

# snippets

Issue 48 - October 2025

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# Identity conditions with mixed expressives

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7358/snip-2025-048-saab>

Potts et al. (2009) make the following claim regarding the identity conditions that regulate a certain set of constructions in English and other languages:

- (1) In the construction *NP or no NP (as AP as AP can be, X and X alone)*, the NPs (APs, Xs) must have identical descriptive semantic content. (Potts et al. 2009:360)

Let me illustrate this observation with the *X and X alone* construction:

- (2) a. \*I'll talk with the president, and the chief executive alone.  
b. \*I'll talk with the president, and the American president alone.
- (3) a. I'll talk with the president, and the goddamn president alone!  
b. I'll talk with the goddamn president, and the president alone!
- (Potts et al. 2009:360)

The construction has a Spanish counterpart that also obeys the observation in (1) (in this environment, *puto* is a pure expressive):

- (4) a. Voy a hablar con el presidente y solo con el *puto* presidente. (=3a)  
b. \*Voy a hablar con el presidente y solo con el primer mandatario. (=2a)

However, the condition in (1) only works with pure expressives (see Potts 2005). It doesn't work with mixed terms (slurs, register, etc., see McCready 2010). Here is an example with the Rioplatense Spanish slur *bolita* 'Bolivian (pejorative)':

- (5) a. Voy a hablar con ese boliviano y solo con ese boliviano/#bolita.  
go.1SG to talk.INF with that Bolivian and only with that Bolivian/#Bolivian.PEJ  
'I'll talk with that Bolivian and with that Bolivian/\*Bolivian (pejorative) alone.'
- b. Voy a hablar con ese bolita y solo con ese bolita/#boliviano.  
go.1SG to talk.INF with that Bolivian and only with that Bolivian.PEJ/Bolivian  
'I'll talk with that Bolivian (pejorative) and with that Bolivian (pejorative)/\*Bolivian alone.'

As for register oppositions, a relevant test is the *Si/cuando X, X* construction. Consider the opposition *trabajar/laburar* 'to work/to work (informal)' in the same dialect:

- (6) a. Si/cuando trabajo, trabajo/\*laburo.  
if/when work.1SG work.1SG/\*work.1SG.INFORMAL  
'If I work, I really work/\*work (informal).'

- b. Si/cuando laburo, laburo/\*trabajo.  
 if/when work.1SG.INFORMAL work.1SG.INFORMAL/work.1SG  
 ‘If I work (informal), I really work (informal)/\*work.’

Both of the starred versions of (6) are fine under a different meta-linguistic reading in which the speaker wants to convey that the representational meanings of *laburar* and *trabajar* are identical. Yet, they are out under the implicated readings indicated in the translations, which are the relevant ones to the *Si/cuando X, X* construction.

Evidently, mixed terms are particularly relevant to the condition in (1), since they have been considered as descriptively equivalent to their neutral counterparts (e.g., *bolita* = *boliviano* in the at-issue or truth conditional dimension). This is sometimes referred to as the IDENTITY THESIS, to wit, the idea that the representational dimension of a slur/register word is equivalent to the representational dimension of its neutral counterpart. The thesis is advocated by McCready (2010), Anderson and Lepore (2013a,b), Jeshion (2013a,b), Predelli (2013), Whiting (2013), Caso and Guercio (2016), and Orlando and Saab (2020), among others. Now, the Identity Thesis has been challenged by Hom (2008, 2010), Hom and May (2018), Croom (2015), Ashwell (2016), and Losada (2021), among others. Evidence against or in favor of the Identity Thesis largely depends on considerations around examples like the following one (Croom 2015, Orlando and Saab 2020):

- (7) Some but not all Hispanic-Americans are spics.

According to Croom (2015), the fact that this type of sentence is judged as true by many speakers refutes the Identity Thesis. Yet, the argument is not as sound as it would *prima facie* look like. Orlando and Saab (2020) argue that the literal meaning of sentences like (7) is indeed self-contradictory and the fact that some (but not all) speakers judge the sentence as true is explained away as a typical Gricean implicature (more specifically, triggered by a flouting of the Quality Maxim). Concretely, they contend that (7) should be interpreted as semantically expressing a literal self-contradiction but pragmatically communicating conversationally implicated content that is true, to the effect that some but not all Hispanic-Americans have the features represented in the ‘spic’ stereotype. Similar considerations generalize to cases like *Diego is Hispanic-American but he is not a spic*. Interestingly, this type of implicated meaning is much harder, if not impossible, to obtain when it comes to register terms of the *laburar/trabajar* ‘to work (informal)’/‘to work’ type illustrated in (6). Take, for instance, the nouns *laburo* ‘job (informal)’ and *trabajo* ‘job’ in a sentence like *Algunos aunque no todos los trabajos son laburos* ‘Some but not all jobs are jobs (informal)’, which sounds clearly contradictory.

Now, coming back to the facts in (5) and (6), if the Identity Thesis is (at least partially) correct, then a lexical identity condition for the lexical categories involved in the relevant constructions must replace or be added to (1):

- (8) In the construction *NP or no NP (as AP as AP can be, X and X alone)*,
- a. = (1)
  - b. The Xs or certain level of the XP projections (X = N, V, A, etc.) involved in the relevant constructions must be lexically identical.

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