The compositional independence of expressives

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Words like *damn* and *bastard* have, when uttered, an immediate and powerful impact on the context of utterance. They are *performative*, often destructively so. I develop a general theory of these volatile, indispensable meanings. The theory is built around a class of expressive indices. These determine the expressive setting of the context of interpretation. Expressives morphemes actively change that expressive setting. The approach helps us to understand the many ways in which expressive content is different from other kinds of content, grammatically and cognitively. In the talk, I will also use the data in Potts et al. (2007) to defend this approach against the presuppositional alternatives developed by Sauerland (2007) and Schlenker (2007).

References

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