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The literal meaning of Slur

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the complex and multifaceted nature of slurs within modern sociolinguistic contexts. The study aims to dissect the power dynamics embedded in these terms, examining how slurs function as instruments of social control, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing social hierarchies. Through a combination of qualitative analysis and case studies, this research investigates the historical origins, evolution, and contemporary usage of slurs across different cultures and communities. The findings reveal that slurs are not merely offensive words but are laden with historical and cultural significance, often reflecting broader societal attitudes towards race, gender, sexuality, and other identity markers. The study also considers the psychological impact of slurs on individuals and groups, demonstrating how these terms can inflict lasting emotional harm and contribute to a hostile social environment. In addition, the research addresses the phenomenon of reappropriation, where marginalized groups reclaim slurs as a form of empowerment and resistance. This process is analyzed to understand its potential in

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challenging and subverting the oppressive connotations traditionally associated with these terms. Ultimately, this paper underscores the importance of recognizing the deep-seated implications of slurs in everyday language and advocates for a more nuanced approach to addressing linguistic discrimination. The research concludes with recommendations for fostering more inclusive and respectful communication practices in diverse social settings.

Keywords: Slurs, Speech acts, Conversational score, Power, Discourse and social roles, Silencing, Appropriation

المعنى الحرفي للشتائم

نسرين جمعة مطلك
جامعة تكريت
و
ا.م.د. مروه كريم علي
جامعة تكريت

الـمستـخلـص

يستكشف هذا البحث الطبيعة المعقدة والمتعددة الجوانب للشتائم في السياقات الاجتماعية اللغوية الحديثة. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تشريح ديناميكيات القوة المضمنة في هذه المصطلحات، وفحص كيفية عمل الشتائم كأدوات للسيطرة الاجتماعية، وإدامة الصور النمطية وتعزيز التسلسلات الهرمية الاجتماعية. ومن خلال مزيج من التحليل النوعي ودراسات الحالة، يبحث هذا البحث في الأصول التاريخية والتطور والاستخدام المعاصر للشتائم عبر الثقافات والمجتمعات المختلفة. وتكشف النتائج أن الشتائم ليست مجرد كلمات مسيئة ولكنها محملة بأهمية تاريخية وثقافية، وغالبًا ما تعكس مواقف مجتمعية أوسع تجاه العرق والجنس والتوجه الجنسي وعلامات الهوية الأخرى. كما تدرس الدراسة التأثير النفسي للشتائم على الأفراد والجماعات، موضحة كيف يمكن لهذه المصطلحات أن تلحق ضررًا عاطفيًا دائمًا وتساهم في بيئة اجتماعية معادية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتناول البحث ظاهرة إعادة التخصيص، حيث تطالب المجموعات المهمشة بالشتائم كشكل من أشكال التمكين والمقاومة. وقد تم تحليل هذه العملية لفهم إمكاناتها في تحدي وتقويض الدلالات القمعية المرتبطة تقليديًا بهذه المصطلحات. وفي نهاية المطاف، تؤكد هذه الورقة على أهمية إدراك الآثار العميقة الجذور للشتائم في اللغة اليومية وتدعو إلى اتباع نهج أكثر دقة لمعالجة التمييز اللغوي. ويختتم البحث بتوصيات لتعزيز ممارسات الاتصال الأكثر شمولاً واحترامًا في البيئات الاجتماعية المتنوعة.

الكلمات الدالة : الافتراءات ، أفعال الكلام، درجة المحادثة ، السلطة ، الخطاب والادوار الاجتماعية.

1. DEFENITION OF SLUR

When discussing slurs, it is important to distinguish between the act of slurring and slurs, the derogative and offensive meanings of which can be created on their own. Distinguishing between slurs and the act of slurring leads to slurs being classified as derogatory. Dummett (1973) established the category of slurs as a type of derogatory. He examined the derogatory word "boche" and argued that its meaning is inherently offensive. This offensiveness occurs in almost all cases when used in a specific context. Similarly, Bach (2018) add Slurs are similar to general derogatory terms in this regard, but they differ significantly. Slurs and general derogatory terms both function to insult and demean, but they differ significantly. Slurs target specific groups based on identity characteristics such as race, gender, or ethnicity, carrying historical and social baggage related to discrimination and oppression, making them inherently more offensive. This deep-rooted offensiveness often remains regardless of context, unlike general derogatory terms, whose impact can vary with tone and intent. While some groups attempt to reclaim slurs as symbols of pride, general derogatory terms lack this complex reclamation process. Additionally, slurs have a significant perlocutionary impact, causing profound emotional harm and reinforcing societal prejudices, whereas general derogatory terms typically have a more limited, individual effect. These distinctions emphasize the inherently derogatory nature of slurs, as discussed by (Dummett ,1973) and (Bach,2018).

Saka (2014) maintains that a slurring expression is an expression which is derogatory and often used with the purpose of inflicting harm to some category of people, of stabilizing a situation of dominance/inferiority, an expression which society as a whole should not use due to some convention that officially bans its usage even if certain segments of society, in fact, use it. Those who use slurs can be recognized as having racist intentions. Slurs, however, can be used by the members of the categories slurred, because by re-appropriating a slur one can show a sense of solidarity with those who suffer due to an unjust society and neutralize its potential to cause harm (**Groeling, 2010)**.

Adam (2010) claims that a slur is ''a disparaging remark' that is usually used to ''deprecate'' certain targeted members. Utterances of slurs are usually explosively derogatory acts, and different slurs derogate members of different classes. For instance, racial slurs are ''derogatory or disrespectful nickname[s] for a racial group''. Although different slurs target members of different groups, slurs are in general derogatory terms that target members of a certain class or group.

Panzeri (2016) explains that slurs are derogatory epithets that target specific groups, identified mainly on the basis of race (nigger for a black person), nationality (wop for Italian), and religion (kike for Jew). Slurs differ from other pejoratives (moron, asshole) because they insult a person inasmuch as (s)he belongs to a specific group, that can be

identified by means of a non-offensive expression, the neutral counterpart (or non-pejorative correlate). Slurs are particularly hateful and pernicious because they convey and reinforce stereotypes about the target group, they harm "their target's self-conception and self-worth, often in ways that are common to the social group as a whole", and they are thus considered taboo, prohibited words.

Legaspe (2020) belives that referring to others as "nigger" or "faggot" is a very hurtful way of implying that they are demeaning and disparaging because they are black or gay. It is clear that a slur is a term used to disparage and offend others. However, if all words that can cause this effect are referred to as slurs and only the intention with which the word is used is taken into account, the range of derogatory terms is broadened. A slur is any word that is intended to denigrate, offend, or hurt someone. The act of slurring is the use of derogatory terms, which can be accomplished with both slurs and non-slurs.

Hancock (2004) concluded that speakers use a variety of cues to signal their humorous intentions, including cues based on contrast with context, as well as verbal and paralinguistic cues. Speakers also rely on cues provided by the audience to understand humor. In the absence of such cues or markers, speakers may be less willing to use humor because of the risk of miscommunication, while the audience may be more likely to misinterpret the humor.

2. THE LITERAL MEANING OF SLUR

Croom (2013) claims that it is typically assumed in the literature that " every word is associated with a conventional meaning which is either a property or relation ". He maintains that slurs have mixed content in the sense that the use of racial slurs (such as nigger) can be analytically decomposed into both expressive and descriptive aspects. As a racial slur, by choosing to use the slur nigger instead of a neutrally descriptive term such as African American, the speaker intends to express their endorsement of a (usually negative) attitude towards the descriptive properties possessed by the target of their utterance. For instance, consider the following felicitous utterance documented in Haley (1964):

Now we all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer – that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be.

This example suggests that the phrase ''But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger'' communicates the speaker's endorsement of a negative attitude. While the phrase ''Now we all here like you, you know that'' suggests that what the negative attitude being expressed by the speaker is directed towards is not the agent, but rather some set of the agent's properties. That is to say, the properties that the speaker endorses

the expression of a negative attitude towards are properties that have been associated with members of a particular racial group, and as a result, the speaker does not directly express a negative attitude towards the agent him or herself. Indeed, in this example the speaker explicitly says that they like the target of their utterance. However, an agent might indirectly express a negative attitude towards a target by expressing a negative attitude towards some set of properties that target possesses (Croom,2010).

Furthermore, Croom (2010) adds that slurs usually derogate, ridicule, or demean members of a certain class by targeting certain properties or features associated with those members as a class. For instance, African Americans that have been derogated with the slur nigger have typically been derogated on the basis of being ‘‘emotionally shallow, simple-minded, sexually licentious, and prone to laziness’’ (Asim, 2007). It is in such contexts where a speaker intends to ascribe at least some such properties to a target that the slur nigger has typically been employed.

Further, a speaker S who implicates through their use of language that they are of higher social status or more powerful than their hearer H is engaging in talk that ‘‘is risky, but if he [the speaker] gets away with it (hearer doesn’t retaliate, for whatever reason), speaker succeeds in actually altering the public definition of his relationship to hearer: that is, his successful exploitation becomes part of the history of interaction, and thereby alters the agreed values of D [social distance between S and H] or P [relative power between S and H]’’ (Brown& Levinson,1978:228). Accordingly, since our social identities are in part determined by the way society perceives us, and so the way society comes to interact and continues to interact with us (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1978), the derogative use of slurs can be extremely destructive to the actual character of an individual that it attacks. By ridiculing or derogating a member based on certain negative properties or features, the speaker employing the slur can support, enforce, and contribute to a history of acts that negatively alter the social identity of targeted members. This is done, presumably, for the purpose of increasing the difference in asymmetrical power relations among the interlocutors in the specific conversational context, or among the groups to which they belong more generally. It has been noted, for instance, that ‘‘the British and their colonial counterparts relied on [derogatory] language to maximize the idea of difference between themselves and their African captives’’ (Asim, 2007).

3. SEMANTIC, PRAGMATIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE OF SLURS

Leech (1983) argues that interlocutors may act superficially impolite with one another in order to foster a sense of social intimacy and to reduce relative inequalities between them. and Culpeper (1996) suggests that ‘‘the more intimate a relationship, the less necessary and important politeness is [. . .] lack of politeness is associated with

intimacy, and so being superficially impolite can promote intimacy. Clearly, this only works in contexts in which the impoliteness is understood to be untrue'', such as in communicative exchanges between close friends or in-group members.

Hornsby (2001) adopts a semantic approach, arguing that: A unified representation of pejoratives cannot be achieved by identifying a pragmatic component that must be added to the semantic component represented by the neutral counterpart of the [pejorative] word, because only the [pejorative] word itself can provide a perspective from which one can understand the various [pejorative] speech acts associated with it. The contours of the space of possible speech acts performed by sentences containing certain pejoratives can only be discerned from the perspective of someone who knows the [literal] meaning of the words. Every pejorative word, like any other, has the potential to evoke speech acts because of its [literal] meaning.

Moreover, the semantic theorist Hom (2008) claims that the derogatory content of a slur is part of its literal meaning and that ''their derogatory content gets expressed in every context of utterance''. This view suggests that the derogatory content of a slur can be explained independently of context. The semantic content of slurs includes derogation, which is determined by the semantic conventions that govern them, i.e., the rules that give them their literal meanings.

Additionaly, Croom (2010) confirms that semantic theories of slurs are appealing because they can explain why it is that slurs carry derogatory content and force across such various conversational contexts. It is because according to this account slurs ''literally say bad things, regardless of how they are used'' (cited in Hom, 2008) and because they literally ''prescribe harmful practices'' to their targets.

According to the semantic view Hom (2008), slurs:

both insult and threaten their intended targets in deep and specific ways by both predicating negative properties to them and invoking the threat of discriminatory practice towards them. [. . .]

Hom and May (2018) contend that derogation is a component of truth-condition content and that it is functionally related but not equivalent to the neutral counterpart of slurs. According to them, the specific content of each slur is determined externally by racist institutions or social practices and includes descriptive stereotypes and normative judgments, all of which should be linked to the target group's identity. For example, the epithet [i.e. racial slur] 'chink' expresses a complex, socially constructed property like: ought to be subject to higher college admissions standards, and ought to be subject to exclusion from advancement to managerial positions, and, because of being slanty-eyed, and devious, and good-at-laundering, and all because of being Chinese.

As a result, Hess (2022) adds that "chink" should be held to a higher standard of college admissions, should be barred from managerial positions due to squinty eyes, cunning, money laundering, and all because they are Chinese. This truth-conditional reading demonstrates that slurs have no allegation because no one should be discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.

Croom (2010), (as cited in Goffman ,1967) notes that "people who are familiar with one another and who do not require much ritual" may joke with one another and insult one another "apparently for the amusement of the social circle in which the ritual (the insult) is used.". For instance, imagine that speaker A and hearer B are shut buddies that are aware of every others prevalent beliefs and dispositions. If B is aware of A well enough to recognize that A is now not racist and is normally a first rate person, then sincerely it is safe for B to expect that A meant to create rapport with B as a substitute than to derogate B by A's precise use of the slur. That is, as close friends, it is common knowledge between A and B that A in established intends to create rapport with B and no longer derogate B. This is, indeed, how one in normal creates and keeps friendships, and probable how A and B in precise grew to be friends in the first place'.

Leech (1983) has argued that interlocutors may act superficially impolite with one another in order to foster a sense of social intimacy and to reduce relative inequalities between them, and Culpeper suggests that ''the more intimate a relationship, the less necessary and important politeness is [. . .] lack of politeness is associated with intimacy, and so being superficially impolite can promote intimacy. Clearly this only works in contexts in which the impoliteness is understood to be untrue'' such as in communicative exchanges between close friends or in-group members.

Finally, Jonas (2010) recently argues that ''what may seem to be impolite at a (superficial) level of what is said, may nevertheless be polite at a (deeper) level of what is implicated''. So, for instance, if it is understood between African American interlocutors that no offense is intended towards one another, they may strategically produce utterances involving slurs to foster or promote intimacy and in-group solidarity. Indeed, a hearer B will tend to interpret an insult from a speaker A as mere banter if B thinks that A likes them, because the more one interlocutor A likes another interlocutor B the more likely it is that A will be concerned with B's face and so be cautious not to offend B.

In such appropriative or in-group uses, Croom (2010), (cited in Culpeper ,1996) points out that a slur is a form of ''mock impoliteness'' since it is understood as intentionally non-offensive. For instance, in-group racial members share in many of the same discriminatory problems and face the same discriminatory prejudices. So creating a sense of solidarity and togetherness via in-group uses of slurs – the use of which is often restricted to only in-group members – can help speakers signal to each other that they are

not alone and that others like them, share in their pains, perspectives, and history of prejudices.

4. SPEECH ACTS AND SLURS

Speech acts, as conceptualized by J.L. Austin and further developed by John Searle, are fundamental to understanding how language is used not just to convey information but to perform actions and shape social reality. According to Searle (1969), speech acts can be categorized into different types such as assertives (statements that express beliefs), directives (speech acts that aim to get the listener to do something), commissives (speech acts that commit the speaker to a course of action), expressives (speech acts that convey attitudes and emotions), and declarations (speech acts that bring about a change in the external world). This categorization illustrates that speech acts are performative in nature, influencing social interactions and relationships through the words we use (Searle, 1979). Hence, speech acts can be explicit or implicit, and they can have various functions depending on the context and intention behind the words spoken.

In contrast to speech acts which can vary widely in intention and effect, slurs are derogatory terms or expressions used to demean, insult, or marginalize individuals or groups based on attributes such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc. Slurs function as performative acts that not only describe but actively participate in social practices of discrimination and exclusion. Anderson and Lepore (2013) argue that slurs are used to express negative attitudes and stereotypes, reinforcing social hierarchies and perpetuating prejudice within society. The impact of slurs extends beyond their literal meaning, influencing interpersonal relationships and contributing to broader patterns of discrimination and inequality. Hence, the relationship between speech acts and slurs lies in their shared performative nature and their distinct social and ethical implications. Both involve the use of language to perform actions, but while speech acts can serve positive or neutral functions within communicative contexts, slurs are predominantly negative in their effects. Speech acts shape social norms and interactions by conveying intentions and commitments, whereas slurs contribute to social harm by reinforcing stereotypes, promoting discrimination, and creating barriers to inclusive communication practices. Understanding this distinction is crucial for promoting respectful communication and addressing issues related to social justice and equality in language use (Anderson and Lepore, 2013).

Holmes (1984, p. 346) takes Fraser's ideas as a starting point and suggests that mitigation is a way of "reducing the expected negative effects of a speech act." For example, interlocutors can soften criticism, but they do not talk about softening compliments.

In conclusion, while speech acts and slurs both involve the performative aspects of language, their relationship underscores significant differences in intention, impact, and ethical considerations. Speech acts contribute to effective communication and social coordination, whereas slurs perpetuate harm and reinforce inequality. Recognizing and addressing these differences are essential for promoting respectful communication practices and fostering inclusive social environments.

4.1 Grecian Maxims and slurs

The Gricean Maxims, introduced by H.P. Grice in his seminal work "Logic and Conversation" (1975), are fundamental principles that underpin effective and cooperative communication. These maxims form part of Grice's broader theory of conversational implicature, which explains how speakers often mean more than what is explicitly stated and how listeners infer additional meaning based on contextual cues and shared conversational norms. The four maxims are:

1- Maxim of Quantity: This maxim requires speakers to provide an appropriate amount of information—neither too much nor too little. The aim is to ensure that contributions are as informative as necessary for the purposes of the conversation (Grice, 1975). When speakers adhere to this maxim, they help maintain clarity and avoid overloading the listener with irrelevant details or leaving out critical information.

2- Maxim of Quality: According to this maxim, speakers should not say what they believe to be false or for which they lack adequate evidence. This principle emphasizes the importance of truthfulness and reliability in communication (Grice, 1975). By following the Maxim of Quality, speakers foster trust and credibility in their interactions.

3- Maxim of Relation (Relevance): This maxim advises speakers to be relevant in their contributions. Each utterance should be pertinent to the ongoing conversation, helping to maintain a coherent and focused discourse (Grice, 1975). Relevance is crucial for ensuring that the conversation progresses logically and meaningfully.

4- Maxim of Manner: The Maxim of Manner suggests that speakers should avoid ambiguity and obscurity, and strive for clarity and orderliness in their communication (Grice, 1975). This maxim addresses the form of the message, advocating for straightforward and unambiguous expression to enhance comprehension.

Slurs, which are derogatory terms aimed at insulting or marginalizing individuals based on attributes such as race, gender, or sexual orientation, can be analyzed through the lens of these maxims to understand their harmful communicative functions. Slurs often violate the **maxim of quantity** by injecting unnecessary negative connotations into discourse. They provide more information than needed to convey an insult, embedding prejudiced attitudes and social stigmas within their usage. This additional, often implicit, information includes derogatory stereotypes that go beyond the literal meaning of the words (Grice, 1975).

4.2 Felicity Conditions and Slurs

Felicity conditions refer to the necessary conditions that must be met for a speech act to be successfully and appropriately performed. These conditions are crucial for understanding how language functions in social contexts, particularly in terms of performative utterances. Felicity conditions include aspects such as the appropriateness of the speaker, the context of the utterance, the intentions of the speaker, and the uptake or reception by the listener. Austin (1962) laid the foundation for understanding how these conditions are essential for the successful execution of speech acts. Searle (1969) further elaborates on these ideas, where he detailed various conditions such as preparatory, sincerity, propositional content, and essential conditions.

In the context of slurs, felicity conditions help illuminate why such derogatory language is not just harmful but also fails as a valid communicative act in a cooperative and respectful discourse. Slurs often violate several key felicity conditions:

1. Preparatory Conditions: These conditions require that the context and circumstances be appropriate for the speech act. Slurs typically fail this condition because they introduce unnecessary and harmful prejudice into a conversation. The use of a slur is rarely, if ever, appropriate, as it contributes to a hostile environment and undermines respectful communication. This aligns with Searle's (1969) framework where the context must be suitable for the speech act to be felicitous.
2. Sincerity Conditions: For a speech act to be felicitous, the speaker must sincerely hold the beliefs or intentions expressed. While a person using a slur might sincerely intend to express contempt or derogation, this sincerity is ethically problematic. It reflects genuine prejudice, which is socially and morally unacceptable. The sincere expression of such harmful beliefs further entrenches social divisions and perpetuates discrimination. Searle (1969) emphasizes the importance of sincerity in speech acts, noting that insincere or malicious intentions violate this condition.
3. Propositional Content Conditions: These conditions specify that the content of the utterance must be appropriate to the speech act. Slurs often embed false or unfounded negative stereotypes about a group of people. The propositional content of slurs is typically based on prejudice rather than fact, thus failing to meet the standard of appropriateness for informative or descriptive speech acts Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). They emphasis on the necessity for content to be relevant and accurate for a speech act to be effective.

Butler (1997) emphasizes on how language can enact social harm and reinforce societal structures of power and oppression. The analysis of slurs through the lens of felicity conditions underscores the ethical imperative to avoid such language and to promote discourse that is inclusive and respectful.

4.3 Criterial features and properties of Slur

Croom **(**2010, p.13) points out that while everyday speakers find it quite natural that the felicitous use of slurs need not be restricted by any one criterial feature such as the target's racial identity, some traditional philosophers and linguists may find this result intuitively unappealing. Surely, the traditionalist may argue, since the slur nigger has most often been ascribed to African Americans and has been used to derogate them, the felicitous application of that term must be restricted to African Americans.

Croom (2013) maintains that as individuals participate in social and cultural contexts with others, they employ cognitive resources representing the schematic organization of those social and cultural contexts. In the psychological literature, human concepts have often been categorized as falling into one of two groups: as either classical categories or family resemblance categories. The traditional or classical view, which was widely held in the linguistic and philosophical literature, was that category membership is determined by possession of some common, essential, criterial feature or property.

Pinker and Prince (1996) explain that "classical categories are definded by formal roles and allow us to make inferences within idealized law-governed systems". Although these "classical categories" are defined by necessary and sufficient criteria that determine whether an object is a category member or not, linguists and philosophers of language have in general been unable to adequately articulate necessary and sufficient conditions for most concepts of natural language. Rosch and Mervis (1975) explain that:

The more prototypical a category member, the more attributes it has in common with other members of the category and the less attributes it has in common with contrasting categories. Thus, prototypes appear to be just those members of the category which most reflect the redundancy structure of the category as a whole. That is, categories form to maximize the information-rich clusters of attributes in the environment.

For instance, regarding the concept art, potts (2008, 2007) argues that the "attempt to discover the necessary and sufficient properties of art is logically misbegotten," and that the, contention that "art" is amenable to real or any kind of true definition is false " because art has no set of necessary and sufficient properties. Based on this view, there is no feature (x) such that the possession of (x) is necessary and sufficient for some object (y) to be categorized as in an artistic one. Instead, this view suggests that for each of the various objects that we categorize as art. The family resemblance conception of category membership, therefore, seems most appropriate for the analysis of slurring terms, especially since it has been argued that, "derogation begins with shared stereotypes that allow negative social meanings to attach to a previously neutral term " and that the

meanings of the terms sometimes overlap, compete, and even support one another; their interaction is highly complex.

On a family-resemblance account of category membership, an individual may even fail to possess the highest ranking or most salient indicator of category membership while still being best considered a member of that category for the current conversational purpose at hand. Rosch and Mervin's (1975) family-resemblance analysis may be fruitfully extended to explain how speakers actually employ slurs in real life cases.

For instance, assume that the family resemblance category (C) designated by the term (nigger)– call this category N – consists of a number of properties (P) such as those displayed below:

C: Nigger

P1. African American

P2. Prone to laziness

P3. Subservient

P4. Commonly the recipient of poor treatment

P5. Athletic

P6. Emotionally shallow

P7. Simple-minded

P8. Sexually licentious

These properties (P1 – P8) could be ranked in the order to which their possession by an individual is taken as a salient indicator of category membership. For instance, property (P1) would be ranked relatively higher than property (P6), and so (P1) would be considered a more salient indicator than (P6) that the individual possessing it is a member of the category Nigger. In other words, although (racist or in-group) speakers may prototypically ascribe the term nigger to African Americans, (racist or in-group) speakers may still informatively or effectively ascribe that slur to someone that fails to be African American for their conversational purpose. However, for the (racist or in-group) speaker's choice to refer to a target individual as a nigger to be considered a strategically apt choice, it must be thought (or at least assumed for the purpose of the conversation) that the target individual possesses a sufficient set of properties in (P1)–(P8) such that N is the strategically most appropriate category under which to subsume the individual for the purposes of the speaker's current conversational aim (which may be to derogate or build rapport with some hearer). For instance, if speakers intend to communicate that a

target whom they dislike possesses some subset of properties (P2 –P8) that speaker might strategically choose to employ Nigger as the category that most efficiently and economically predicates the intended properties of their target and most forcefully expresses a negative attitude towards them, at least to an extent that is better than other categories available to the speaker in their lexical inventory (Weitz ,1956).

4.4 **Variable offence**

Variable offence is a concept recognizing that the harm or offence caused by a slur can vary across different contexts and audiences. In particular, there is considerable variation in the degree of offence caused. Offence varies across different slur words, across different uses of the same slur word, and across the reactions of different audience member (Popa-Wyatt ,2016).

Hom (2012) states that the focus in describing variability is on the derogative content of the word, distinguishing derogation and offence as follows: ‘‘offence is a psychological result on the part of the discourse participants, and is a function of their beliefs and values. While derogation is an objective feature of the semantic contents of pejorative terms’’. So, derogation is part of the speaker’s communicative intentions, while offence is an achieved effect on the audience members, determined in part by their beliefs and values.

As mentioned above, slurs vary in the degree of offence they cause. Jeshion (2013a) notes that ‘nigger’ is said to be more offensive than ‘chink’, as well as ‘spook’ and ‘jigaboo’, terms used for the same socially relevant group. ‘Kike’, ‘yid’, and ‘hymie’ are said to differ in their offensive intensity’’. Thus,it can be said that:

● offence does not just vary across different slur words for different groups (inter-group variation), but also across different slur words for the same group (intra-group variation). They refer to these collectively as variability type-1 (VT1) or word-variation (Jeshion, 2013b).

● Offence doesn’t just vary across different slur words. It also varies across different uses of the same slur word, depending on speaker and context. They refer to this as variability type-2 (VT2) or use-variation (Jeshion, 2013b). Consider the following examples (C marks contemptuous intonation, and NC non-contemptuous, friendly tone of voice):

(1) White person to African-American person: ‘‘You are one useless nigger^{C}.’’

(2) White person to African-American person: ‘‘Yo, my nigger ^{NC}, missed you.’’

(3) African-American person to African-American person: ‘‘You are one useless nigger^{C}.’’

(4) African-American person to African-American person: ‘‘Yo, my nigger[NC], missed you.’’

Since offence is a psychological and accordingly subjective property, such statements can totally be meaningfully defined with admire to a particular individual. However, with the useful resource of taking idealized individuals, e.g. a non-racist, non-homophobic, non-sexist individual, we can make statements about the ranking of offensiveness of slurring utterances taken with the aid of that person. Thus, we can make statements such as ‘slurring utterance X is extra offensive than utterance Y to an idealized person A, the place A is a non-racist, non-homophobic, non-sexist individual’ Jeshion (2013a).

Having taken this into account, let us consider the utterances (1)– (4). First, consider contemptuous versus non-contemptuous uses. The contemptuous makes use of (1) and (3) are larger offensive than the non-contemptuous makes use of (2) and (4). Now consider the in-group versus out-group uses. The out-group contemptuous use (1) is widely viewed greater offensive than the equal in-group use (3), and the same is proper of the corresponding pair of non-contemptuous makes use of (2) and (4).

The difficulty is to give an explanation for why there is a difference in the offence we would expect, if the speakers of (2) and (4) do not intend to convey contempt. The same can be said for (1) and (3), where contempt is intended, but where (1) is clearly more offensive. We can make many variations to the context in which these utterances are made and the relative offence within each pair will remain the same. For example, suppose that the speaker and target of utterances (2) and (4) are close friends, or that alternatively they are strangers. In either case (2) will be more offensive than (4). Now, suppose we adjust (1) and (3) so that they are not uttered with a contemptuous tone, (1) is still more offensive than (3). This shows that the degree of contempt or derogation conveyed by a slur word cannot be the only ingredient in variable offence. The pragmatic factors, such as the speaker’s group-membership, are also important.

● the same slurring utterance may cause different levels of offence to different audience members. Imagine a slurring utterance in front of an audience who vary from the highly bigoted to non-bigoted. It is reasonable to assume that different audience members will be offended to different degrees. They refer to this offence variation as variability type-3 (VT3) or audience-variation. It's important to recognize that variable offence does not diminish the overall harmful nature of slurs. Even if the degree of offence varies, slurs inherently carry the potential to cause harm and perpetuate discrimination. Understanding the concept of variable offence is crucial for navigating complex discussions around language, identity, and social justice (Jeshion ,2013a).

4.5 Roles and Power in Relation to Slurs

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) argue that slurs are a kind of hate speech that seeks to achieve an unjust power imbalance between the speaker and the target by altering their discourse roles. This power imbalance is what distinguishes oppressive slurs from other derogatory expressions. They contend that slurring utterances seek to create (or maintain) an unjust power imbalance via role assignment. Their second contention is that the degree of offence caused is correlated with the magnitude of the perceived unjustness of the power imbalance associated with this role. Hence, roles are social constructs that carry records about permissible and expected behaviours, social status (i.e. rank relative to different roles), rights, and duties.

Goffman (1961) states that "roles" are the basic units of socialization: "Roles are how tasks in society are assigned and arrangements are made to accomplish them in order to reinforce social fulfillment." Roles are assigned to individuals. Human interactions are shaped by the expectations of their wakings. Roles also often occur in pairs or groups and convey information about relative status and power. As roles change, so does power. While in many cases, roles with an imbalance of power are accepted and useful (e.g., parent and child), in other cases there is an unfair power imbalance that is created and maintained through violence (e.g., master and slave).

Additionaly, Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) point out that discourse roles have three components:

●Discourse status denotes relative rank between a role and other roles. It reflects the fact that human society is hierarchically organised, and that many social interactions involve participants with a clear difference in rank

●discourse rules govern expected moves, permissible moves, their expected effects, and rules of interpretation.

● The associated social role, the same utterance—in an otherwise identical situation—will be interpreted differently depending on the speaker's discourse role. For example, a person saying to a bank teller ''I want $1000'' will engender a different interpretation depending on whether they are a customer or a bank robber. A speech-act that changes the discourse role of a participant is thus important because it changes the discourse rules and discourse status for that participant. It also brings to salience the associated long-term social role.

Popa-Wyatt (2016) maintains that it is necessary to separate long-term social roles external to the dialogue from the short-term social roles (discourse roles) that are internal to the dialogue. Without such a distinction, we cannot have a coherent theory of how roles determine dialogue. Let us take an example from the film ''In the Heat of the

Night''. After being arrested in Mississippi in the 1960s, on suspicion of murder, the Sidney Poitier character, Mr Tibbs, is taken to the police station. Mr Tibbs has four external social roles that are relevant: first, he is an African-American in the deep south during a period of overt racist practice; second, he is briefly a murder suspect; third, he is a police officer; and fourth, he is the number one homicide expert with the Philadelphia police department. The conversation with the chief of police begins with Mr Tibbs as a murder suspect, and the fact of his race determining the conversational trajectory, and the balance of power:

PC: Got a name boy?

MT: Virgil.

PC: Virgil? (laughs) [I don't think we're going to have any trouble, are we

Virgil?

MT: No.

PC: What d'you hit him with boy?

It should be clear that the power lies with the police chief. As the conversation progresses it transpires that Mr Tibbs is a police officer:

PC: Just what you do up there in Pennsylvania, to earn that kind of money?

MT: I'm a police officer. (shows police badge)

PC: Oh. Yeah. (scratches head, sits down)

At this point the tone of the conversation changes. The fact that he is a policeman and a homicide expert now determines the trajectory of the discourse. This is shown with particular force, when, after further conversation, the police chief asks him to look at the body of the murdered man as a favour:

PC: Look, if they pay you $162.39 a week to look at bodies. Why can't you look at this one?

MT: Why can't you look at it yourself?

PC: Because I'm not an expert, officer.

Although the tone of the conversation has already changed, ''officer'' is the first time Virgil Tibbs is referred to with an honorific. It is a clear statement of respect. The request for a favour demonstrates a significant shift in the power balance during the conversation (Popa-Wyatt,2016).

This example shows that the salience of external social roles changes during a discourse. To make sense of the conversation at any moment, we have to know which external social roles of Mr. Tibbs are salient at that moment. Certain external roles became less salient (murder suspect, member of an oppressed racial group), while others (police officer, homicide expert) became more salient. But three of the actual external social roles of Mr. Tibbs did not change: all the way through the conversation, and before and after, he was an African-American, a police officer, and a homicide expert. Thus, to describe the conversational kinematics we must separate a participant's external social roles that exist beyond and throughout the dialogue from their corresponding changes in salience during the dialogue and the way that those changes in salience cause the conversational kinematics to change.

4.6 Slurs and oppressive speech

Langton (1998) points out that speech can be used to insult, harass, threaten, bully, badger, demean, and humiliate people. If oppression is simply a matter of a person being treated particularly poorly, then of course speech can be used to oppress, since it can be used in any of these ways to treat people very poorly. He proposes that speakers have authority if they already have local control over aspects of the lives of the targets. He adds that some types of speech, such as pornography, can not only subordinate, but are constitutive of subordination. In other words, the illocutionary act performed is an act of subordination, rather than merely causing subordination through its perlocutionary effects.

McGowan (2009) argues that, in fact, authority is not needed, based on the idea of conversational score. Simpson (2013) expresses that the conversational score for a conversation C at time t is, roughly, an informal register of the participants' shared presuppositions and shared or respective expectations, which together determine – in accordance with complex but consistently-behaved rules – which conversational moves would constitute 'correct play' in Conversation at time.

Lewis (1979) points out that conversational score evolves so as to make the utterances that have occurred ''correct play''. This is achieved by various rules of accommodation, which refer to the implicit principles or mechanisms by which participants in a conversation adjust the conversational context to ensure that what has been said fits appropriately within that context. These rules help maintain the flow and coherence of the conversation, even when unexpected or unconventional utterances occur. In turn, the conversational score and the rules of conversational kinematics together determine what counts as correct play. So an utterance that requires a rule of accommodation changes the conversational score, and thereby changes what is conversationally permissible.

McGowan (2009) identifies a species of illocutionary act called 'the conversational exercitive'; exercitive because the illocutionary type is one which determines what is permissible within a particular domain of conduct; and *conversational* because the domain in which the speech act enacts permissibility facts is the domain of conversation. She argues that conversational exercitives do not need to display their communicative intentions, nor have them understood by participants, in order to work, and so they can be what she terms ''covert''. Critically, conversational exercitives do not require authority in the way that standard exercitives do. McGowan (2009) extends this idea of a covert exercitive to include any move in any rule (norm) governed activity, i.e. any move in any game changes the state of the game, thus determining the permissible next moves. Permissible moves are simply defined by the rules of correct play.

Simpson (2013) cited in McGowan (2009) claims that we can think of oppression as a rule governed activity. So, if a verbal move enacts a specific rule within the oppression game then it is an exercitive within the game of oppression, i.e. it changes what is a permissible move in the oppression game. She suggests that sexist and racist speech falls into this category. So sexist and racist speech is constitutive of a move within the game of oppression. It can be used to explain slurring utterances by adding discourse roles as being possible entities in the conversational score. These determine what is correct play in the conversation. Because of accommodation the conversational score updates to include this assignment: the target now has the discourse role. This in turn changes rules of interpretation, and rules of permissibility about what the target can say.

It would seem natural, given our division between discourse roles and external social roles, to say that slurs are constitutive of oppressive speech with respect to the discourse roles, because they have the illocutionary force of assigning a subordinate role for the purposes and duration of the discourse. So, in this sense the theory clearly supports the notion that slurs constitute oppression in the current social (conversational) interaction (Simpson ,2013).

5.SILECING AND APROPRATION IN RELATION TO SLURS

The concepts of silencing and appropriation are intricately linked to the usage of slurs. Slurs have been and continue to be tools of oppression, silencing the voices of marginalized groups and perpetuating harmful power dynamics. Appropriation of slurs by dominant groups further complicates this issue, highlighting the need for awareness, sensitivity, and respectful discourse (Lawrence, 1993).

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) point out that silencing is actually a pair of phenomena. First, the target feels intimidated to respond. Second, even if they do respond their responses cannot completely undo the effects of the slur, and can be ignored.

Furthermore, in constitutive terms the discourse role also includes rules that permit participants to ignore future utterances by the target, including those that disable objections from the target to the assignment itself. The utterance constitutes a threat of violence by reference to the roles assigned, and one of the perlocutionary effects is the fear of the target that selfsilences to try to self-preserve. For instance, imagine an African-American man arrested by a racist policeman who targets him with a slur: if he objects, his objections can be used as evidence of his criminality—resisting arrest, talking back to a police officer. In this way, his perfectly justified response is turned against him. So in the first case the target does not speak, and in the second case s/he will not be heard. Both are demonstrations of power.

In regard with Cultural appropriation, as defined by Scafidi(2005), involves "taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission." In the context of slurs, appropriation can occur when members of a dominant group co-opt the slur and use it within their own group, often removing its negative connotations or using it in a positive light. This act of appropriation can further marginalize. When members of a dominant group appropriate a slur, they often do so without understanding or acknowledging the historical context and power dynamics surrounding the term. This act of appropriation can serve to further erase the experiences of the marginalized group and contribute to a false sense of equality or progress (Ross ,2015).

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) state that appropriation is a complex phenomenon. When a member of the target group uses a slur word, the felicity conditions for the role assignment do not automatically fail because their group-membership doesn't match that of the historical oppressor group. Because of this failure, the slur word is freed, enabling appropriation as a possibility. Thus, the space for appropriation must be created by repeated uses where the felicity conditions are violated. So, for example, when an African-American greets another African-American with ''Nigger'', a different pair of roles can be assigned—roles with equal discourse rights. This is perfectly possible for in-group uses to offend if some of the felicity conditions are met. A friendly white speaker of ''Nigger'' will likely offend, insofar as their group-membership fulfils the felicity conditions for a speech-act that assigns roles with an unjust power imbalance. So, the two uses (in-group and out-group) have the potential to assign different pairs of roles.

6.THE CONTRIBUTION OF SLURS TO OPPRESSION

Slurs, or derogatory and offensive terms directed at specific individuals or groups, play a significant role in perpetuating oppression and reinforcing power imbalances. The use of slurs has tangible impacts that contribute to a cycle of discrimination and marginalization. It is argued that slurring acts are moves in a discourse that seek to

shift power from the target to the speaker. If a slurring act only affected the current discourse, its effects would end when the discourse ends**(** Adam, 2021).

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) state that Just as the discourse function is influenced through the social roles of the participants, so the social roles of the members are influenced through the discourse. The discourse role feeds returned into the social role. This feedback is completed by perlocutionary effects of the slurring utterances. First, these include changes to the attitudes of audience members and to their dispositions about how to treat contributors of the target group. There is proof that social instances have an impact on the extent to which people discriminate, and can override an individual's declared ideology**.**

Similarly, Warner and DeFleur (1969) show that those of low racial prejudice are more likely to act in a discriminatory manner if they are members of a society in which there is a significant number of bigots, and they know that their actions will be broadcast. In predominantly nonbigoted societies the reverse is true: bigots hide their beliefs so as to avoid social disapproval. Thus, when a bigot uses slur words, they make it more permissible for others within their social circle to give voice to their bigotry. If there are sufficient bigots, they create a pressure for even non-bigots to discriminate. In this way, the perlocutionary effect of a slurring use is to increase oppression by incrementally increasing the social pressure for, and acceptability of, oppressive acts.

So, racial slurring, for instance, in a racist society versus a non-racist society will have different effects in inducing, or failing to induce, others to discriminatory acts. Lance and Kukla (2013) describe how speech acts shift norms. They introduce the notion of uptake. In this, the pragmatic context within which the utterance is made determines whether uptake is achieved. They refer to the ‘‘output’’ of a speech act as the set of normative statuses it institutes. They emphasise that ‘‘a speech act can be, in virtue of its uptake, a different speech act than it would typically be, given its social context and standard discursive conventions’’.

Second, by slurring the bigot shows others the power they can acquire. On the power theory outlined here, the bigot is not talking about power, they are demonstrating power. The speaker acquires discourse power. This is emotionally appealing to audience members—who are not members of the target group—who feel less powerful than they would like. They see that they can accrue power to themselves by using a slur. Thus, a perlocutionary effect is to make others desire the power the bigot has grabbed. Increasing desire is different to increasing acceptability. Both are required for audience members to join the side of the bigot (Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt ,2018).

Tirrell (2012) believes that deeply derogative words are ‘‘action-engendering’’ and ‘‘can be part and parcel of genocide, not only an antecedent of it’’. In addition,

‘‘understanding these speech-acts such as ‘inyenzi’ (cockroach) or ‘inzoka’ (snake) helps to illuminate the important ways that power is enacted through discourse, how speech-acts can prepare the way for physical and material acts, and how speech generates permissions for actions hitherto uncountenanced.

7.PROPLEMS RELATED TO SLURS

The use of slurs leads to several significant problems and ethical dilemmas. Here are some of the main issues associated with slurs:

Slurs often reflect and reinforce power imbalances between dominant and marginalized groups. They serve to uphold systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Slurs contribute to the social, political, and economic disenfranchisement of targeted groups (Croom, 2010).

The use of slurs can have significant psychological impacts on the individuals and communities targeted by this language. Bränström (2016) suggests that exposure to ethnic slurs can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly when individuals feel unable to respond or are repeatedly targeted.

Moreover, Kennedy (2018) shows that slurs have the potential to cause harm and offense to their targets and others. They can inflict emotional distress, perpetuate stereotypes, contribute to discrimination, and create an unsafe environment for marginalized groups. The use of slurs normalizes derogatory language and can lead to further acts of prejudice or violence.

In addition, Slurs are often used as tools of hate speech, intended to demean, dehumanize, and stigmatize members of a particular group. This can contribute to a culture of discrimination, prejudice, and systemic inequality. Penner, Link, and Dovidio, (2019) show that exposure to racial slurs, for example, can increase implicit bias and negative evaluations of the targeted group.

Finally, Kennedy (2020) states that while members of targeted groups may reclaim slurs as a form of empowerment, this reclamation is not without challenges. Non-members of the group may misuse reclaimed slurs, perpetuating harm and offense. Navigating the boundaries of reclamation and determining who has the right to use reclaimed slurs can be complex.

8.PREVIOUS STUDIES ON SLURS AND THEIR TRANSLATION

Previous studies on slurs and their translation have explored the complex and sensitive nature of these terms, which are deeply rooted in social, cultural, and historical contexts. Researchers have examined how slurs function linguistically, conveying not only denotative meaning but also connotative and performative dimensions that can inflict harm, express contempt, or reinforce social hierarchies. This section reviews a

number of studies on slurs and their translations chronologically from the oldest to the newest ones, as follows:

1. **The study of Jay, T. (1992): Cursing in America: A Psycholinguistic Study of Dirty Language in the Courts, in the Movies, in the Schoolyards and on the Streets**

   Jay's study investigates the use of dirty language in various societal contexts such as courts, movies, schoolyards, and streets, aiming to understand its psycholinguistic aspects in American culture. Jay aims to explore and understand the psycholinguistic aspects of dirty language across different societal domains in America, including courts, movies, schoolyards, and streets. Jay likely gathered data from observational studies and possibly interviews or surveys conducted in courts, movies, schoolyards, and streets across America to analyze the use of dirty language in various contexts. Jay's study revealed insights into the varied contexts and psychological motivations behind the use of dirty language in American society, highlighting its complex role in interpersonal communication.

2. **The study of Hughes (2006): An Encyclopedia of Swearing: The Social History of Oaths, Profanity, Foul Language, and Ethnic Slurs in the English-Speaking World**

Hughes' encyclopedia explores the social history of swearing, oaths, profanity, and ethnic slurs across the English-speaking world, offering a comprehensive view of their evolution and societal impact. Hughes aims to provide a comprehensive social history of swearing, oaths, profanity, and ethnic slurs within the English-speaking world, documenting their evolution and societal significance. Hughes compiled data from historical documents, literature, legal records, and other written sources to construct an encyclopedia detailing the social history of swearing, oaths, profanity, and ethnic slurs in the English-speaking world؛Hughes utilized a historical and archival research method to compile and analyze extensive written records, literature, and legal documents to document the social history of swearing and ethnic slurs. Hughes' research documented the evolution and societal functions of swearing, oaths, and ethnic slurs, offering a comprehensive historical perspective on their cultural significance within the English-speaking world.

3. **Anderson and Lepore (2013): Slurring words**

   Anderson and Lepore examine the phenomenon of slurring words, likely focusing on linguistic aspects and possibly exploring their social implications. They aim to study the phenomenon of slurring words, likely focusing on their linguistic characteristics and possibly exploring their social and cultural implications. Anderson and Lepore likely analyzed linguistic data, possibly including corpus

studies or experimental data, to investigate the linguistic characteristics and usage patterns of slurring words. Anderson and Lepore likely utilized linguistic analysis methods, potentially including corpus linguistics and experimental studies, to investigate the linguistic features and usage patterns of slurs. Anderson and Lepore's findings provided insights into the linguistic structures and social implications of slurring words, contributing to the understanding of how language can be used to demean or marginalize.

The studies by Jay (1992), Hughes (2006), and Anderson & Lepore (2013), primarily focus on analyzing slurs within the contexts of psycholinguistics, social history, linguistic structure, philosophical implications, and power dynamics in English-speaking societies. These studies delve into the usage, evolution, societal impact, linguistic characteristics, and ethical dimensions of slurs, contributing valuable insights to their respective fields. In contrast, my study on translating English slurs in political debates into Arabic from a pragmatic perspective addresses a distinct and pressing issue within cross-cultural communication. The specific problem lies in the complexities of translating highly context-dependent and culturally loaded language such as slurs, which often carry specific connotations, power dynamics, and emotive impacts that may not directly transfer between languages.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has comprehensively explored the multifaceted nature of slurs, shedding light on their historical origins, sociolinguistic functions, psychological impacts, and processes of reappropriation. The study has demonstrated that slurs are deeply embedded in cultural and social contexts, functioning as instruments of social control that reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate social hierarchies. The significant psychological and emotional harm caused by slurs underscores the need for greater awareness and sensitivity in language use. Additionally, the examination of reappropriation reveals its potential for subverting negative connotations and empowering marginalized groups, though its limitations must be acknowledged. The study advocates for more inclusive and respectful communication practices, suggesting that educational programs and policies can help reduce linguistic discrimination. By providing a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between language and social identity, this research contributes to broader efforts aimed at fostering a more equitable society.

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