Presuppositional features on WH-words are used to narrow down the set of alternatives, while expressive features are applied to each alternative in the set. If expressives behaved like presuppositions, we would expect the antihonorific feature of *doitsu* to restrict the set to those contextually salient people that the speaker dishonors; but (5a) shows that expressive content cannot be used to restrict alternatives. Compositional antihonorific WH-phrases work in a similar way (details provided in the full paper, together with examples of positive honorifics, which behave similarly to antihonorifics):

$$(8) \llbracket \text{dono kusogaki} \rrbracket = \{x \blacklozenge_{\text{BAD}_s}(x) \mid \text{child}(x) \wedge x \in C\}$$

We derive the asymmetry in (5) by following Hagstrom (1998) and Cable (2008, 2010) in arguing that the alternatives in the WH-phrase are closed off by a Q particle denoting a choice function variable. This choice function variable is then bound by a higher question operator. Unlike Cable (2008, 2010), we calculate alternatives in the regular semantic value of the WH-phrase. We further argue that the WH-phrase combines with the matrix question operator to derive not the set of all *possible* answers, but the set of all *true* answers (Karttunen 1977). The details are spelled out in the full paper, but the effect is that expressive content appearing *outside* the WH-phrase will apply only to *true* alternatives.

Complex Wh-Phrases. A skeptic might argue that the observed differences are lexical, rather than the result of compositional differences inside and outside WH-phrases. The example in (9) allays this concern, by using the same morpheme *yagar* either inside or outside a complex WH-phrase:

- (9) [dono oozeina gakusei-ni goukakusase-(**yagat**)-ta sensei-ga] okane-o
 [which many students-DAT PASS-ANTIHON-PST teacher-NOM] money-ACC
 youkyuusi-(**yagat**)-ta (nda)
 demand-ANTIHON-PST (PRT)
 ‘[Which teacher that passed many students] demanded money?’

The question in (9) contains a complex WH-phrase. The noun denoting ‘teachers’ acts as the head of an island-internal relative clause, so there are thus two points in the sentence where the verbal suffix *yagar* can be used to denigrate the teachers introduced by the WH-phrase. Native speaker intuitions suggest that use of WH-phrase-internal *yagar* results in denigration of *all* teachers that passed many students (ie. all teachers the WH-phrase ranges over). By contrast, use of *yagar* in the matrix predicate only denigrates whichever teachers make the entire proposition true, which is unexpected if lexical content determines the differences, but expected on the principle in (6).

Implications. The data above provide support for a mixed theory of question meaning, with Hamblin alternatives within the WH-phrase but only true propositions at the clause level. How do our results mesh with observations about the independence of expressive content from at-issue operations (Potts, 2005, 2007; Potts *et al.*, 2009)? The answer seems to depend on how the alternative construction operation for question semantics is construed. If it is a semantic operation, then independence is threatened; if (partly) pragmatic, then perhaps not. We conclude the talk by exploring these implications of our data for the general theory of expressives and alternatives.

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