That damn idiot! Expressives, definite descriptions, and reference

Daniel Gutzmann
Universität zu Köln

daniel.gutzmann@uni-koeln.de

The debate around the literal, attribute use of definite descriptions and their referential use focuses on what could be called *descriptive descriptions*, as the content of the description contains descriptive content.

(1)   **The man with the Martini** is the murderer.

The well-known case of misdescriptions – when the content of the description does not match the intended referent but reference nevertheless succeeds – are all based on the idea that the content of the description may not be true for the intended referent.

In this context, it is interesting to have a look at what could be called *expressive descriptions*, which look like standard definite descriptions but whose content contains only in the sense of **Kaplan 1999**.

(2)   **That damn idiot** is the murderer.

These are interesting for the debate regarding descriptions and reference for several reasons. First, „misdescriptions" in the sense that the (subjective) content of an expressive description may not be shared between speaker and hearer commonly occur with expressive descriptions. Second, since expressive content is use-conditional rather than truth-conditional and commonly assumed to reside in different meaning dimension (Potts 2007), the question of what happens to the truth of the asserted content – one of the main issues regarding the referential use of descriptions – does not raise in the first place.

The similarities and differences between descriptive and expressive descriptions will be used to provide additional arguments in favor of a unified analysis of both descriptive and expressive referential descriptions in a multidimensional framework along the lines of Gutzmann & McCready 2014.

Literatur: • Gutzmann, Daniel & Eric McCready. 2014. Using descriptions. Submitted to Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics 10. 55–72. • Kaplan, David. 1999. The meaning of *ouch* and *oops.* Ms. University of California, Los Angeles. • Potts, Christopher. 2007. The expressive dimension. Theoretical Linguistics 33(2). 165– 197.