Expressive Small Clauses in Japanese[*]

Yu Izumi[1] and Shintaro Hayashi[1]

Nanzan University, Department of Anthropology and Philosophy,
18 Yamazato-cho, Showa-ku, Nagoya, Aichi 466-8673, Japan
`yuizumi@nanzan-u.ac.jp`   `sh0211@nanzan-u.ac.jp`

Abstract. This paper modifies and extends Potts and Roeper's (2006) analysis of simple uses of epithets such as *You fool!*, what they call Expressive Small Clauses, to analogous phrases in Japanese. The original Potts and Roeper analysis is unable to account for two puzzling characteristics of Japanese Expressive Small Clauses, which we cannot observe in those in English: first, the use of a second person pronoun is not permitted in the Japanese counterparts, whereas many other forms of pronouns and non-pronominal nouns are available; and second, something like "you fool" in Japanese can indeed occur as an argument of a sentence. Drawing on the recent syntactic literature on the morphological variation of analogous uses of epithets, we propose an account that explains why there are differences between English and Japanese Expressive Small Clauses.

1 Introduction

In recent years linguistic studies have been making contributions to understanding the socially problematic aspect of language use, including slurring, dog whistling, propaganda, and hate speech (Potts 2007; Croom 2011; Langton 2012; Stanley 2015 among others). Seemingly simple insults referred to as "Expressive Small Clauses" (ESC) by (Potts and Roeper 2006, henceforth P&R), illustrated in (1), are also a part of "fighting words" that can provoke an audience and even incite violence (Greenawalt 1995).[1]

(1)   a.   Oh, You fool!
       b.   You idiot!

According to P&R, an ESC has no covert functional structure, and its expressive meaning is solely due to the lexical property of the employed noun; for example, (2a) can be analyzed as (2b), where E is an expressive type that allows no further semantic computation.

(2)   a.   You fool!
       b.   fool (you) : E (P&R 2006, p.196, ex.40)

      you : e fool : $\langle e, E \rangle$

[1] To be accurate, P&R focus on ESCs used as self-disapprobation, not on those used to insult others, but their analysis applies to other-directed ESCs as well.

Crucially, P&R use the normal Function Application in (2b), not a multidimensional composition rule that would preserve a descriptive meaning of type e as part of the overall multidimensional meaning. Since E is sealed from further semantic composition, this analysis explains why an ESC is never used in argument position and generally unembeddable, as shown in (3–4).

(3) a.   You fools should read more carefully.

   b.   * You fool should read more carefully.

<div align="right">(P&R 2006, p.197, ex.44)</div>

(4)   * I consider you fool/nincompoop/screwball.

<div align="right">(P&R 2006, p.187, ex.15a)</div>

This paper modifies and extends P&R's expressive analysis of ESCs to analogous insults in Japanese. First, section 2 introduces Japanese ESCs and discusses how they differ from the English counterparts, showing that the original P&R analysis is unable to account for two puzzling characteristics of Japanese ESCs. Second, drawing on the recent syntactic literature on the morphological variation of ESCs, section 3 offers solutions to the puzzles identified in section 2.

2   Two Puzzles about Japanese ESCs

2.1   What Are ESCs in Japanese?

P&R present (5a–b) as instances of Japanese ESCs, but neither of them is obviously analogous to (1) above.

(5) a. Ore tte   baka da   na.
        me TOPIC idiot COPULA PART
        "I am such a fool"

   b. Ore tte   o-baka-san.
        me TOPIC HON-idiot-HON

<div align="right">(P&R 2006, p.192, ex.31, the translation added by the authors)</div>

First, since (5a) includes the copula *da*, it fails to meet P&R's own criterion of ESCs, according to which they are "necessarily verbless" (p.184). Second, as opposed to ESCs, which are highly productive as noted by P&R, (5b) isn't compatible with a different noun, as the contrast between (6) and (7) clearly indicates: (7) is simply incomprehensible even with enough contextual information analogous to (6). The contrast suggests that the phrase *o-baka-san* is a conventional idiom.

(6) a. You are trying to make allies again. You politician!

   b. You broke a glass again. You elephant!   (Arsenijević 2007, p.89, ex.4)

(7) */?? Ore tte   o-seijika/zou-san.
        me TOPIC HON-politician/elephant-HON

Third, the straightforward interpretation of (5a–b) is more aligned with the full-sentential counterparts of (1) (*I'm a fool*, etc.). (5a–b) just don't seem to express emotive frustration about a present circumstance unlike (1); they are most naturally understood as a self-deprecating observation about one's stable property such as character and habit.

Based on these considerations, we doubt that (5a–b) are ESCs in P&R's sense. In any case, whether P&R's original examples turn out to be ESCs, there are obvious counterparts of (1) in Japanese, where two nouns are intervened by the genitive marker *no*. (8) contains a first-person pronoun and corresponds to an ESC used as self-disapprobation, while the examples in (9) contain a non-pronominal noun, and they are used as insults directed at others.

(8) Ore/Watashi no   baka/usotsuki!
    1st.sing   GEN fool/liar

(9) a. Oneechan/Okaasan no   baka/usotsuki! (kinship terms)
       sister/mother   GEN fool/liar

    b. Tanaka/Sacchan no baka/usotsuki! (proper names)

    c. Sensei/Shacho no baka/usotsuki! ("teacher"/"CEO")

    d. Taifuu/Teisupe Pasokon no baka/usotsuki! ("typhoon"/"low-spec PC") (from the Internet)

    e. Ko-no baka/usotsuki! ("this")

The pattern here—"Noun 1-*no*-Noun 2"—is highly productive, and one can be creative about the choice of the second noun; for example, *Ko-no seijika!* ("You politician!") would be totally fine with enough contextual information. It is also worth noting that the presence of the genitive marker is similar to ESCs in most Scandinavian languages, as extensively discussed by Julien (2016) (e.g., *Din dust!* "your fool" in Norwegian). In the remainder of the current paper, we assume that phrases like (8) and (9) are the counterparts of (1) in Japanese.

2.2   The First Puzzle

The first puzzle about Japanese ESCs is that the use of a second person pronoun in the "Noun 1" position is clearly degraded, as in (10), even though all other nouns that have a vocative use are acceptable in the same position, as we have seen in (9a–e) above.

(10) ?? Anata/Omae/Kisama/Temee   no   baka/usotsuki!
        2nd.sing (progressively more impolite forms) GEN fool/liar

In vocatives, the second person pronouns are just as acceptable as the other nouns here (*Anata/Oneechan, kocchi kite!* "You/Sister, come here!"). Then, what is so special about the second person pronouns in ESCs?

The P&R original analysis of ESCs on its own has no resource to address this puzzle. If a first person pronoun in Japanese were analyzed as an expression of type e to account for the acceptable case (8), then the analysis would have to predict (10) to be acceptable as well, unless one rejects the very plausible view that the first and second person pronouns are assigned the same basic semantic type.

One may suggest that some idiosyncratic syntactic property of the Japanese pronominal system deems examples like (10) illicit. Such a syntactic restriction is, however, not in the offing. Note, first, that (10) is not obviously ungrammatical—it merely sounds odd, and second, that there is no independently motivated restriction on the person of subjects in Japanese that would exclusively rule out second person pronouns. Some predicates of direct experience in Japanese are known to restrict the person of their subjects, but as (11) below indicates, they exclude everything but the first person subjects (Kuroda 1973; Kuno 1973; Tenny 2006, among others).

(11) Watashi/*Anata/*Tanaka wa kanashii yo.
      1st.sing/2nd.sing/Tanaka TOP sad   part

      "I am/you are/Tanaka is sad."

Thus, in what follows, instead of seeking a general restriction on the second person pronouns, we will derive the oddity of (10) in the semantic composition of Japanese ESCs.

2.3 The Second Puzzle

The second puzzle about Japanese ESCs is that, unlike (3b) above, at least some of the Japanese ESCs mentioned above can be licitly used as an argument, as shown by (12). Importantly, however, such argumental ESCs lack a contextual requirement for proto-typical ESCs, i.e., the addressees of ESCs need to be the very individuals picked up by the first nouns of the ESCs, as in (13a). Consider (13b), where an ESC is coupled with a vocative use of the name *Yamada*. Assuming *Yamada* and *Tanaka* are not coreferential, (13b) hardly makes sense. This is because the addressee of (13b) is fixed by the vocative *Yamada*, and that is incompatible with the conflicting addressee introduced by the ESC subject *Tanaka*. By contrast, (12) shows that the referent of an argumental ESC doesn't have to be the addressee of the utterance.

(12) (Addressing at Yamada)

      Oi   Yamada, **Tanaka no baka** ga   mata shippai-shita yo.
      Hey Yamada, **Tanaka GEN fool** NOM again mistake-did   PART

      "Hey Yamada, that fool Tanaka made a mistake again."

(13) a. Oi   Tanaka, **Tanaka no baka**!
          Hey Tanaka, **Tanaka GEN fool**

      b. # Oi   Yamada, **Tanaka no baka**!
            Hey Yamada, **Tanaka GEN fool**

The P&R analysis of ESCs is incompatible with (12) because an argumental ESC is precisely what their semantic system is designed to exclude (recall that according to P&R, an ESC overall yields a meaning of type E, which cannot be an argument of a sentence).

One may suggest that *baka* ("fool") is ambiguous between the expressive and descriptive interpretations ($\langle e, E \rangle$ vs $\langle e, t \rangle$), and *Tanaka no baka* in (12) isn't an ESC after

all (probably, *baka* is a modifier of *Tanaka*). Although the underlying intuition here points to the right direction (as we will see below), merely appealing to ambiguity leads to more problems. Why can't we say the same thing for *fool* in English? For P&R, *fool* is ambiguous to begin with. Then, what makes *baka* in (12) so different from *fool* in (3b) that an argumental ESC is permitted only in the former? There must be a principled explanation for the differences between (12) and (3b).

To summarize, Japanese ESCs are different from the English counterparts in that, first, second person pronouns are not allowed in Japanese ESCs, and second, an argumental ESC is sometimes allowed in Japanese, but not in English. In what follows, we will propose to solve these two puzzles at one fell swoop by making modifications to the P&R analysis of ESCs.


3 (Dis)solving the Puzzles

3.1 Our Proposal

To account for the two puzzling phenomena presented in the previous section, we would like to propose a modified analysis of ESCs that retains P&R's basic insight—that ESCs are expressives. Our analysis is designed to encompass the following two points.

(14) What P&R dubbed ESCs are not literally 'small clauses' consisting minimally of the subject and the predicate, but they have more structure than meets the eye.

(15) The locus of the expressive property of an ESC is not an epithet noun such as *fool* in itself; rather, its expressive meaning is derived with the help of another syntactic head located above the epithet noun.

(14) is, we think, not much contentious. Scholars such as Julien (2016) and Corver (2008) cross-linguistically examine ESCs ("possessive predicational vocatives" in Julien's terminology, and "evaluative vocatives" in Corver's), and they both propose that there is an independent syntactic head that is responsible for the **predication relation** between the subject and the predicate of an ESC. To give a concrete example, according to Julien (2016), the Norwegian ESC *din lille fjott* ("you little dork") is analyzed as having a head called "Pred," which semantically connects "you" and "little dork" by means of predication; an ESC is not a mere concatenation of two nominals. (15) is concerned with what we have pointed out in section 2.3; simply regarding epithet nouns as lexically ambiguous between descriptive and expressive interpretations would fail to capture the above-mentioned differences between Japanese and English ESCs. We thus have to attribute the source of the expressive meaning to something else. We identify it with a higher syntactic head in the structure.

We also assume that Japanese is an NP language (Bošković 2012; Izumi 2011; Takahashi 2011, among many others), where NPs on their own can be an argument of a sentence without being headed by some functional element such as a D. This assumption together with the view that an ESC includes a predicational structure implies that English and Japanese ESCs are structurally different, as represented by (16).

(16) a.   (English)

D   E-Pred   NP
|
you   fool

b.   (Japanese)

pro$_1$
     E-Pred   NP

          Tanaka no baka
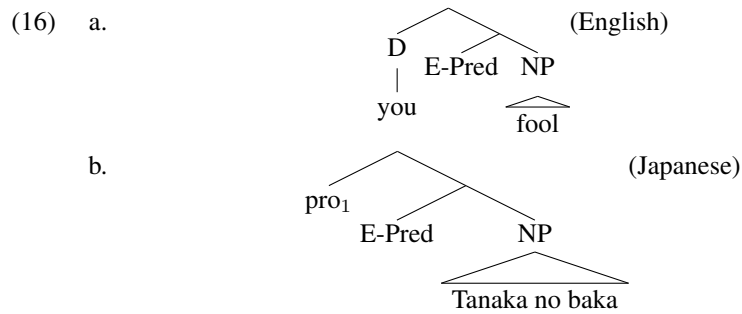
Here, NPs are a complement of an E-Pred, and the English pronouns are inserted higher than that (possibly as D). Since E-Pred requires an argument of type e, we also posit a *pro* to serve as the subject of a Japanese ESC. The gist of the proposal is that an E-Pred serves as a functional head responsible for the predication relation, which is more or less equivalent to Julien's and Corver's treatment of the predication inside ESCs.[2]

Let us now turns to the semantics of E-Pred. The basic idea is that it turns a descriptive nominal predicate into an expressive one. For present purposes, we can implement the idea by taking it as an expression of type $\langle\langle e,t\rangle,\langle e,E\rangle\rangle$, which takes an NP and imposes an expressive interpretation on it. For concreteness, we represent an expressive meaning in terms of sets of contexts (Predelli 2013; Gutzmann 2015). For example, something like (17) can be said to reflect the observation that an ESC containing a derogatory noun is felicitously used only if the speaker intends to insult the addressee by referring to the addressee with that noun.

(17) $[\![$ E-Pred $]\!]^c = \lambda P_{\langle e,t\rangle}.\lambda x.\{c' : c'_S = c_S$ and $c'_A = c_A$ and x is c'_A and c'_S considers c'_A to be unfavorably describable as being $P\}$
(where c_S is the speaker of context c and c_A is the addressee of c)

In other words, a context in which an ESC is appropriately used is where the utterer of the ESC is expressing a derogatory attitude toward the hearer by calling her with the noun in that ESC.

We also adopt Noguchi's (1997) view that Japanese personal pronouns are NPs as well as what philosophers call "Predicativism" about names, at least, with respect to Japanese proper names, according to which proper names are nominal predicates (Burge 1973, Elbourne 2005, Matushansky 2008, Izumi 2012, Fara 2015, among others). If we prefer a simpler, unified semantics for all NPs in Japanese, then it would be reasonable to suppose that personal pronouns and proper names in Japanese are both expressions of type $\langle e,t\rangle$, and within the present framework, the following illustrates their lexical meanings:

(18) $[\![$ anata $]\!]^c = \lambda x.x$ is c_A

(19) $[\![$ Tanaka $]\!]^c = \lambda x.x$ is called "Tanaka"[3]

---

[2] See also (Bowers 1993) for the idea that predication in general is established by a functional head.

[3] A referential use of proper names can be derived using a type-shifting rule, which is needed anyway to derive a referential use of a bare common noun in Japanese (Izumi 2012).

Now, the derivation for *You fool!* based on the proposed structure (16a) is the same as the original P&R analysis (2b), except that *fool* is unambiguous and first turned into an expressive predicate by E-Pred.

The derivation for the Japanese ESC (16b) proceeds in a parallel fashion:

(20) a. ⟦ Tanaka no baka ⟧^{c} = $\lambda x.x$ is called "Tanaka" and a fool (via Predicate Modification)

b. ⟦ E-Pred Tanaka no baka ⟧^{c} = $\lambda x.\{c' : x$ is $c'_A(= c_A)$ and $c'_S(= c_S)$ considers c'_A to be unfavorably describable as being called "Tanaka" and a fool} (via Function Application)

c. ⟦ pro$_1$ E-Pred Tanaka no baka ⟧^{c} = $\{c' :$ the individual referred to by pro$_1$ is $c'_A(= c_A)$ and $c'_S(= c_S)$ considers c'_A to be unfavorably describable as being called "Tanaka" and a fool} (via Function Application and Traces and Pronouns for pro$_1$)

Thus, apart from the additional nominal predicate *Tanaka*, the English and Japanese ESCs (16a–b) are analyzed as having the same expressive meaning: the speaker expresses an insulting attitude toward the addressee.

One may worry that, by presenting the second step as (20b), we are claiming that the addressee of (16b) is insulted by being called "Tanaka." This outcome would be incongruous with an intuitive reading of (16b). That is not what (17) implies, however, because it states that the addressee is insulted by being called with the whole NP, not just its part (a fake diamond is not a diamond). Also, note that the first noun in an ESC could contribute a negative, derogatory meaning to the whole NP, as in the "low-spec PC" example in (9d). Admittedly, the assumption we make for (20a) is simplistic ignoring the NP internal structure and the possible contribution of the genitive marker to the overall NP meaning. To be precise about the internal semantics of NPs, we would need to specify a theory of genitive constructions in Japanese. The simplistic assumption is adequate for present purposes, however.

3.2 A Solution to the First Puzzle

Applying the same derivation as (20) to the unacceptable (10), we obtain:

(21) ⟦ pro$_1$ E-Pred Anata no baka ⟧^{c} = $\{c' :$ the individual referred to by pro$_1$ is $c'_A(= c_A)$ and $c'_S(= c_S)$ considers $c'_A(= c_A)$ to be unfavorably describable as being c_A and a fool}

This should sound odd, if not incoherent, because $c'_A(= c_A)$ is described **as $\mathbf{c_A}(= \mathbf{c'_A})$**, namely, the addressee of the context is described **as the addressee of the context**—a redundant way of describing someone. We claim that this type of redundancy explains why a second person pronoun in Japanese ESCs is almost unacceptable but not obviously ungrammatical.

To put differently, an ESC always targets the addressee of the context (though the addressee is sometimes the speaker herself), and so a Japanese second person pronoun, which behaves like a predicate and thereby contributes the semantic information of "being the addressee" to the overall meaning, would be redundant in an ESC.

3.3 A Solution to (or a Dissolution of) the Second Puzzle

Since NPs on their own can occur as arguments in Japanese, the NP *Tanaka no baka* ("Tanaka GEN fool") is licitly used as an argument; in other words, (12) in fact contains no genuine ESC, and the lack of E-Pred explains the lack of an expressive meaning in (12). On the other hand, in the case of English, neither *you fool* nor *fool* is permitted in argument position, because the former only has an expressive meaning of type E and the latter is a mere NP, which must be headed by a D to be an argument in DP languages.

By offering this solution we can be seen as dissolving the second puzzle about ESCs, rather than solving it, because we deny that (12) has an ESC, understood as an expressive phrase, concurring with P&R that no ESC can be an argument of a sentence. Our account is an improvement over P&R's insofar as it captures the differences between English and Japanese ESCs, while explaining why some genitive NPs in Japanese are not really ESCs.

4 Concluding Remarks

We have presented two puzzling phenomena involving Japanese slurring ESCs and proposed possible solutions to the puzzles by modifying the P&R analysis of English ESCs. The proposal is mainly based on the NP/DP language distinction, so future studies must examine if there is a systematic difference between ESCs in NP and DP languages. Another research question is how to understand the internal structure of NPs in Japanese ESCs—What is the relation between the first noun and the second noun? What is the nature of the genitive marker *no*? Whether it turns out to be empirically tenable, our proposal opens up many research questions concerning the structure and meaning of nominal expressions.

References

Arsenijević, B.: Disapprobation expressions are vocative epithets. ACLC Working Papers **2**(2) (2007) 87–98

Bošković, v.: Phases in NPs/DPs. In 'Angel J. Gallego, ed.: Phases: Developing the Framework. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin (2012) 343–383

Bowers, J.: The syntax of predication. Linguistic Inquiry **24**(4) (1993) 591–656

Burge, T.: Reference and proper names. The Journal of Philosophy **70**(14) (1973) 425–439

Corver, N.: Uniformity and diversity in the syntax of evaluative vocatives. Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics **11** (2008) 43–93

Croom, A.M.: Slurs. Language Sciences **33** (2011) 343–358

Elbourne, P.D.: Situations and Individuals. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2005)

Fara, D.G.: Names as predicates. Philosophical Review **124** (2015) 59–117

Greenawalt, K.: Fighting Words: Individuals, Communities, and Liberties of Speech. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey (1995)

Gutzmann, D.: Use-Conditional Meaning: Studies in Multidimensional Semantics. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2015)

Izumi, Y.: Interpreting bare nouns: Type-shifting vs. Silent heads. In: The Proceedings of the 21st Semantics and Linguistics Theory. (2011) 481–494

Izumi, Y.: The Semantics of Proper Names and Other Bare Nominals. PhD thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland (2012)

Julien, M.: Possessive predicational vocatives in Scandinavian. Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics **19** (2016) 75–108

Kuno, S.: The structure of the Japanese Language. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1973)

Kuroda, S.Y.: Where epistemology, style and grammar meet: A case study from Japanese. In Kiparsky, P., Anderson, S.R., eds.: A Festschrift for Morris Halle. Holt, Rinehart & Winston (1973) 377–391

Langton, R.: Beyond belief: Pragmatics in hate speech and pornography. In Maitra, I., McGowan, M.K., eds.: Speech and Harm: Controversies over Free Speech. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2012) 72–93

Matushansky, O.: On the linguistic complexity of proper names. Linguistics and Philosophy **31**(5) (2008) 573–627

Noguchi, T.: Two types of pronouns and variable binding. Language **73. 4** (1997) 770 – 797

Potts, C.: The expressive dimension. Theoretical Linguistics **33** (2007) 165–198

Potts, C., Roeper, T.: The narrowing acquisition path: From declarative to expressive small clauses. In Progovac, L., Paesani, K., Casielles-Suárez, E., Barton, E., eds.: The Syntax of Nonsententials: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives. John Benjamins, Amsterdam (2006) 183–201

Predelli, S.: Meaning Without Truth. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2013)

Stanley, J.: How Propaganda Works. Princeton University Press, New Jersey (2015)

Takahashi, M.: Some Theoretical Consequences of Case-marking in Japanese. PhD thesis, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut (2011)

Tenny, C.L.: Evidentiality, experiencers, and the syntax of sentience in Japanese. Journal of East Asian Linguistics **15** (2006) 245–288