Epithets at the Syntax-Semantics Interface

Pritty Patel-Grosz

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This book is one of the first extensive cross-linguistic theoretical investigations on epithets. Epithets (such as the bastard) are anaphoric expressions which take the shape of a definite description, contain an evaluative component, and are typically unstressed. This monograph shows that, in order to understand the perplexing nature of epithets, one must consider what kinds of behavior they exhibit in different components of the language faculty. In this vein, the text adopts a broad approach, analysing epithets from the perspective of the syntax-semantics-pragmatics interface. The empirical focus of this monograph is on epithets in embedded clauses. It unearths new empirical findings and shows that the acceptability of epithets is affected by a variety of influences, including syntactic factors, such as whether the epithet is in the subject position of an embedded clause, or its object position. Semantic-pragmatic restrictions further navigate the nature of epithets, such as whether they are intended to refer to an attitude holder whose beliefs or other attitudes embed the clause that contains them. Based on these findings, the book argues that epithets are a type of pronoun, subject to interface restrictions concerning the semantics and pragmatics of attitude reports. The insights in this monograph raise new questions concerning the division of labour of the language faculty with respect to the processes and mechanisms involved in Binding Theory.

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