

Epithets: Implicature and Information

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Definite descriptions, like *the pig* behave differently in prosodically prominent (2) and non-prominent (1) environments. (I hate Jack but . . .)

- (1) Mary KISSED the pig.
- (2) Mary kissed the PIG.

In (2) the definite description picks out a uniquely salient pig. In the unaccented environment (1) the definite description *the pig* is an epithet. It behaves like a pronoun in referring to some antecedent, in this case *Jack*, while providing some additional expressive content.

Potts (2003) proposes that epithets are part of a class of meanings called Conventional Implicatures (CIs). CI are lexical speaker-oriented commitments that are independent from the central at-issue meaning of a sentence. The CI characterization captures the intuition that a sentence like (1) can be faithfully paraphrased by the pair of propositions: (a) *Mary kissed Jack* and (b) *Jack is a pig*.

The current analysis adopts the indexed determiner in (3) from Elbourne's NP-deletion account of donkey anaphora (Elbourne 2005). This allows for a unified treatment of the determiner across standard and epithetic definite descriptions (contra Potts).

- (3) $\llbracket \text{the} \rrbracket = \lambda f_{\langle e,t \rangle}. \lambda g : g \in D_{\langle e,t \rangle} \ \& \ \exists ! x (f(x) = 1 \ \& \ g(x) = 1). \ \iota x (f(x) = 1 \ \& \ g(x) = 1)$

On this approach the NP of a standard definite description saturates the second argument of the determiner. But in epithets the CI NP, placing no restrictions on the identity of the referent, is not an argument of the determiner. Instead the determiner is saturated by the element in (4). The referent provided by the fully composed determiner then composes with the CI NP.

- (4) $\llbracket \text{DEACCENT} \rrbracket = \lambda x [x = x]$

DEACCENT is simply a name for the element in (4), but it is an intuitive one. While standard and epithetic definite descriptions are not distinguished in their segment level phonology, they do differ in their ability to bear utterance level prominence. Previous accounts of have attributed the lack of prominence on epithets to some notion of givenness (Umbach 2002). But in (1) there are no independent criteria by which it is given that the speaker believes Jack to be a pig. This requires revising the concept of linguistic givenness, otherwise it is reduced meaning 'unaccented'.

Given the independence displayed by CI elements in the semantics it is reasonable to suppose that independence extends to other components of the grammar. Sentence prosody in English is a way to encode the Information Structure of an utterance (Vallduví 1993). A working hypothesis is that Information Structural accent placement algorithms will be insensitive to CI elements.

Elbourne, P. 2005. *Situations and individuals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Potts, C. 2003. The logic of conventional implicatures. Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz.

Umbach, C. 2002. (De)accenting definite descriptions. *Theoretical Linguistics* 27:251-280.

Vallduví, Enric. 1993. The informational component. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

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