Interpretations of the embedded expressive motto in Japanese: Varieties of meaning and projectivity

Osamu Sawada
Mie University
sawado@human.mie-u.ac.jp

Recent studies of expressives have shown that when expressives such as damn in English are embedded in the complement of an attitude predicate, they not only can be speaker-oriented, but also can be non-speaker oriented (Amaral et al. 2007; Harris & Potts 2009; Tonhauser et al., 2013). Amaral et al. (2007) and Harris and Potts (2009) have suggested this phenomenon is an instance of indexicality/pragmatic phenomenon (cf. Schlenker’s semantic binding approach).

In this paper, I will investigate the interpretations of embedded expressives from new data, i.e., the Japanese comparative expressive motto, and argue that the interpretation of the embedded motto is not purely pragmatic (not just a matter of indexicality), and that both semantic and pragmatic mechanisms can be involved. The expressive motto conventionally implicates that “the expected degree is much greater than a current degree” and often pragmatically triggers a speaker’s complaint (Sawada 2014). What is interesting about motto is its variation in meaning and projectivity. When it is embedded under an attitude predicate, it is always subject-oriented and its meaning is within the scope of an attitude predicate (it is an expressive in the subject’s belief). However, if a deontic modal is inserted in the main clause, both a speaker-oriented reading, which is a conventional implicature (CI), and a subject-oriented reading, which is an at-issue meaning, become available.

I argue that (i) there can be a dimensional shift from a CI to a secondary at-issue entailment at a clausal level in a non-speaker-oriented reading, and that (ii) there is a type, a dependent projective content which requires a consistency between at-issue and CI meanings (including a judge).