The syntax of adnominal expressives from a cross-linguistic perspective

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Expressive adjectives (EAs) of the *damn*-type in English are known for having many perplexing syntactic and semantic properties (Potts 2005). One of such properties is what Gutzmann (2019) calls *argument extension*, i.e., the fact that in many imaginable scenarios, the syntactic argument of the EA does not match its interpretation. For instance, in the sentence in (1), the most natural reading is that the speaker is emotional about what the entire proposition denotes, not about the semantic value of the NP *cake*.

(1)   The dog ate the *fucking* cake.

Other expressive operators do not behave the same, e.g., epithets like *that idiot Andrés* are cases in which semantic modification matches syntactic combination. Gutzmann (2019:264-265) conjectures that the difference may refer to grammatical category, namely, nominal vs. adjectival expressives. Yet, both Italian and Brazilian Portuguese have nominal expressives which behave exactly like EAs, in the sense that they are also triggers of argument extension. Here is an example in Brazilian Portuguese (see Basso 2020):

(2)   Eu perdi *a porra*   das   chaves.

        I   lost   the fucking of.the   keys

        'I lost the fucking keys.'

This type of binominal constructions sharply contrasts with the well-studied qualitative binominals (den Dikken 2006), which behave like English complex epithets in not triggering argument extension (e.g., *el idiota de Andrés* lit. 'the idiot of Andrés'). Therefore, we are left with the puzzle of what is the real cause of argument extension in the nominal domain across languages. At the present, we lack of in-depth comparative studies. In this talk, I revise the syntax of argument extension from a comparative point of view and conjecture that the relevant variation parameter must be found in the timing of External Merge.

References: • den Dikken, M. (2006). *Relators and linkers: The syntax of predication, predicate inversion, and copulas*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. • Gutzmann, D. (2019). *The grammar of expressivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. • Potts, C. (2005). *The logic of conventional implicatures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. • Basso, R. (2020). Use-conditional expressions and non-local interpretation: A case study of a Brazilian Portuguese structure. In R. Pires de Oliveira et al. (eds.) *Brazilian Portuguese Syntax and Semantics*, 163‑182. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.