

PURE EXPRESSIVE ADJECTIVES IN ROMANCE¹

CLARA CUONZO²

Abstract. *Pure* expressive adjectives (EAs) like English *fucking* or German *verdammte* signal the speaker's heightened emotional state, without describing any property of the noun they modify. Gutzmann (2019: 69–123, *pace* Potts 2005) shows that in German and English the peculiar semantics of EAs is mirrored by an atypical syntax: they cannot be found in predicative position, cannot be coordinated, cannot be modified by degree words or by adverbs and cannot be turned into adverbs, but can be used as degree modifiers and be stacked on top of each other. In this paper, I draw a comparison between pure EAs in Romance and in English/German, taking into account the known differences in the syntax of adjectives in these two language families (Cinque 2010, Valois 2007 a.o.). I show that, when these differences are factored out, a close resemblance between EAs in Romance and English/German emerges, providing initial evidence for a crosslinguistically stable grammar of EAs.

Keywords: Expressivity, pure expressive adjectives, English, German, Romance.

1. INTRODUCTION

When interacting linguistically, speakers/signers can either *describe* a situation (or an object, a person, an event etc.) or *express* their own attitudes and emotions in a given context. These two fundamental communicative actions can be traced back to two different functions of language, the *descriptive* and the *expressive* (Gutzmann 2019: 2 building on Bühler 1934, Kaplan 1999, Potts 2005, 2007, a.o.). The difference between these two dimensions of meaning can be understood examining (1) and (2).

¹ Expressive content in this article comes in the form of swearwords and slurs in English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish. I apologise for any distress caused because of this. I would also like to stress that my interest for EAs is purely scientific and this paper does not mean in any way to foster their use, especially when this is done with a derogatory intent.

² University of Maryland, ccuonzo@umd.edu.

I would like to thank Valentine Hacquard and Juan Uriagereka as well as two anonymous reviewers and the audience at the Third FARM Workshop, and in particular Adriana Costăchescu, Andreas Dufter, Ion Giurgea, Leonardo Savoia and Sam Wolfe, for their feedback and comments on this work. I would also like to thank Jessica Arnold, Rebecca Howitt and Jemima Goodall (English), Pauline Ries (French), Aaron Doliana (German), Ștefania Costea (Romanian), Ana Maria Martins (European Portuguese), Jéssica Viana Mendes (Brazilian Portuguese), Camila de la Parra (Mexican Spanish), Luis Eguren and Juan Uriagereka (Peninsular Spanish) for providing and discussing with me data and examples from the all the languages above. All remaining errors are mine.

- (1) I witnessed a minor mishap.
 (2) Oops!

(Kaplan 1999 quoted in Gutzmann 2019: 2)

Although (1) and (2) convey similar meaning, the ways in which the former is conveyed differ significantly in the two examples. In (1), the speaker is just describing the current state of affairs, while in (2) they are expressing their attitudes about the present situation. The semantic difference between (1) and (2) can be formalised as follows:

- (3) ₁ ‘I witnessed a minor mishap.’
 ₂ is **true**,
 ₃ iff the speaker witnessed a minor mishap.
 (4) ₁ ‘Oops!’
 ₂ is **feliculously used**,
 ₃ iff the speaker witnessed a minor mishap.

(adapted from Gutzmann 2019: 2)

Descriptive meaning, on which formal semantics has mainly focussed until recently, is standardly captured in terms of *truth-conditions*, while expressive meaning is subject to *use-conditions*, i.e., it is felicitously uttered or not (Kaplan 1999, Recanati 2004). Kaplan’s (1999) seminal work on expressivity led to the realisation that semantics can formalise use-conditions as successfully as truth-conditions. All subsequent work (e.g., Potts 2005, 2007 a.o.) aimed at investigating the semantics of expressivity, but, until now, little research was devoted to analyse its syntax. The few studies that do focus on expressive grammar show that the semantic peculiarity of expressivity is matched by atypical syntax (Hoeksema and Napoli 2008, Napoli *et al.* 2013, Doliana 2016, Sailor 2017, Gutzmann 2019, Cuonzo 2019).

Gutzmann (2015, 2017, 2019 a.o.) investigated various expressive phenomena (expressive adjectives, expressive intensifiers, expressive vocatives and modal particles), highlighting also some of the striking characteristics of their syntax. His work, however, focuses only on German and, partly, English. The next logical step to take is to analyse similar expressive phenomena in other languages and language families in order to determine whether there is a crosslinguistically stable grammar of expressivity (an endeavour also wished for by Hoeksema 2018). Although expressivity encompasses a great variety of distinct phenomena (see Gutzmann (2019: 13–27) for an overview), in this essay I will only examine one expressive phenomenon, expressive adjectives (EAs), and only in one language family, Romance. However, this paper is to be intended as the first in a series of works investigating comparatively the syntax of expressivity, in order to determine which of its characteristics are stable crosslinguistically and which are specific to given languages. Indeed, already known syntactic differences among language and language families can be used to distinguish syntactic behaviours that are peculiar to specific languages and those that need to be traced back to expressivity itself. The aim of this paper is precisely to investigate the syntax of Romance EAs and compare it with that of English and German ones in order to uncover commonalities and determine whether there is a cross-linguistically stable grammar of expressivity³.

³ Although it is plausible to assume that the syntax of pure EAs is shared across Germanic, I do not have data from other Germanic languages to be able to generalise over the whole language family as I do for Romance.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 is devoted to briefly review the syntax of adjectives in Romance and Germanic, as described in the literature (Cinque 1994, 2010, Demonte 1999, 2008, Laenzlinger 2005, Scott 2002 and Svenonius 2008 a.o.). In Section 3, I sketch the semantic differences between pure EAs (like English *fucking* and German *verdammt* “damn”) and mixed ones (like English *shitty* and German *beschissen* “shitty”). The former convey only expressive meaning signalling the heightened emotional state of the speaker, while the latter carry both descriptive and expressive content. As Gutzmann (2019) shows, pure EAs are characterised by a non-standard syntax: they cannot be found in predicative position, cannot be coordinated, cannot be modified by degree words or by adverbs and cannot be turned into adverbs, but can be used as degree modifiers and be stacked on top of each other. In Section 4, data from French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish are examined in order to determine the syntactic characterisation of pure EAs in Romance. Pure EAs in Romance are diachronically derived from and are synchronically ambiguous with mixed expressive or even descriptive adjectives, coming from the sexual and religious sphere (see also Hoeksema 2018). Interestingly though, the syntactic position in which they occur disambiguates between the pure expressive readings and the other ones. Indeed, pure EAs in Romance are found prenominal or, very marginally, in a postnominal focused position. Thus, this ambiguity allows us to test the syntactic contexts in which pure expressivity is banned. Indeed, in the contexts in which pure EAs are ungrammatical in English (e.g., adverbial modification, comparative or superlative grade, coordination), Romance EAs acquire descriptive meaning, and turn into mixed expressives or even simple descriptive adjectives (as happens with *verdammt* in German). A clear differentiation between pure and mixed EAs thus allows us to realise that Romance pure EAs behave just like their English and German counterparts. Section 5 draws conclusions: once syntactic differences between Romance and Germanic adjectives are factored out, it becomes clear that EAs have similar syntax and semantics in the two language families, providing initial evidence that this could be a crosslinguistically stable pattern. Indeed, although evidence from other language families is needed, this is a promising first result.

2. ADJECTIVES IN ROMANCE AND GERMANIC

Many studies have investigated the ordering of adjectives in the world’s languages (see Valois 2007 for an overview). Both typological and formal research on adjectives provide evidence for a (more or less) fixed ordering of adjectives crosslinguistically (Hetzron 1978, Sproat and Shih 1991 a.o.). However, languages differ in allowing adjectives only prenominal, such as for instance English and German, only postnominal, such as Indonesian and Persian, or both (Valois 2007: 63). Romance follows under this last category, showing also a meaning differentiation between the pre- and post-nominal positions. In particular, Cinque (2010) argues for very systematic distinctions in meaning between pre- and post-nominal positions in this language family. According to Cinque (2010: 5-24), when adjectives have two possible interpretations (restrictive/non-restrictive, stage level/individual level, intersective/non-intersective, modal/implicit relative clause reading etc.), the prenominal position in Romance allows only one interpretation, while the postnominal position has both readings. For instance, in

(5) the adjective *possibile* has only a modal reading, while (6) it has both a modal and an implicit relative clause reading.⁴

- (5) Maria ha intervistato ogni possibile candidato. (unambiguous)
 Maria has interviewed every possible candidate
 a. ‘Maria interviewed every potential candidate’ (modal reading)
 b. #‘Maria interviewed every candidate that it was possible for her to interview’ (implicit relative clause reading)
- (6) Maria ha intervistato ogni candidato possibile. (ambiguous)
 Maria has interviewed every candidate possible
 a. OK with modal reading
 b. OK with implicit relative clause reading
- (Cinque 2010: 9)

Moreover, Cinque (2010) analyses the limited occurrence of postnominal adjectives in Germanic on a par with the Romance data. More specifically, Cinque (2010: 8, building on Larson 2000) argues that in Germanic the prenominal position has a modal and an implicit relative clause reading, while the postnominal position will have only the implicit relative clause reading.

- (7) Mary interviewed every possible candidate. (ambiguous)
 a. OK with modal reading
 b. OK with implicit relative clause reading
- (8) Mary interviewed every candidate possible. (unambiguous)
 a. # with modal reading
 b. OK with implicit relative clause reading
- (Cinque 2010: 8)

Interestingly, the only interpretation available for prenominal position in Italian is the opposite of the one available for postnominal position in English. Obviously though, the occurrence of adjectives postnominally in English is extremely limited and so, even though the finding in (5-8) can be replicated with other kind of adjectives, they cannot be tested on all of them. Moreover, Cinque (2010) provides data only from English and Italian, claiming that they are representative of Germanic and Romance respectively. The overall picture seems to be slightly more complex though, since for instance Demonte (1999) argues that there is only one possible interpretation for the postnominal adjectives in Spanish, namely the implicit relative clause reading, as shown by (9).⁵

- (9) a. el posible viaje
 the possible trip
 ‘the potential trip’ (modal reading)

⁴ The terminology (modal vs implicit relative clause reading) is Cinque’s and I am just reporting it without committing to his analysis of the data.

⁵ I changed the glosses and the translation of the Spanish data in order to make them comparable with the Italian ones.

- b. el viaje posible
 the trip possible
 ‘the viable trip’

(implicit relative clause reading)
 (Demonte 1999: 49)

Bouchard (1998) too, bringing data from French, shows a specialisation of the pre- and post-nominal positions for different meaning. What emerges even from this brief overview is that there is a meaning differentiation between pre- and post-nominal position of adjectives in Romance, even though its exact characterisation has not been conclusively agreed upon.

Different analyses have been put forward to account for the ordering of adjectives crosslinguistically. Cartographic approaches (Cinque 1994, 2010, Laenzlinger 2005, Scott 2002) postulate a wide array of ordered functional projections in whose specifiers adjectives occur in order to get different semantic nuances. Moreover, supporters of this view aim to explain the crosslinguistic variation in the occurrence of adjectives pre- and post-nominally with parametric variation in the different degree of N-movement in different languages. Svenonius (2008) proposes instead DP-internal functional projections that are independently motivated (related for instance to number morphology and classifier placement). In this view, the interpretation of an adjective depends on what nominal element it combines with, i.e., the root or some higher functional projection. Interestingly, what both views agree upon is that the same adjective will get different interpretations according to which position it is merged in (Svenonius 2008: 37). Moreover, crosslinguistic studies show that subjective or speaker-oriented adjectives are found higher in the DP (Hetzron 1978: 178, but see also the Subject-Comment FP in the adjectival hierarchy proposed by Scott 2002). The data I present in the following sections for EAs, which are *by definition* speaker-oriented, are in line with this crosslinguistic finding. In Germanic, this can be ascertained looking at the ordering of adjectives: when an EA follows a descriptive one, it is either very marginal, or acquires descriptive meaning (see §3). In Romance, on the other hand, pure EAs are mainly found in prenominal position and are only very marginally allowed in a focalised postnominal position (see §4). Therefore, irrespective of the analysis one chooses to explain these data (a Cartographic one or one *à la* Svenonius 2008), the data clearly show that there is a strong preference to put EAs as high as possible in the DP. This is mirrored at phrasal level by modal adverbs like *regretfully* or *fortunately* which occur among the highest in the clausal structure (see Cinque 1999: 106) and carry not-at-issue content (Potts 2005).⁶ However, the reason lying behind the occurrence of not-at-issue content highest in both the nominal and verbal domain, which has been debated at length in the literature, is beyond the bounds of this article.

2. EXPRESSIVE ADJECTIVES SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS

2.1. The semantics of EAs

EAs (Potts 2005, Gutzmann 2019) like *damn*, *fucking*, *bloody* (and variations thereof) signal the heightened emotional state of the speaker, conveying contempt or anger as in (10), as well as positive attitudes, as in (11).

⁶ I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing this comparison to my attention.

(10) The dog ate the damn cake.

(adapted from Gutzmann 2019: 87)

(11) I absolutely love that fucking car.

EAs of this kind, which are called *pure* EAs in Gutzmann (2019: 72), convey only expressive meaning, and lack any descriptive content. In other words, they do not specify any characteristic of the individual/object/event denoted, but just express an attitude of the speaker towards it. In (12), the speaker is not describing any particular characteristic of the car itself, let alone a negative one. Indeed, the speaker is just signalling their heightened emotional state because their car was stolen, and their contempt will be greater the greater the value of their car.

(12) They stole my fucking car.

≈ ‘I am in a heightened emotional state because they stole my car!’⁷

Conversely, mixed EAs contribute both expressive *and* descriptive meaning, i.e., they both specify a characteristic of the individual/object/situation denoted and express an attitude of the speaker towards it. When someone utters a sentence like (13), they are describing their car as not-properly functioning/in poor condition, *and* they are also conveying their contempt about this fact.

(13) They stole my shitty car.

≈ ‘They stole my car. My car is in poor condition and I am heightened emotional state about it being in poor condition!’

2.2. The syntax of EAs

Gutzmann (2019: 72–83) closely examines the syntactic behaviour of pure EAs in English and German. Pure EAs in German are derived from sexual and religious terms, just like in English (see also Hoeksema 2018). In German, however, the same lexical items can be used both with their literal meaning and the expressive one, as clear from the glosses in (14), and what distinguishes the two meanings is the syntactic environment. In English, on the other hand, there is a morphological distinction between pure EAs, as in (15a), and the deverbal adjectives they are derived from, in (15b).

(14) verdammt/verfickt/verflucht

damned/ fucked/ cursed

‘damn/fucking/damn’

(15) a. damn/bloody/fucking

b. damned/fucked

⁷ Gutzmann’s (2019) paraphrase of pure EAs is ‘I feel negatively about...’. However, the feelings conveyed by EAs are not necessarily negative, as shown by (11), so I prefer to use a different paraphrase. I thank one of the reviewers for drawing my attention to this.

In English, pure EAs are homophonous with expressive intensifiers, as in (16), interjections as in (17), and more generally expressive elements in the nominal domain, as in (18–19).

- (16) You're *fucking* stupid!
 (17) *Damn!* I lost my wallet.
 (18) No *fucking* way!
 (19) Abso-*fucking*-lutely!⁸

Since English has no overt agreement morphology on adjectives and since EAs do not show many of the standard properties of adjectives, one might wonder if *fucking* in (20) is really an adjective.⁹

- (20) They stole my *fucking* car.

However, differently from what happens in (16–19), in (20) *fucking* occurs in a structural position usually occupied by adjectives, arguing in favour of its adjectival status. Indeed, in German too, *verdammt* can be used as an interjection, as in (21) and as an expressive intensifier, as in (22), although not as an expressive particle in the DP.

- (21) *Verdammt!* Der Hund hat den Kuchen gefressen.
 damn the dog has the cake eaten
 'Damn! The dog ate the cake.'

(Gutzmann 2019: 88)

- (22) Du bist *verdammt* blöd!
 you are damned stupid
 'You're *fucking* stupid!'
 (23) *auf gar keinen *verdammten* Fall!
 on at-all no damned occasion
 intended 'No *fucking* way!'

(Doliana, p.c.)

However, when *verdammt* is found in a prenominal position like that of *fucking* in (20), it must be marked with overt case and agreement morphology, a fact that clearly shows its adjectival status.

- (24) Gestern hat der *verdammt-e* Hund die
 yesterday has the.NOM.SG.MASC damn.NOM.SG.MASC dog.NOM.SG.MASC the
 ganze Nacht gebellt.
 whole night barked
 'Yesterday, the damn dog barked the whole night.'

⁸ See McCarthy (1982) for a phonological analysis of expletive infixation.

⁹ As pointed out by one of the reviewers.

- (29) *der Hund verdammt
 the dog damned
 intended ‘the damn dog’

Although there are some attested cases of postnominal adjective in English (see §2), nevertheless pure EAs cannot be found postnominally in English.

- (30) *Every car damn was destroyed.

Similarly, pure EAs cannot occur in predicative position in English, as clear from (31) (Gutzmann 2019: 81).

- (31) *The dog is damn.

In German, *verdammt* loses its pure expressive reading when occurring in predicative position (Gutzmann 2019: 82), while *verflucht* and *verfickt* are simply ungrammatical in this context. This shows once again that when syntax makes the expressive meaning unavailable, semantics can nevertheless salvage the grammaticality of the sentence introducing descriptive meaning.

- (32) a. Der Hund ist verdammt. (*pure expressive reading)
 the dog is damned
 ‘The dog is damned.’ (Gutzmann 2019: 82)
 b. *Der Hund ist verflucht/ verfickt.
 the dog is damned/ fucked
 (‘The dog seemed damn/fucking.’)¹⁰ (Gutzmann 2019: 82)

Interestingly, pure EAs cannot be coordinated neither with other EAs nor with descriptive ones (Gutzmann 2019: 82).

- (33) a. *the damn and fucking dog
 b. *the damn and young dog
 (adapted from Gutzmann 2019: 82)

Coordination of pure EA is equally banned in German, but in (34c) *verdamnte* is able to get a mixed interpretation, improving its grammaticality status.

- (34) a. *der verdamnte und verfickte Hund
 the damned and fucked dog
 (‘the damn and fucking dog’)
 b. *der verdamnte und junge Hund
 the damned and young dog
 (‘the damn and young dog’)

¹⁰ Translations between brackets signal sentences that are ungrammatical in English too.

- c. der junge und verdammte Hund (*pure expressive reading)
 the young and damned dog
 ‘the young and damned dog’ (Gutzmann 2019: 82)

On the other hand, pure EAs can be stacked on top of each other, conveying even greater contempt on the part of the speaker (Gutzmann 2019: 76).

- (35) the damn fucking car
 ≈ ‘I am in a very heightened emotional state about the car!’
 (36) das verdammte verfluchte Auto
 the damned cursed car
 ‘the damn fucking car’

Gutzmann (2019: 79–80) also shows that pure EAs cannot be modified neither by degree modifiers nor by adverbs.

- (37) *the very/extremely/utterly damn dog
 (38) *the presumably/probably/actually damn dog
 (39) *der sehr/auserst/ arg verdammte Hund
 the very/extremely/utterly damned dog
 (‘the very/extremely/utterly damn dog’)
 (40) *der vermutlich/wahrscheinlich/tatsächlich verdammte Hund
 the presumably/probably/actually damned dog
 (‘the presumably/probably/actually damn dog’)
 (Gutzmann 2019: 79–80)

Gutzmann (2019) tests only scalar degree modifiers like *very* and German *sehr*, and not totality degree modifiers like *totally*, *completely* and German *total* (see Paradis 2008 for a classification of degree modifiers). However, even the latter cannot modify pure EAs, as visible from the ungrammaticality of (41) and the absence of expressive meaning of (42).

- (41) *The totally fucking dog
 (42) der total verdammte Hund¹¹ (*pure expressive reading)
 the totally damned dog
 ‘the totally damn dog’ (Doliana, p.c.)

Pure EAs cannot be found in the comparative or superlative form (Gutzmann 2019: 78), neither in English nor in German.

- (43) a. *the damn-er/-est dog
 (44) a. *der verdammt-er/est-e Hund
 the more/most damned dog
 (‘the more/most damn dog’)
 (Gutzmann 2019: 78–79)

¹¹ I am grateful to Andreas Dufter for bringing these data to my attention.

Finally, pure EAs cannot be turned into adverbs (Gutzmann 2019: 82).

(45) *Helge sings damnly/fuckingly.

(46) *Helge singt verdammt/verflucht/verfickt.

Helge sings damnly/ fuckingly/ cursedly
(‘Helge sings damnly/fuckingly/damnly.’)

(Gutzmann 2019: 82)

Gutzmann does not comment on this, but pure EAs can also be turned into expressive degree modifiers (cfr. Nouwen 2011). This is clearly visible from (47), which has two possible interpretations, as signalled by the different constituencies: in (a) *fucking* is an adjective modifying, together with *new*, the noun *car*, while in (b) *fucking* is modifying the degree of the adjective *stupid*.

(47) the fucking new car

a. ≈ the [fucking new car]

b. ≈ the [fucking new] car

Similarly, *verdammt* can be used as a degree modifier: in (48a) where it is an adjective it is declined for gender and number, while in (48b) where it is a degree modifier it is not.

(48) a. das [verdamnte neue Auto]

the damned new car

‘the damn new car’

b. das [verdammt neue] Auto

the damned new car

‘the [fucking new] car’

Summarising, pure EAs in English and German:

- a. can only be found prenominal and preferentially precede all descriptive adjectives;
- b. cannot be found in predicative position;
- c. cannot be coordinated with any other adjective;
- d. cannot be modified by degree modifiers nor by adverbs;
- e. cannot be found in the comparative or superlative grade;
- f. cannot be turned into adverbs;
- g. can be turned into degree modifiers.

All these characteristics, apart from (g), have been identified by Gutzmann (2019). He also argues that the characteristics in (b), (d) and (e) can be traced back to the descriptive emptiness of pure EAs (Gutzmann 2019: 119–120). Moreover, the data in this section clearly show that pure EAs have the same syntax in German and English. The only difference between the two languages is that English has a morphological distinction between pure EAs and the deverbal adjectives from which these are derived, while German does not. Therefore, in contexts in which pure expressive interpretation is unavailable, *verdammt* acquires once again descriptive meaning. Although the similarity between English and German pure EAs is valuable in itself, it is not completely unexpected given the relatedness of these two languages. Therefore, we now turn to Romance to see whether EAs in this language family follow the generalisations already identified for English and German.

4. EXPRESSIVE ADJECTIVES IN ROMANCE

In this section, I analyse data from French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish EAs.¹² Romanian, on the other hand, lacks EAs and, in order to convey the same meaning, resorts to expressive nouns in a nominal construction of the kind of (49).

- (49) *căcatul* *ăla* *de câine*
 shit.DEF.M.SG that.M.SG of dog.M.SG
 ‘that fucking dog’
 (Romanian, Costea p.c.)

In (49) *căcat* ‘shit.M.SG’ has lost any descriptive meaning and only conveys the speaker’s contempt (precisely as pure EAs do). The expressive construction exemplified in (49) is attested also in other Romance languages and is usually the preferred way to express the same meaning as EAs in Romance (see Milner 1978 for French, Doliana 2016 for Italian, Bastos-Gee 2013 for Brazilian Portuguese and Cuonzo 2019 for a general overview on Romance). However, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish show also clearly identifiable EAs. In particular, French seems to have only one pure EA, *foutu*, while Italian and especially Spanish (with some variation depending on the variety spoken) show a much greater array of pure EAs.

- (50) *foutu*
 fucked
 ‘fucking’
 French
- (51) *dannato/ fottuto/ maledetto/ benedetto*
 damned/ fucked/ damned/ blessed
 ‘damn/ fucking/ damn/ bloody’
 Italian
- (52) a. *jodido/ puto*¹³ /*maldito/bendito*
 fucked/ prostitute/damned/ blessed
 ‘bloody/ fucking/ damn/bloody’
 Spanish¹⁴
- b. *chingado/ pinche*
 fucked/ crappy
 ‘fucking/ bloody’
 Mexican Spanish

On the other hand, Portuguese stands out in having a pure EA that could also be an expressive noun. Indeed, as shown by (53), *maldito* can either be a noun occurring in an

¹² Although I only adduce data from national Romance languages and not from regional languages, the syntactic similarities of pure EAs in the languages under investigation are close enough to allow me to argue that they represent Romance-wide generalisations.

¹³ The EA *puto* derives from the noun *puta*, a derogatory term for prostitute. Given the offensive characterisation of this term, I will gloss it simply with “prostitute”, although its expressive content is stronger and corresponds to English “whore”.

¹⁴ All the examples are marked as simply “Portuguese” or “Spanish” if judgements are shared by speakers of both European and Latin American varieties, while, when judgements differ, the variety under analysis is specified.

expressive construction like the Romanian one in (49) or an adjective, given the optionality of the preposition *de* in these contexts.¹⁵

- (53) o maldito (do) mosquito
 the damned (of-the) mosquito
 ‘the damn mosquito’ Portuguese (Martins, p.c.)

Since constructions made up of expressive noun-*de/di*-noun are found in many Romance languages, Portuguese could potentially represent a further development of these, in which the expressive noun has been reanalysed as an adjective. However, more historical evidence would be needed to test this hypothesis.

As already pointed out in §2, the pre- or post-nominal occurrence of adjectives in Romance influences their meaning. In prenominal position they only have pure expressive meaning, as shown in (a) examples of (54-58), irrespective of their literal meaning. However, when they occur in postnominal position they acquire descriptive content. Depending on the literal meaning of the adjectives in question, they can retain some expressive meaning like *foutu*, *fottuto* and *jodido* in (54b), (55b) and (58b), or lose it completely like in *maledetto* and *maldito* in (56b) and (57b).

- (54) a. ce foutu garçon
 this fucked boy
 ‘this fucking boy’
 b. ce garçon foutu (*pure expressive reading)
 this boy fucked
 ‘this screwed boy’ French
- (55) a. quel fottuto ragazzo
 that fucked boy
 ‘that fucking boy’
 b. quel ragazzo fottuto (*pure expressive reading)
 that boy fucked
 ‘that screwed boy’ Italian
- (56) a. quel maledetto cimitero
 that damned graveyard
 ‘that damn graveyard’
 b. quel cimitero maledetto (*pure expressive reading)
 that graveyard damned
 ‘that damned graveyard’ Italian
- (57) a. o maldito rapaz
 the damned boy
 ‘the damn boy’

¹⁵ Some more restrictions seem to characterise *maldito*: in European Portuguese it can only be preceded by a definite article, but not by demonstratives or indefinite determiners (Martins p.c.), while in Brazilian Portuguese it can be preceded by definite articles, by demonstratives and by possessives, but only marginally by indefinite determiners (Viana-Mendes p.c.).

- b. o rapaz maldito (*pure expressive reading)
 the boy damned
 ‘the damned boy’
 Portuguese (Martins, p.c.)
- (58) a. un jodido examen
 a fucked exam
 ‘a bloody exam’
- b. un examen jodido (*pure expressive reading)
 a exam fucked
 ‘a difficult exam’
 Spanish (Eguren, p.c.)

Clearly, in postnominal position these adjectives display a (more) literal meaning, related to their etymological origin, while in prenominal position they do not have any descriptive content and only convey the heightened emotional state of the speaker. Nevertheless, the pure expressive reading is marginally allowed in postnominal position if the adjective is focussed in Italian, Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish, but not in European Portuguese and French.

- (59) *ce chien FOUTU (*pure expressive reading)
 this dog fucked
 ‘this screwed dog’
 French
- (60) ?quell’esame FOTTUTO
 that- exam fucked
 ‘that fucking exam’
 Italian
- (61) ?o cemitério MALDITO (✓pure expressive reading in BP, *pure expressive reading in EP)
 the graveyard damned
 ‘the damn graveyard’
 Portuguese
- (62) *?el examen PUTO
 the exam prostitute
 ‘the fucking exam’
 Spanish (Uriagereka, p.c.)

The existence of a focalised postnominal position in Romance is attested in the literature (see for instance Dam 2018), but the marginality of the pure EAs in these cases clearly show that this is clearly not the unmarked position for EAs. This is indeed expected given that speaker-oriented adjectives are usually found very high. Moreover, the marginality of (59-62) mirrors the limited acceptability of the order descriptive adjective>expressive adjective that we have seen for English in (27), repeated here:

- (63) a. that damn new dog
 b. ??that new damn dog

(Gutzmann 2019: 75)

Just like in English, pure EAs precede all descriptive adjectives in French, Italian, European Portuguese and Peninsular Spanish.

- (64) a. le foutu vieux chien
 the fucked old dog
 ‘a fucking old dog’¹⁶

¹⁶ The English translation of this example and of (64-66) is ambiguous between a reading in which *fucking* is a degree modifier ‘a [fucking old] dog’ or an adjective ‘a [fucking old dog]. However, in French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish only the latter interpretation is available.

- b. *le vieux foutu chien
the old fucked dog
intended 'an old fucking dog' French
- (65) a. un fottuto buon caffè
a fucked good coffee
'a fucking good coffee'
- b. *un buon fottuto caffè
a good fucked coffee
intended 'a good fucking coffee' Italian
- (66) a. o maldito horrível café
the damned horrible coffee
'the damn disgusting coffee'
- b. ??o horrível maldito café
the horrible damned coffee
'the disgusting damn coffee' European Portuguese (Martins, p.c.)
- (67) a. ?la puta fría nieve
the prostitute cold snow
'the fucking cold snow'
- b. *la fría puta nieve
the cold prostitute snow
intended 'the fucking cold snow' Peninsular Spanish (Uriagereka, p.c.)

The co-occurrence of an expressive and a descriptive adjective prenominal, which is somewhat marginal in European Portuguese and Peninsular Spanish, is completely banned in Mexican Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese.

- (68) a. *o maldito horrível café
the damned horrible coffee
intended 'the damn disgusting coffee'
- b. *o horrível maldito café
the horrible damned coffee
intended 'the disgusting damn coffee' Brazilian Portuguese (Viana-Mendes, p.c.)
- (69) a. *el puto hermoso perro
the prostitute beautiful dog
intended 'the fucking beautiful dog'
- b. *el hermoso puto perro
the beautiful whore dog
intended 'the beautiful fucking dog' Mexican Spanish

This ungrammaticality can be due to the fact that the occurrence of two prenominal adjectives is rather marked in Romance and usually found in formal language, making it harder for an EA to occur in such a context. Indeed, also European Portuguese (Martins p.c.), the tendency is to avoid having the expressive and descriptive adjective together in prenominal position and to move the descriptive one postnominally, which, on the other hand, is the only possible order in Brazilian Portuguese (Viana Mendes, p.c.).

- (70) o maldito café horrível
 the damned coffee horrible
 ‘the damn disgusting coffee’ Brazilian Portuguese (Viana-Mendes, p.c.)

Moreover, pure EAs cannot be found in predicative position, and when they do so, they acquire descriptive meaning.

- (71) Le chien est foutu. (*pure expressive reading)
 the dog is fucked
 ‘The dog is fucked up.’ French
- (72) Quella casa sembra proprio maledetta. (*pure expressive reading)
 that house seems really damned
 ‘It really seems that that house is damned.’ Italian
- (73) O rapaz é maldito. (*pure expressive reading)
 the boy is damned
 ‘The boy is damned.’ Portuguese (Martins, p.c.)
- (74) El examen es jodido. (*pure expressive reading)
 the exam is difficult
 ‘The exam is difficult.’ Spanish (Uriagereka, p.c.)

Pure EAs in English and German cannot be coordinated with other adjectives, but only juxtaposed to them. As we have seen, in French and Portuguese there is only one pure EA, *foutu*, so we cannot test whether it can co-occur with other EAs, however it cannot be coordinated with descriptive ones.

- (75) a. *le foutu et vieux chien
 the fucked and old dog
 intended ‘a fucking and old dog’ French

In Italian, pure EAs cannot be coordinated among themselves and with descriptive adjectives. Indeed, adjectives like *fottuto* and *dannato* acquire descriptive meaning in these coordinated structures.

- (76) a. il fottuto e maledetto cane (*pure expressive reading)
 the fucked and damned dog
 ‘the screwed and damned dog’
- b. il fottuto e stupido cane (*pure expressive reading)
 the fucked and stupid dog
 ‘the screwed and stupid dog’ Italian

On the other hand, pure EAs cannot be stacked on top of each other in Italian, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (77).

- (77) a. *il fottuto maledetto cane
 the fucked damned dog
 intended ‘the fucking damn dog’ Italian

In Portuguese, it is not possible to test the co-occurrence of EAs since there is only one EA, *maldito*. However, it can be coordinated with descriptive adjectives, acquiring descriptive meaning.

- (78) o maldito e horrível café (*pure expressive reading)
 the damned and horrible coffee
 ‘the damned and disgusting coffee’ Portuguese (Martins, p.c.)

In Spanish too, the coordination of pure EAs with either expressive or descriptive adjectives is disallowed: in these cases, EAs acquire descriptive meaning.

- (79) la jodida y malintencionada pregunta (*pure expressive meaning)
 the fucked and ill-meant question
 ‘the difficult and ill-meant question’
 (80) la jodida y maldita pregunta (*pure expressive meaning)
 the fucked and damned question
 ‘the difficult and damned question’

On the other hand, the juxtaposition of pure EAs is allowed in both Peninsular and Mexican Spanish and it indicates an even more heightened emotional state on the part of the speaker.¹⁷

- (81) a. esa puta jodida maldita silla
 this prostitute fucked damned chair
 ‘this fucking damn bloody chair’ Peninsular Spanish (Uriagereka, p.c.)
 b. la chingada pinche puta silla
 the fucked crappy prostitute chair
 ‘the fucking damn bloody chair’ Mexican Spanish

In this regard then, Spanish resembles more closely English and German than the other Romance languages (see §3). Therefore, the fact that more than one pure EA can occur preminally is not due to their expressivity, and it must be linked to some other characteristic of the languages under examination.

As we have seen in the previous section, pure EAs in English and German cannot be modified by adverbs and by degree modifiers. Descriptive adjectives occurring preminally in French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish cannot be modified by adverbs, so this context cannot be tested for EAs. However, there is variation with regard to degree modifiers. In Italian degree modifiers cannot modify prenominal adjectives, while this is allowed in French, Portuguese and Spanish. As visible from the examples below, degree modification of pure EAs is ungrammatical in all of these languages, and (84) is grammatical only on a descriptive reading.

¹⁷ It must be noted, however, that there seems to be intra-speaker variation in this regard. For instance, Eguren (p.c.) does not allow for the co-occurrence of more than one expressive adjective. Further research might be needed to understand why these differences are attested.

- (82) *le très foutu chien
the very fucked dog
intended ‘the very fucking dog’ French
- (83) o muito maldito rapaz
the very damned boy
‘the very damned boy’ (*pure expressive reading)
European Portuguese (Martins, p.c.)
- (84) *meu muito maldito carro
my very damned car
intended ‘my very damn car’ Brazilian Portuguese (Viana-Mendes, p.c.)
- (85) *el muy puto perro
the very prostitute dog
intended ‘the very fucking dog’ Spanish

Interestingly, in Italian intensifier suffixes *-issimo* and *stra-* can be attached to pure EAs, conveying an even stronger contempt on the part of the speaker, and they can even co-occur.

- (86) a. quel fottutissimo cane
that extremely.fucked dog
‘that fucking bloody dog’ Italian
- b. quel maledettissimo cane
that extremely.damned dog
‘that fucking bloody dog’ Italian
- (87) stramaledett(issim)o/strafottut(issim)o/strabenedetto/*stradannato

In Spanish, *-issimo* can attach to *puto* without interfering with its pure expressive meaning, while it turns *jodido* into a mixed expressive (*jodidísimo* means “very difficult”) and it cannot attach to the other EAs (**malditísimo*, **benditísimo*, **chingadísimo*). Other intensifiers as well, like *re-* and *contra-* (Uriagereka, p.c.) can attach to pure EAs.

- (88) el putísimo perro
the extremely.prostitute dog
‘the fucking bloody dog’ Spanish
- (89) re(contra)jodido/re(contra)puto/re(contra)maldito

In French and Portuguese, on the other hand, the suffix *-issime/-issimo* cannot be attached to EAs.

- (90) *le fottissime chien
the extremely.fucked dog
intended ‘the fucking bloody dog’ French
- (91) *o malditíssimo rapaz
the extremely.damned boy
intended ‘the fucking bloody boy’ Portuguese (Martins, p.c.)

The suffix *-issimo/e* is derived from the Latin superlative suffix *-issimus/a/um*, but synchronically it is just an elative and it does not build a syntactic superlative (Dressler and

- (99) Aquel chico es putamente hermoso.
 that boy is fuckingly handsome
 ‘That boy is fucking handsome.’ Spanish

On the other hand, in French and Italian at least, they cannot modify verbs, as shown by (100) and (101).

- (100) *Marie chante foutuement.
 Mary sings fuckingly
 (‘Mary sings fuckingly.’) French
- (101) *Maria canta dannatamente.
 Mary sings damnly
 (‘Mary sings fuckingly.’) Italian

Interestingly, in Spanish the use of *jodidamente* as an adverb is allowed by some speakers, but in this case it acquires descriptive meaning.

- (102) %El jodido Maradona jugaba jodidamente al fútbol!
 the fucking Maradona played fuckingly to.the football
 (*pure expressive interpretation)
 ‘Fucking Maradona played football as a rascal.’ Spanish (Uriagereka, p.c.)

These data clearly show that in Romance, the adverbial-like forms in *-ment(e)*, when retaining the pure expressive meaning, are not adverbs but degree modifiers just like *fucking* or *damn* in the English translations of (97-99). Therefore, Romance differs from Germanic in that it signals morphologically the distinction between adjectives and degree modifiers, and, lacking a distinctive morphological form for these, resorts to the adverbial suffix *-ment(e)*.¹⁸

Summarising the data presented in this section, it is clear that Romance pure EAs:

- a'. precede all descriptive adjectives, are mainly found prenominal, but can marginally occur in a postnominal focused position;
- b'. cannot be found in predicative position;
- c'. cannot be coordinated with any other adjective;
- d'. cannot be modified by degree modifiers nor adverbs, but can be modified by intensifier suffixes;
- e'. cannot be found in the comparative or superlative grade;
- f'. cannot be turned into adverbs;
- g'. can be turned into degree modifiers adding the suffix *-mente*.

However, as we have seen, when the pure expressive reading is unavailable syntactically, semantics comes to the rescue and introduces descriptive meaning. This phenomenon is present also in German given the ambiguity of *verdammmt* between a pure EAs and a descriptive adjective, but it is much more extensive in Romance.

¹⁸ Obviously, there is a close syntactic resemblance between adverbs and degree modifiers, which is morphologically signalled in Romance by the use of the same suffix *-ment(e)* to turn adjectives into either adverbs or degree modifiers.

All the data presented in this section clearly show that the syntax of Romance EAs closely mirrors that of English and German ones, with some minor differences. First of all, the availability of a focalised postnominal position for adjectives in Romance allows EAs to, at least marginally, occur postnominally. Pure EAs can be modified by intensifiers like *-issimo/e* and *stra-/re-/contra-*. Moreover, pure EAs can be turned into degree modifiers only if with the addition of the suffix *-mente*. However, these differences are expected given what we know about Germanic and Romance: availability of focalised postnominal positions for adjectives in Romance, abundance of modifying suffixes and more extensive word-class marking in Romance when compared to Germanic. Therefore, the data presented in this work show that, when known differences between Romance and Germanic are factored out, pure EAs in these language families behave exactly in the same way.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have analysed the grammar of Romance pure EAs as compared to that of German and English ones, showing a clear similarity between the two. Section 2 was devoted to reviewing some syntactic differences between Germanic and Romance, highlighting how Romance adjectives can more freely occur postnominally and show meaning differentiation when in pre- or post-nominal position. I also stressed the fact that, crosslinguistically, speaker-oriented adjectives, of which EAs are a clear manifestation, preferentially occur high in the DP. Section 3, on the other hand, reviewed the recent finding about pure EAs in English and German. As Gutzmann (2019: 69–123) shows, pure EAs cannot be found in predicative position, cannot be coordinated, cannot be modified by degree words or by adverbs and cannot be turned into adverbs, but can be used as degree modifiers and be stacked on top of each other.

In Section 4, I examined the syntactic behaviour of Romance pure EAs, showing its close similarity with that of English and German ones. Indeed, all the contexts in which pure EAs are ungrammatical in English and German are equally unavailable in Romance. However, Romance allows (even more extensively than German) for pure EAs to be turned into mixed ones or even simple descriptive adjectives as a rescue strategy. Clearly, it is the syntax which determines the meaning of ambiguous lexical items like *maldito*, *foutu* or *verdammt*. This is in line with the general finding that the meaning of adjectives varies according to their syntactic position (Scott 2002, Svenonius 2008 a.o.). What the data in this paper add to the general picture though is that the literal meaning of the adjectives under investigation is completely obliterated when they are interpreted as pure EAs and they only convey the speaker's heightened emotional state.

When known differences between Germanic and Romance are factored out, the syntax of pure EAs in the two languages is the same, providing initial evidence for a characteristic grammar of EAs crosslinguistically. The comparison drawn between Germanic and Romance is not only valid in itself, but also as a spur to draw data from more language families and determine whether the behaviour of EAs is indeed stable crosslinguistically. In particular, it would be useful to examine data from languages that allow pre- and postnominal adjectives like Romance, but especially from those that only have postnominal adjectives. Finally, within Romance, a few points need to be investigated further: whether the determiner used in the DPs containing pure EAs influences their

semantics and syntax (see for instance note 15), whether other Romance languages allow more extensively the occurrence of pure EAs in postnominal focused position, whether the animacy of the NP modified by the EA matters for expressivity purposes and finally why Portuguese *maldito* resist modifications by suffix like *-issimo* and *-mente*.

REFERENCES

- Bastos-Gee, A. C., 2013, “A descriptive study of Brazilian offensive phrases”, *Diacritica*, 27, 1, 40–68.
- Bouchard, D., 1998, “The distribution and interpretation of adjectives in French: a consequence of bare phrase structure”, *Probus*, 10: 139–183.
- Buhler, K., 1934/1999, *Theory of Language. The Representational Function of Language*, translation by Goodwin, D. F. in collaboration with Eschbach, A., Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Cinque, G., 1994, “On the Evidence for Partial N-Movement in the Romance DP” in G. Cinque, J. Koster, J-Y Pollock, L. Rizzi, R. Zanuttini, *Paths Towards Universal Grammar*, Washington (D.C.), Georgetown University Press, 85-110.
- Cinque, G., 2010, *The Syntax of Adjectives: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.
- Cuonzo, C., 2019, “*Quella cavolo di sedia*: what expressives can tell us on the internal make-up of DPs”, MPhil Thesis, University of Cambridge.
- Demonte, V., 1999, “A Minimal Account of Spanish Adjective Position and Interpretation”, in J. A. Franco, A. Landa, J. Martín (eds), *Grammatical Analyses in Basque and Romance Linguistics. Papers in honor of Mario Saltarelli*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1999, 45–76.
- Demonte, V., 2008, “Meaning-form correlations and adjective position in Spanish”, in L. McNally, C. Kennedy (eds), *Adjectives and Adverbs: Syntax, Semantics, and Discourse*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, 71-100.
- Doliana, A., 2016, “Agree and Minimality in the DP”, in K. Bellamy, Kate, E. Karvovskaya, G. Saad (eds), *Proceedings of the 24th Conference of the Student Organization of Linguistics in Europe*, Leyden: Leyden University Centre for Linguistics, 2016, 88–111.
- Dressler, W. U., Merlini Barbaresi, L., 1994, *Morphopragmatics: Diminutives and Intensifiers in Italian, German and Other Languages*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter.
- Dürscheid, C., 2002, “Polemik satt und Wahlkampf pur –Das postnominale Adjektiv im Deutschen”, *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft*, 21, 1..
- Gutzmann, D., 2015, *Use-Conditional Meaning. Studies in Multidimensional Semantics*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press.
- Gutzmann, D., 2017, “Modal particles ≠ modalparticles (= modal particles). Differences between German modal particles and how to deal with them semantically”, in J. Bayer, V. Struckmeier (eds), *Discourse Particles: Formal Approaches to Their Syntax and Semantics*, Berlin and New York, de Gruyter, 144-172.
- Gutzmann, D., 2019, *The Grammar of Expressivity*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press.
- Hetzron, R., 1978, “On the Relative Ordering of Adjectives”, in H. Seiler (ed), *Language Universals*, Tübingen: Narr, 1978, 165–184.
- Hoeksema, J., 2018, “Taboo terms and their grammar”, in K. Allan (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Taboo Words and Language* 2018, 159–179. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198808190.013.9>
- Hoeksema, J., Napoli, D., 2008, “Just for the hell of it: A comparison of two taboo-term constructions”, *Journal of Linguistics*, 44(2), 347–378.
- Jay, T., Janschewitz, K., 2007, “Filling the emotion gap in linguistic theory. Commentary on Potts’ expressive dimension”, *Theoretical Linguistics* 33 (2), 215–21. <https://doi.org/10.1515/TL.2007.014>
- Kaplan, D., 1999, *The meaning of ouch and oops. Explorations in the thory of menaing as use*. Manuscript, Los Angeles.

- Laenzlinger, C., 2005, "French adjective ordering: Perspectives on DP-internal movement types", *Lingua* 115 5, 645–689.
- Larson, R. K., 2000, *ACD in AP?* Paper presented at the 19th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics (WCCFL 19), Los Angeles, CA.
- McCarthy, J. J., 1982, "Prosodic Structure and Expletive Infixation", *Language*, 58(3), 574–590. <https://doi.org/10.2307/413849>
- Milner, J., 1978, *De la syntaxe à l'interprétation*, Paris, Aus éditions du Seuil.
- Napoli, D., Fisher, J., Mirus, G., 2013, "Bleached taboo-term predicates in American Sign Language" *Lingua*, 123, 148–167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2012.11.001>
- Napoli, M., 2013, "On Italian past participles with *-issimo*: The superlative of events between intensification and pluractionality", *Linguistica e Filologia* 33, 85–126.
- Nouwen, R., 2011, "Degree modifiers and monotonicity", in P. Egge, N. Klinedinst (eds), *Vagueness and Language Use*, London, Palgrave.
- Potts, C., 2005, *The Logic of Conventional Implicature*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press.
- Potts, C., 2007, "The expressive dimension", *Theoretical Linguistics*, 33, 2 <https://doi.org/10.1515/TL.2007.011>
- Rainer, F., 1983, *Intensivierung im Italienischen*, Salzburg, Salzburgerromanistische Schriften.
- Recanati, F., 2004, "Pragmatics and semantics" in L. Horn, G. Ward (eds), *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, Oxford, Blackwell, 442–462.
- Sailor, C. 2017, "Negative inversion without negation: On fuck-inversion in British English" *Cambridge Occasional Papers in Linguistics*, 10, 88–110.
- Scott, G.J., 2002, "Stacked adjectival modification and the structure of nominal phrases", in G. Cinque (ed), *Functional Structure in DP and IP: The Cartography of Syntactic Structures*, New York, Oxford University Press, 91–120.
- Sproat, R., Shih, C., 1991, "The cross-linguistic distribution of adjective ordering restrictions" in *Interdisciplinary approaches to language*, C. Georgopoulos, R. Ishihara, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 565–593.
- Svenonius, P., 2008, "The position of adjectives and other phrasal modifiers in the decomposition of DP", in L. McNally, C. Kennedy (eds), *Adjectives and Adverbs: Syntax, Semantics and Discourse*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 16–42.
- Valois, D., 2007, "Adjectives: Order within DP and Attributive Aps", in M. Everaert and H. van Riemsdijk, *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax*, Vol. I, 61–82.
- Wierzbicka, A., 1986, "Italian reduplication: Cross-cultural pragmatics and illocutionary semantics", *Linguistics*, 24: 287–315.

