

## Lack of composure, lack of composition

**Overview** Natural language expressives sometimes exhibit an apparent lack of semantic composition, which isn't true for all items that convey the speaker's emotions or attitudes. E.g., in (1), the first three members of the set can signal that the speaker is angry without this emotion being linked to anything in the sentence, but the other two must convey the speaker's evaluation of their pen.

(1) Where is my {fucking, bloody, goddamn, lovely, awesome} pen?!

Furthermore, true expressives can be linearly inserted into an utterance without ostensibly being part of its syntactic—and, thus, compositional—structure at all, but items like *lovely* cannot:

(2) Will you please (never) {fucking, bloody, goddamn, \*lovely, \*awesome} stop?!

**Questions** Do “non-compositional” expressives use Strategy 1 (S1): lack of composition, or Strategy 2 (S2): vacuous composition? Which emotion types can be expressed “non-compositionally”? This paper (i) explores new Russian data showing that both S1 and S2 exist in natural language, and what licenses “non-compositional” expressives is immediacy and intensity of the feeling; (ii) discusses if the current linguistic theories of expressives can capture these facts; (iii) shows how other ways of conveying emotions/attitudes like facial expressions and intonation fit into the picture.

**Russian S1 & S2 expressives** Russian uses both S1 and S2 via expressive particles and suffixes:

(3) Gde (bljad') moja (bljad') ručka (bljad')?!

where **expr<sub>prt</sub>** my **expr<sub>prt</sub>** pen **expr<sub>prt</sub>**  
≈‘Where is my (fucking) pen?!’

(4) *Context: The speaker is talking to their dog.*

Ja seĵčas nal'ju tebe svež-en'k-oj vod-iĉk-i v mis-oĉk-u,  
I.nom now pour.1sg.fut you.dat fresh-**expr<sub>suff-ptv</sub>** water-**expr<sub>suff-ptv</sub>** in bowl-**expr<sub>suff-acc</sub>**,  
a potom my bystr-en'k-o pojdëm guljat-en'k-i.  
and then we quick-**expr<sub>suff-adv</sub>** go.1pl.fut walk.inf-**expr<sub>suff-inf</sub>**  
≈‘I will now pour fresh water into a bowl for you, and then we will quickly go for a walk.’

*Bljad'* in (3) is an (obscene) particle that can be freely sprinkled over an utterance signaling the speaker's anger; it only integrates with the host utterance prosodically, can be used as a standalone interjection, and is, thus, an S1 expressive. The suffixes in (4) are diminutives signalling affection towards the dog, not fresh things, water, etc. (contra Steriopo 2008). They are bound morphemes, morphosyntactically integrated with the host utterance, and are, thus, S2 expressives.

**Immediacy and intensity** Curiously, derogatory/pejorative Russian suffixes, as in (5), can't be interpreted “non-compositionally” (and, thus, can only combine with nouns—cf. -*Vn'k-* from (4)).

(5) a. star-ik-an

old-n-**eval** ‘old man (derog.)’

b. star-ik-ašk-a

old-n-**eval**-n.sg ‘old man (pejor.)’

I put forth a hypothesis that the less control one has over a feeling at the moment of speech, the more likely it's to be expressed “non-compositionally”. Low control is linked to immediacy and intensity of the emotional experience. Ire, affection, elation, etc. are, thus, likely to yield “non-compositional” expressives, but derision rarely comes in intense bursts that need an immediate outlet.

**Theories of expressives** I show that Potts' (2007) semantics can handle both S1 and S2 expressives, but as things stand, the link between immediacy and “non-compositionality” is uncaptured.

**Beyond words** Other means of conveying feelings (facial expressions, gestures, prosody) fit into the same typology. E.g., the surprised facial expression (OO) can be a compositionally integrated, focus-sensitive attitudinal item (cf. *surprisingly*); thus, (6a) and (6b) differ in what the speaker finds surprising. Or it can be an S1 expressive signalling immediate surprisal, as in (7).

(6) a. <sup>OO</sup>KIM brought her husband.

b. Kim brought her <sup>OO</sup>HUSBAND.

(7) *Context: Kim's husband unexpectedly shows up at a party.* <sup>OO</sup>Oh god, what do I do now?!

The foci in (6) also differ from regular foci in pitch accent type and voice quality; it remains to be seen if this intonational morpheme can make attitudinal contributions independently of OO.

## References

- Potts, C. (2007). The expressive dimension. *Theoretical linguistics*, 33(2), 165–198. doi: 10.1515/TL.2007.011
- Steriopolo, O. (2008). *Form and function of expressive morphology: a case study of Russian* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of British Columbia). doi: 10.14288/1.0066282