1 The expressive function of language

After having read the other chapters in this volume, the reader might exclaim: How fine an instrument language is to talk about the world! Indeed it is. No wonder that this “world-relatedness” is widely accepted as a core function of language (Bühler 1934).

Twentieth-century linguistic research has shown that language is an even finer instrument, in that it provides means to indicate why something is said (illocutionary function), how it relates to the assumed background knowledge of the hearer (information structure), what the source of the conveyed information is (evidentiality), and how certain the speaker is about a specific claim (modality). Linguistic means for these functions “customize” the talking about the world to the actual speech situation.

There is, however, another dimension of communication that is still missing in the picture just sketched. Human beings often have feelings about what they say, about what others say, or about what happens in the here-and-now environment. These feelings are typically expressed in non-verbal ways (facial expression, gesture, posture, etc.), but, as it turns out, language itself also provides means for expressing such feelings. Language not only has a referential, but also an expressive function. In recent literature, the verbal means that fulfill this latter function are called expressives. We will use this term here too.

As we will see in section 2, the expression of feelings has not been at the centre of attention of twentieth-century linguistics. Linguists have developed models which are primarily meant for the informative, referential function of language, with the natural consequence that other aspects, like expressivity, do not naturally fit in. However, the recent interest in expressives has shown that the expressive component of language takes a bigger place in the language system than these earlier models suggested. In this sense, the study of expressives is relevant for, and will have an impact upon general linguistic theorizing.

Like many other linguistic topics, the expressive function of language involves all kinds of terminological problems. First, in the psychological literature on emotions, feelings are sometimes distinguished from emotions, and attitude, stance, and mood are distinguished as well. In the context of the present chapter, we will not go into these finer distinctions and their relevance for a linguistic theory of expressives. When we talk here about feelings or emotions, attitudes etc. are meant as well.

Second, the referential and expressive function are labeled differently, often related to specific theoretical frameworks. The referential function is also known as the propositional,
denotational, informational, conceptual, descriptive, truth-conditional, denotative, objective, and *mode pur* function of language. For the expressive function, labels like affective, emotive, connotative, involved, subjective, and *mode vécu* are used. Again, we will not be able to go into the question of how far these labels imply different theoretical views.

Third, some of the terms are used in different contexts as well. For example, in formal logic, the term connotation is sometimes used as equivalent to intension, the definition of a concept, in contrast to extension, the referents of the concept. And in research on sound symbolism, the term “expressives” is sometimes used as an equivalent for ideophones and mimetics (see Dingemanse (2012)).

Misunderstandings can not only arise through such terminological matters; different perspectives can also cause confusion. It is important to realize from the beginning that emotions are relevant for language and linguistics in two ways. The first one, which will be the focus of this chapter, regards the question of how emotions are expressed in language, or the other way around, which linguistic elements have expressive meaning. The second way in which emotions are relevant for linguistics has to do with the way emotions are conceptualized in languages. This is not the main concern of this chapter, so we will restrict ourselves here to a few remarks on this topic of research. In the perspective of conceptualization of emotions in grammar and lexicon, emotions are not different in principle from colors, body parts, time, space, etc. They are all specific fields of experience, conceptualized in partly universal, partly language-specific ways. Linguistic research on the conceptualization of emotions in different languages takes place, or should take place, in interdisciplinary cooperation with psychological research on emotions. This research raises questions like the following: Which emotions should be distinguished; do “basic emotions” exist; what exactly is the difference between emotions, moods, and attitudes; how should we model the strength of emotions and their valence (their positive or negative orientation)? The Whorfian question of how far lexical and structural differences between languages have an impact on the experiencing of emotions is also intriguing (cf. Lindquist and Gendron (2013)). For some recent overviews of research on the conceptualization of emotions see Majid (2012) and Fontaine et al. (2013). However interesting such questions regarding the conceptualization of emotions are, in the rest of this chapter we will focus on emotions as they are expressed in language.

**2 The expressive function in early twentieth-century linguistics**

As we pointed out in the first section, linguistics has traditionally focused on the referential aspect of language. Linguistic historiographers have attributed this focus to the fact that linguistics has a traditional link with philosophy (interested in the relation between language, thinking, and the world), and with philology (focusing on written, informative, language data) (see Chapter 3). The unequal importance of the referential and emotive aspect of language was worded succinctly by Sapir (1921: 38) when he stated that “[on] the whole, it must be admitted that ideation reigns supreme in language, that volition and emotion come in as distinctly secondary factors”. However, there have always been defenders of the importance of the expressive aspect for a complete theory of language, as we will illustrate in this section with a few examples, restricting ourselves to the twentieth century.

Although in the first half of the twentieth century linguistics turned to a primarily synchronic perspective on its object of study, nineteenth-century diachronic research did not disappear immediately. In semantics, a diachronic line of research was continued in which
the emotive factor stayed on the agenda, for example in the work of Sperber (1914), Stern (1931), and Ullmann (1977 [1962]). In this research, it has often been observed that the emotional loading of a word can change through time. Due to social changes, the loading can change from positive to negative (pejorization, cf. Schreuder (1970), also called pejoration, see Hom (2010)), or the other way around (amelioration, for example nice, which meant ‘silly’ in Middle English). Sometimes, speakers want to get rid of a word with strong negative emotional loading (taboo word), introducing a euphemism (Casas Gómez 2009). The replacement is typically cyclical, as the connotation of the old taboo word will, after a while, re-connect to the new word (cf. Horn (2011)). Replacement can also be motivated by the loss of emotive meaning through frequent use, as can be observed with intensifiers; see section 5.2.

The twentieth-century turn to synchronic linguistics is emblematically linked to Ferdinand de Saussure’s Cours de linguistique générale, published in 1916. As a colleague of Saussure in Geneva, Charles Bally (1865–1947) supported the synchronic turn in linguistics. But even before his co-editorship of the Cours, Bally developed his own research program (cf. Cura (2010)), which he called somewhat misleadingly “stylistique”, cf. his Précis de stylistique (1905). The central focus of his program was the expressive value of linguistic forms and their use in discourse. As such, Bally can be considered as the father of modern synchronic linguistic research on expressive language. He already sensed that this type of meaning has a certain preference for holistic ways of expression: intonation contours, constructions and fixed expressions (phraseologisms). Like in Geneva, expressivity has been on the research agenda of the Prague School branch of European structuralism, cf. the Thèses (1929), Pos (1933/34), Jakobson (1960), and Danes (1994).

Modern French and German researchers on expressive language regularly refer back to the inspirational work of Bally and other structuralists, cf. Legallois (2012), Legallois and François (2012), Hübler (1987, 1998), and Drescher (2003). This shows that Bally’s insight that the expressive part of coded meaning is bigger than most linguists assumed in the past century, has gained increasing interest in the past years, cf. also the overviews in Foolen (1997, 2012) and Schwarz-Friesel (2007, 2008). In the next section, we will consider two frameworks in which this growing interest can be observed.

3 Expressives in cognitive and formal semantics

Cognitive semantics, as part of Cognitive Linguistics (see Chapter 5), has focused, from its beginnings in the 1980s, on the conceptualizing function of language, cf. Maynard (2002: 48), who notes that “Cognitive semantics most frequently analyzes language about emotion, and only limited numbers of studies analyze language as emotion. Thus, the mode vécu of language remains largely untouched.” Langacker (2012: 100) confirms this perception, at the same time conceding that there is more to language than descriptive content:

To some extent, every instance of language use (and every linguistic unit) has conceptual import involving four dimensions: descriptive, expressive/emotive, interactive, and discursive. (...) Expressive/emotive import is internal to the interlocutors, being conveyed but not described. (...) An example would be the expression of pain, e.g. Ouch or Ow!, differing in intensity of the pain experienced. These are conventional units of English which express an experience, rather than putting it onstage as a focused object of description.
Despite this acknowledgement of the importance of the expressive function of language by one of the founding fathers of Cognitive Linguistics, the number of cognitive linguistic publications on this topic is still restricted. However, in Construction Grammar, as part of Cognitive Linguistics, the expressive aspect of certain constructions has been increasingly noticed (see section 5.5).

In Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor and metonymy are central topics of study. In this framework, they are studied primarily from the perspective of conceptualization. But earlier and modern stylistics has stressed their expressive value as well; see, for example, Ullmann (1977: 136), who stated that “simile and metaphor are among the most effective devices available for the expression of emotive meaning” (cf. also the discussion in Foolen (2012: section 4)). For the expressive value of metonymy, see Feyaerts and Brône (2005).

The primary goal of Formal Semantics has been and still is providing a formal logical treatment of those aspects of meaning that have to do with reference to the world (see Chapters 1 and 4). Truth conditions, compositionality, and possible worlds are the main ingredients of this enterprise. In recent years, in particular since the unpublished paper by David Kaplan (1997), formal semanticists (Potts 2005, with revisions by McCready (2010) and Gutzmann (2012)) have developed multidimensional formalisms for the “conventional implicatures that provide content which supplements the main, at-issue content of the sentence in which they are used” (McCready 2010: 1). These formalisms will not be discussed here, but their availability has strongly stimulated research into meaning aspects that do not belong to the at-issue propositional content, also called conventional implicature, a label that covers a diversity of meaning aspects, one of them being expressive aspects (see Chapter 10). A special issue of the journal *Theoretical Linguistics* (33: 2, 2007) was devoted to this “expressive dimension”. The target paper by Christopher Potts and the subsequent discussing contributions have played a catalyzing role in this line of research. Potts (2007a: 166–167) proposed six properties of expressive items: independence (from descriptive content), non-displaceability (expressives need to relate to the utterance situation), perspective dependence (typically the speaker’s), descriptive ineffability (descriptive paraphrase doesn’t fully catch the meaning or impact of the expressive original), immediacy (the performative character of expressives), and repeatability (repeating expressive items generally strengthens the emotive impact). These properties are the target of discussion in the commenting papers in the same issue of the journal and the discussion has been continued since then; see, among others, Blakemore (2011), Croom (2013), Hedger (2012, 2013), and the contributions in Gutzmann and Gärtner (2013).

One of the many points in the discussion pertains to the question whether items can have descriptive and expressive content at the same time, so called mixed expressives. Potts (2007b: 267) admits that in terms of his formalism “it is difficult . . . to analyze expressions that seem to have both descriptive and expressive content: *Redskins* and *Commie*, for instance”. Gutzmann and Turgay (2013: 152) analyze expressive intensifiers (EIs) and comment that:

>s]emantically, EIs are . . . two-dimensional expressions that contribute to both dimensions of meaning ( . . . ). Hence, EIs add further evidence against Potts’ (2007: 7) claim that no lexical item contributes both descriptive and expressive content: *Redskins* and *Commie*, for instance”. Gutzmann and Turgay (2013: 152) analyze expressive intensifiers (EIs) and comment that:

This fits the traditional position that items often have a denotational and connotational meaning at the same time, cf. also Croom’s (2014) argumentation against considering slurs as “pure expressives” (as defended in Hedger (2012, 2013)).
4 The demarcation of expressives and descriptives

The expressive-descriptive distinction, introduced in the first section without further argumentation, has a strong intuitive appeal. But how exactly is the expressive aspect of language and language use “special”, what makes it different from the conceptual function (see Chapter 2)? It is not exclusively the fact that the expressive function has to do with the (actual) feelings and attitudes of the speaker. The speaker can refer to his feelings and tell the hearer how he feels at the moment of speaking (*I feel happy*), the same way he can report what he sees or thinks in the here and now. What is special, in the view of many researchers, is the way the linguistic item relates to these feelings and attitudes. This special way of relating has been characterized in semiotic terms as direct, indexical, or procedural (Wharton 2009).

Different authors capture this distinction between the conceptual and direct way in their own theoretical vocabulary, for example Volek (1987: 26), who states that:

"[t]he emotive components are based on a reflection of the emotive experiences that are not notionalized. There is thus a direct connection between the sign containing such a component and the object expressed (rather than referred to). It is this directness between the sign and its object that is recognized in the term “expressive”.

Kaplan (1997) contrasts *oops* and *I just observed a minor mishap* and comments (p. 12) that they are informationally equivalent, “but they convey it through different modes of expression”. Potts (2007b) points out that language users feel that a descriptive rendering of an expressive utterance misses something (he calls this property of expressives their “ineffability”). Horn (2013) proposes to call conventional implicatures with expressive value “F-implicatures”, as a tribute to Frege, who already pointed out that words often have a subjective “tone”, in addition to their truth-conditionally relevant referential meaning.

The difference in status shows itself in contexts like negation and quotation, which thus can be used as tests, when a researcher is uncertain about the status (conceptual or expressive) of a semantic aspect of a given linguistic form. Expressive aspects are typically ascribed to the speaker, even if they occur in indirect quotation. And they cannot occur in the scope of negation (unless it is metalinguistic negation).

In the literature, besides the Kaplan-Potts position just sketched, another view exists, which draws the distinction between referential and expressive meaning along different lines. An early representative of this position can be found in Ogden and Richards (1923: 125), cf. their discussion on the ethical use of *good*:

This peculiar ethical use of “good” is, we suggest, a purely emotive use. When so used the word stands for nothing whatever, and has no symbolic function. Thus, when we so use it in the sentence, “This is good” (…) it serves only as an emotive sign expressing our attitude to *this*, and perhaps evoking similar attitudes in other persons, or inciting them to actions of one kind or another.

Stevenson (1937) is a classic statement of this view, and Morris (1946: 60ff.) reformulates it in behaviouristic terms, thus keeping

the distinction which Ogden and Richards wish to make between referential and emotive modes of signifying and yet anchoring these distinctions in objectively determinable
criteria. In so doing we but move further in the direction which they themselves have seen to be desirable.

(p. 72)

A more recent and influential argument along similar lines has been made by Lasersohn (2005). He calls predicates like tasty, as used in those tomatoes are tasty predicates of personal taste. Statements with such predicates are not really open for discussion in terms of truth conditions. We have to acknowledge that, despite the fact that the subject NP of these statements refers to something in the world, the utterance is in fact a statement of the speaker’s appreciation of that referent, so that no real debate about the truth is possible (“faultless disagreement”, as it is called).

Riemer (2013) concedes that it looks surprising that, in the Ogden and Richards line of thinking, statements with predicates of personal taste end up in the expressive group, but in his view, this conclusion is unavoidable:

[M]any expressions relate to the inner experience of the speaker: we can classify these expressions as either outbursts (yuck, damn, etc.) or evaluations (good, bad, sad, happy etc.). While outbursts are standardly recognized as expressive, evaluations are not. I will argue, however, that both categories are expressive, and that both are, as a result, implausible candidates for conceptual explanation.

(p. 11)

Riemer’s main argument is that “assertions involving evaluative predicates like good cannot be assigned truth-values in an objective, speaker-independent manner” (p. 11).

The clustering of statements about private states and expressions of private states doesn’t mean that we can’t distinguish between them on a finer level, as the following test shows. In conversations, it makes sense to react to a statement on a private state with a statement about one’s own state, which can be the opposite of the state of the previous speaker (That cake is tasty – That cake isn’t tasty). In contrast, a continuation of ouch with not ouch would be strange.

Both positions, the one represented by Kaplan and the Ogden and Richards position, are needed to fully understand the discussion in Liu (2012), who analyzed evaluative adverbs like sadly, fortunately, and unbelievably. These adverbs don’t contribute at-issue content, they cannot be used in the scope of negation or conditionals and they are typically attributed to the speaker. They are, thus, candidates for being considered as expressives in the sense of Kaplan. Consequently, Liu uses and further develops the formal framework of multidimensional semantics as proposed in Potts (2005). At the same time, she discusses these adverbs in relation to predicates of personal taste. As she points out, sadly etc. typically express an evaluation from the side of the speaker, like predicates of personal taste do, and they also share the property of faultless disagreement. The hearer can accept a proposition without sharing the sadly etc. evaluation of the speaker.

We have to end this section with the conclusion that the demarcation of expressives in relation to predicates of personal taste (and other linguistics elements with a “subjective” meaning aspect) still needs further empirical research and theoretical discussion. In the rest of this chapter, we will follow a “conservative” strategy and restrict the category of expressives to linguistic items with a direct, indexical link to their emotional referent, at the same time conceding that more theoretical work has to be done to fully understand this specific type of meaning.
5 Expressive forms on different linguistic levels

Expressivity can be found everywhere in language, in the lexicon, in phonology, morphology and syntax. In this section, we will illustrate this with a few examples. We will start with the lexicon, thereby distinguishing between content and function words.

5.1 Content words

In psychology, there exists an interest in emotion-laden words, which is rather independent from linguistics. To illustrate this line of research, let’s consider the word lion. It is linked to our mental concept “lion”, which relates to a certain type of animal. However, the word is not only associated with the concept and the referents, it also evokes feelings. It is a rather fruitless discussion whether these emotive aspects of words are considered as part of the meaning of the word or not. Words have connotations, and these are not purely private associations. For most words, the emotional associations of different people tend to go in the same direction, so there is an intersubjective (thus, in a sense, “objective”) side to it.

Osgood et al. (1957) developed a method for measuring word valence. Valence is the strength of the emotion that the word evokes, from strongly negative to strongly positive. Osgood et al. asked subjects to score words on different scales, among them valence. In recent years this method has been applied to word lists in different languages, for example to English by Bradley and Lang (2010). More than 1000 English words were scored on valence, from 1 to 9, where 1 is very negative and 9 very positive. This led to their ANEW list: “Affective Norms for English Words”. Since then, other lists have been produced for English (Warriner et al. 2013) and for other languages, for example Kanske and Kotz (2010) for German, Ferré et al. (2012) for Spanish, Ric et al. (2013) for French, and Moors et al. (2013) for Dutch. Such lists are interesting for linguists but also for experimental psychologists, as valenced words behave differently in language processing.

In the linguistic and philosophical literature, strongly negative valenced words have attracted special attention. There are studies on “swear words” (Pinker 2008), slurs (Croom 2013; Hedger 2012, 2013) like nigger and kraut and religious or sexual taboo words. These words typically have a “mixed meaning”; they are partially expressive, partially conceptual. The study of such words is not only relevant for theorizing on expressive meaning but also in relation to the effects of their use in society and the question of how far regulation is possible (cf. Meibauer (2013)). Allan (2006a) and Nunberg (2013) stress that the expressive value and impact of this kind of word strongly depends on who uses them in which context.

5.2 Function words

Emotional interjections are the prototype of expressive function words. Even if they are derived from content words, like damn, their original meaning doesn’t really play a role in their actual expressive functioning, in other words, they are not of a mixed type. Some recent studies on emotional interjections are Goddard (2014), Golato’s (2012) analysis of German oh, which marks an emotional change of state (in contrast to English oh, which can also mark an epistemic change of state) and Reber’s (2012) study on the conversational use of oh, ooh, ah, and other affect-laden “sound objects”. For an overview of research on interjections, see Norrick (2011).

Pos (1933/34) showed that words like French mais “but”, enfin “finally”, donc “thus”, which typically have what Pos called a “logical” use, can also function in a primarily emotive way: Mais Monsieur!, Enfin! (But sir, really!). Koo and Rhee (2013) analyzed Korean
sentence-final particles which express “discontent”, cf. the sentence-final use of what or or what in certain varieties of English (see Koo and Rhee (2012: 82) for references).

Intensifiers like very indicate that a certain property holds to a high degree (very nice, etc.). Some intensifiers, however, have the additional meaning that the high degree has an impact on the speaker, cf. Waksler (2012). Gutzmann and Turgay (2012: 150) call intensifiers of this type expressive intensifiers (EIs):

Semantically, the difference between EIs and standard degree elements is that beside their intensifying function, EIs convey an additional expressive speaker attitude, which is not part of the descriptive content of the sentence they occur in. That is, besides raising the degree to which the party was cool in (2) [Du hast gestern eine sau coole Party verpasst “yesterday, you missed a EI cool party”], sau expressively displays that the speaker is emotional about the degree to which the party was cool.

Foolen et al. (2013) collected new emotional intensifiers in Dutch and found that many of them are recruited from emotive content words, in particular from negatively laden content words, like akelig “scary”, gruwelijk “horribly”, etc. The preference for negative words as a source for intensifiers can be explained on the basis of two principles, or biases, see Jing-Schmidt (2007): the negativity bias and the positivity bias, also known as the Pollyanna hypothesis, as Boucher and Osgood (1969) called it. According to the negativity bias, negative feelings are stronger than positive feelings. This has an evolutionary explanation: it is more important to react to negative things which might harm you than to enjoy positive things. Enjoyment is a bonus, but need not be very strong to be adaptive. So negatively laden words are stronger and therefore better candidates for strong intensification. When they are grammaticalized into intensifiers, their literal meaning is backgrounded and their strong emotional meaning becomes the salient part of the meaning. The positivity bias claims that the baseline of everyday discourse is not neutral but positive. Recently, this idea has been tested empirically by García et al. (2012). First, they analyzed English, German, and Spanish lexica and found that averaging the emotional content over all the words in each of them leads to a neutral result. Next, they looked at language use and found that “the everyday usage frequency of these words . . . is strongly biased towards positive values, because words associated with a positive emotion are more frequently used than those associated with negative emotion” (p. 1). Like the negativity bias, the positivity bias can be explained from an evolutionary point of view: it motivates us to see the world in a sunny perspective, we like to be with people who ascribe to such a perspective, etc. When used against such a positive background, the negativity based intensifiers stand out even more strongly. Together, the negativity and positivity biases strengthen the impact of negative words when used as intensifiers.

5.3 Phonology

Non-segmental, prosodic aspects of sound structure provide many opportunities for coding expressive meaning; cf., among many others, Hancil (2009). But expressive phenomena on the segmental phonological level have also been observed, as will be briefly illustrated.

Myers-Schulz et al. (2013) show that phonemes are not emotionally neutral, they have an emotional connotation, for example depending on the rising and falling formants in consonants. In bupaba, the F2’s in all three labial consonants rise, in dugada, a word with non-labial consonants they fall. Myers-Schulz et al. asked subjects to pair these words with pictures of aggressive and cute dogs. It turned out that the subjects associate bupaba with the cute dog and dugada with the aggressive one. The authors conclude (p. 6) “that certain strings of
English phonemes have a non-arbitrary emotional quality, and, moreover, that the emotional quality can be predicted on the basis of specific acoustic features.” And they also claim (p. 7) “that our data suggest that Darth Vader (…) is an acoustically more appropriate name for an intergalactic miscreant than Barth Faber, by virtue of the downward frequency shifts and thus inherently negative emotional connotation.”

Phonetic variation in the articulation of phonemes, for example lengthening (cf. Mischler (2008)), can convey expressive meaning. Kochetov and Alderete (2011: 346) observe a type of palatalization

that is not phonologically conditioned, but has a specific iconic function, being associated with “smallness”, “childishness”, or “affection” (…). Expressive palatalization of this kind is used cross-linguistically in sound symbolism, diminutive morphology, hypocoristics, and in “babytalk” – conventionalized adults’ speech directed to small children.

In her research on American preadolescents, Eckert (2010: 97) found that “the fronting and backing of low vowels correlated with the expression of positive and negative emotional states, respectively”. Eckert’s general point is that sociolinguistic variation often has the function of affective display.

5.4 Morphology

In morphology, both derivation and compounding can involve expressive meaning. Among the derivational affixes, diminutive suffixes have been found to easily develop expressive meanings, cf. Volek (1987), Steriopololo (2008), and Fortin (2011); cf. also Schnoebeelen (2012), who did experimental-pragmatic and corpus linguistic research on emotive aspects of little. Rossi (2011) found that lexical reduplication (It’s a little little house, I want coffee coffee) can activate positive or negative affective evaluations.

Meibauer (2013) showed that in German compounds the expressive part can be put in the first or in the second position, cf. Arschgesicht “arse face” (first non-head part is pejorative) and Politikerarsch “politician arse” (with a final pejorative head). Hampe (2002) studied verb-particle constructions like cover up, tighten up, sketch out, etc., in which the particle is often considered redundant. According to Hampe (2002: 101), “a semantically redundant verb-particle construction can function as an index of an emotional involvement of the speaker, since it is the marked member of a formal opposition between two elements: a simple verb and a verb-particle construction”. When we consider surprise as an emotion, mirative evidentials can be considered as expressives as well, cf. Rett and Murray (2013). Mirative evidentials (often coded by affixes, like in Turkish) indicate “that a particular proposition has violated the speaker’s expectations” (p. 3). A condition on the use of mirative evidentials is that the content of the proposition must have been discovered by the speaker just before the utterance (Wow, Bill has a new car!). Rett and Murray (2013: 4) call this the “recency restriction” on mirativity. This is in line with the indexical property of expressives, as discussed in section 4.

5.5 Syntax

Lambrecht (1990) analyzed the incredulity response construction in English (What, me worry?). Potts and Roeper (2006) included this construction in their study on expressive small clauses (You idiot!), see also Arsenijević (2007) for discussion of Potts and Roeper’s paper. Günthner (2011) analyzed similar “dense constructions” (utterances without a finite verb, like ich in die Bahnhofshalle “I went into the station concourse”), in German.
Hübeler (1998) studied grammatical devices in different periods of English, like possessive dative, ethic dative, the present perfect, periphrastic *do*, the *get*-passive, “which function, at one time or another within the course of roughly a thousand years, as primary means of indexically expressing emotional attitudes toward propositional states of affairs” (p. 187).

Foolen (2004) made a comparative study of the *hell of a job* construction in Germanic and Romance languages. In Dutch, this construction is rather productive. The first N is typically occupied by a valenced word like *schat* “treasure” or *duivel* “devil”, but more neutral words like *wolk* “cloud”, *kast* “cupboard”, *boom* “tree” or *dijk* “dike” occur as well. When such words are used, the construction forces foregrounding of the emotive associations we possibly have with this word; in *boom* “tree”, for example, the size and the associated impressiveness will be typically foregrounded. In certain contexts, this impressiveness can be further interpreted as threatening impressiveness: *een boom van een kerel kwam op me af* “a tree of a guy approached me” (suggesting that the speaker was emotionally affected in some way, for example being impressed or frightened). Another construction that often involves expressive meaning is provided by dependent sentences used independently (insubordinate constructions, as Evans (2007) called them), like *that you dare to do that!*

Hoeksema and Napoli (2008) studied constructions like *Let’s get the hell out of here* and *I beat the hell out of him*, which typically contain a taboo term (like *hell* in these examples). Corver (2014) investigated the internal syntax of complex curse expressions in Dutch. Legallois (2012) analyzed a French construction containing the phrase *histoire de + infinitive*, like in *On va leur téléphoner, histoire de voir s’ils sont là* “Let’s ring them up, just to see if they’re there”. As Legallois points out (p. 269), “the attitude [expressed by the construction] is very difficult to describe: it consists in a kind of detachment from the speaker, with regard to the motivation of the process X”. Whereas expressive constructions typically convey a strong attitude, this construction seems to indicate that “it is not a big deal if X is not the case”. Amaral (2013) studied the *vivir*+V [Gerund] construction in the Spanish of Bogotá and found (p. 196) that “[b]y using this construction, the speaker conveys the implication that the event occurs more frequently than it [sic] should be the case (given the speaker’s expectations)”.

Horn (2013) studied certain uses of dative first and second person pronouns, which are known in the literature as non-argument, free, ethical, or personal datives. This use of the dative is normal in spoken standard German, but also occurs in certain varieties of English, like in *I need me a Coke*. According to Horn (2013: 167) such pronouns contribute “subject affect”: “the speaker assumes that the action expressed has or would have a positive effect on the subject, typically satisfying the subject’s perceived intention or goals.” Note that the affect is attributed to the subject of the sentence, who is, however, in utterances with this type of dative, typically identical to the speaker.

### 6 Speech acts and discourse

In Searle’s (1976) classification of illocutionary acts, expressive speech acts constitute one of the five classes (the others are representatives, directives, commissives, and declarations). According to Searle’s definition (1976: 12):

> the illocutionary point of this class is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. The paradigms of expressive verbs are ‘thank’, ‘congratulate’, ‘apologize’, ‘condole’, ‘deplore’, and ‘welcome’.
In the past, speech act research has not focused on expressive speech acts, but this might change, now that expressivity is gaining more attention in general, cf. King and van Roojen (2013) on praising and blaming, Oishi (2013) on apologies, Vingerhoets et al. (2013) on swearing, and Alfonzetti (2013) on compliments.

There has been quite a lot of discussion about the relation between exclamative sentence types (and whether such sentence types can be distinguished at all) and the class of expressive speech acts, cf. Villalba (2008) and the contributions in Krause and Ruge (eds) (2004). Rett (2011) provides a formal-semantic analysis of exclamation as a speech act, claiming that it makes a difference whether the speech act is realized as what she calls a sentence exclamation, formed with a declarative sentence (Wow, John bakes delicious desserts!) or “with something other than a declarative sentence” (Rett 2011: 412), called exclamatives. Rett distinguishes three types of exclamatives: wh-exclamative (My, what delicious desserts John bakes!), inversion exclamatives (Boy, does John bake delicious desserts!) and nominal exclamatives (My, the delicious desserts John bakes!). Interestingly, exclamatives have a falling intonation pattern, whereas declarative exclamations are rising (Rett 2011: 413).

Expressive language use “happens” in real discourse (cf. Baider and Cislaru eds. 2014). The expressive aspect of discourse has gained attention in different frameworks. In the context of conversation analysis, Du Bois and Kärkkäinen (2012: 435) point out that affect is seen here primarily “as crucially involving public display to others within the context of social interaction”. They discuss expressive meaning as an important aspect of “stance”. See for further conversational work on emotion in interaction the contributions in Peräkylä and Sorjonen (2012).

Maynard (2002) studied linguistic emotivity from the perspective of what she calls “Place of Negotiation” theory. Stylistic shift is one of the devices she analyzes, for example how the use of unexpected verb morphology (Japanese informal da instead of formal desu/masu) contributes to expressivity. Another framework is Systemic Functional Grammar, in which expressive meaning is considered as one aspect of the broader functional category “interpersonal meaning”, cf. Thompson (2008: 171): “All acts of appraisal are in essence expressions of the appraiser’s positive or negative feelings about something”. Appraisal, evaluation and affect are the main labels used in this framework, cf. Bednarek (2008) and Thompson and Alba-Juez (2014).

A different line of research focuses on what is called “semantic prosody” (see Chapter 6), the phenomenon that in a text different words and constructions are on the same emotive wavelength, cf. Ebeling (2013: 1): “Semantic prosody can be defined as the evaluative meaning of extended lexical units.” An example is English cause, both as a verb and a noun, which typically co-occurs with negatively evaluated items. Ebeling (2013) studies this item and its translations into Norwegian. For a critical discussion of the assumptions of the semantic prosody approach see Steward (2010).

An important text type for the study of “emotional language” is narrative. As Labov (2013: 227) points out, the main aim of narrative is “the residual emotional impact on the reader.” Labov (1972: 378–380) already observed expressive phonology, quantifiers (I knocked him all out in the street), repetition and gesture as means for intensifying the narrative (cf. also Romano, Porto and Molina (2013)). The affective impact of literary narratives is strengthened by “the use of metaphors, sound play and repetition of words” (Sandford and Emmott (2012: 195)). See also Burke (2011) for research on the affective dimension of literary reading. In his (2006) study, Burke showed that the choice for indirect, direct or free indirect discourse makes a difference with respect to the expressive quality of spoken and written discourse. An increasingly important genre is computer-mediated language. Research on the emotive aspect of this type of texts is expanding,
cf. Vandergriff (2013), who analyzed emoticons, non-standard and multiple punctuation (‘. . .’ ‘!!!’), and lexical surrogates (‘hmmm’).

With the availability of big corpora, searching and analyzing expressive content gets a new methodological turn, cf. Potts and Schwarz (2008) and Constant et al. (2009). The computer linguistic enterprise to automatize the search for emotive cues in big corpora is known as ‘sentiment analysis’, cf. Ahmad (2011). A central methodological question is in what way expressive elements in texts can be identified: are there any formal diagnostics to distinguish them from elements with non-expressive meaning? A challenge for the future will be to program computers in such a way that they can automatically produce and process expressive aspects of language use, cf. Ovesdotter Alm (2012).

7 Conclusion

It is the fine detail in which we can talk about the world (the outside as well as our private inside world) which makes language such a powerful communicative tool. The dominant traditional view is that we have our bodies (face, voice, posture) to indicate how we feel about what we are telling the other about the world. But what the present chapter has intended to show is that the distinction between descriptive language and expressive body is not absolute. Language isn’t a purely rational tool. Meanings are partly emotive, and language takes its share in expressing our feelings and attitudes towards what we are talking about. In reverse, our body and senses participate in conceptualization and expression, as research on gesture (cf. Müller et al. (2013)) has made increasingly clear in recent years.

Looking at the linguistic landscape of the early 2010s, we can conclude that the marginal role that has been traditionally attributed to the expressive function of language is not that marginal anymore. But questions like the following are still central on the research agenda: Which feelings can be or are typically expressed via expressives? Do languages differ in how big a part expressives take in the totality of the language system and do they differ in their structural preferences for coding expressive meaning? Is there a principled difference between verbal and non-verbal expression of feelings, for example between a painful face and screaming ouch? To answer this last question, the semantic study of expressives has to be embedded in a framework of multi-modal communication studies. The increased availability of video-recorded and transcribed verbal interaction data is the best antidote to the written language bias and this will certainly lead to more descriptive research on expressive language. This research will, hopefully, also contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the descriptive-expressive contrast and the relation between expressivity and such notions as “commitment (cf. De Brabanter and Dendale (2008)) and “subjectivity” (cf. Baumgarten et al. (2012)). Integrating these different approaches to the scientific study of “self-expression” of the speaker (cf. Lyons 1981: 240) and the role of emotion in human communication is one of the challenges of future semantic research.

Further reading


References


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**Related topics**

Chapter 2, Internalist semantics; Chapter 3, History of semantics; Chapter 5, Cognitive semantics; Chapter 6, Corpus semantics; Chapter 8, Embodiment, simulation and meaning.