The semantics of slurs: a refutation of pure expressivism

Adam M. Croom *

Department of Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania, 619 Williams Hall, Philadelphia, PA 19104, United States
Department of Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania, 433 Cohen Hall, Philadelphia, PA 19104, United States

ABSTRACT

In several recent contributions to the growing literature on slurs, Hedger (2012, 2013) draws upon Kaplan's (1999) distinction between descriptive and expressive content to argue that slurs are expressions with purely expressive content. The distinction between descriptive and expressive content and the view that slurs are expressions with purely expressive content has been widely acknowledged in prior work (e.g., Kaplan, 1999; Kratzer, 1999; Potts, 2003, 2005, 2007; Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Pullum and Rawlins, 2007; Potts et al., 2009), and Hedger (2012, 2013) aims to contribute to this tradition of scholarship by offering novel arguments in support of his "pure expressivist" account of slurs (henceforth PE). But the account that PE offers is explanatorily inadequate, resting on suspect a priori intuitions which also commit one to denying many basic facts about slurs, such as that slurs largely display systematic differential application and that slurs can be used non-offensively between in-group speakers. In this article I provide clear reasons for rejecting PE, arguing particularly against Hedger (2012, 2013) as one of PE's most explicit and recent proponents. In showing that PE is inadequate in at least 11 ways, I argue in favor of a mixed or hybrid approach.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In several recent contributions to the growing literature on slurs, Hedger (2012, 2013) draws upon Kaplan's (1999) distinction between descriptive and expressive content to argue that slurs are expressions with purely expressive content. The distinction between descriptive and expressive content and the view that slurs are expressions with purely expressive content has been widely acknowledged in prior work (e.g., Kaplan, 1999; Kratzer, 1999; Potts, 2003, 2005, 2007; Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Pullum and Rawlins, 2007; Potts et al., 2009), and Hedger (2012, 2013) aims to contribute to this tradition of scholarship by offering novel arguments in support of his "pure expressivist" account of slurs (henceforth PE). But the account that PE offers is explanatorily inadequate, resting on suspect a priori intuitions which also commit one to denying many basic facts about slurs, such as that slurs largely display systematic differential application and that slurs can be used non-offensively between in-group speakers. In this article I provide clear reasons for rejecting PE, arguing particularly against Hedger (2012, 2013) as one of PE's most explicit and recent proponents. In showing that PE is inadequate in at least 11 ways, I argue in favor of a mixed or hybrid approach.

Towards this end the present article will proceed as follows. Section 2 introduces what slurs are along with several basic facts that an adequate framework for slurs ought to account for. Section 3 reviews the purely expressive account of slurs (PE) most recently and explicitly advocated by Hedger (2012, 2013) and inspects how the projection behavior of slurs differs markedly from expressions with purely descriptive content. Next we turn to review three key cases Hedger (2012, 2013) considers in support of PE's claim that slurs are expressions with purely expressive content, while Section 4 provides a

---

* Tel.: +1 2158988563.
  E-mail address: adam.m.croom@gmail.com

critical evaluation of these cases. In Section 5 we then look at several recent empirical considerations on the non-derogatory use of slurs, while Section 6 concludes. But let us now start from the beginning and first introduce what slurs are.

2. Slurs and some basics for an account

Slurs, such as *nigger* or *faggot*, are expressions that are often used to derogate certain group members and have been considered among the most offensive of all linguistic expressions (Kennedy, 2002, p. 23; Anderson and Lepore, 2013, p. 25). Often considered a form of "hate speech [...] directed to a group of people, based on a shared characteristic of that group," slurs are generally considered derogatory expressions that target certain group members on the basis of descriptive features such as their racial or sexual identity, with racial slurs such as *nigger* primarily targeting people on the basis of race-based features and sexual slurs such as *faggot* primarily targeting people on the basis of sex-based features (Fraleigh and Tuman, 2010, p. 139). Himma (2002), for example, suggests that a linguistically adequate dictionary might "define "nigger" as "a slur that is wrongfully used to oppress black persons on the basis of race [... and] define "faggot" as "a term wrongfully used to oppress male homosexuals on the basis of sexual preference" (p. 518, 521, fn. 23). So an application of a particular slur in context does not occur at random, but instead based on considerations of their systematic differential application–conditions, which concern descriptive features of targets such as their racial or sexual identity. This is not only how speakers are able to systematically distinguish between relatively broader categories of slurs (e.g., the racial slur *nigger* from the sexual slur *faggot*) but further how speakers are able to systematically distinguish between relatively narrower categories of slurs (e.g., the racial slur *nigger* from the racial slur *gook*) within those broader categories. That there are in fact different types of slurs applied differentially towards targets is noncontroversial – as Anderson and Lepore (2013) rightly point out, there in fact exists a large variety of slurs "that target groups on the basis of race ('nigger'), nationality ('kraut'), religion ('kike'), gender ('bitch'), sexual orientation ('fag'), immigrant status ('wetback') and sundry other demographics" (p. 25) – and accounting for this basic fact has been outlined in prior work as one of several conditions to be met by any explanatorily adequate account of slurs.[1]

Another basic fact about slurs that must be accounted for is their ability to pack some of the nastiest punches natural language has to offer.[2] Since slurs of any type seem capable of greatly offending most people, the question of how slurs are able to do this across such a diverse range of contexts (e.g., while being embedded within a question, under negation, or as the antecedent of a conditional) provides the linguist and philosopher alike with a substantive theoretical challenge. Clearly such an important challenge must be carried out with responsibility and without unsupported a priori prejudice, as a thorough understanding of how slurs are actually used may have significant real-world implications for how issues regarding freedom of speech and freedom from oppression are practically adjudicated in our society.

Perhaps the most salient feature about slurs is their ability to offend, as this has been a central point of focus in prior work on slurs (e.g., Anderson and Lepore, 2013, p. 25; Hedger, 2012, p. 74). The potential offensiveness of slurs is not only evidenced by the fact that their use has often initiated violence and ended in homicide (Hoover, 2007; Kiefer, 2010; Fox 10 News, 2010; Islam, 2011; Wilkinson, 2011), but is further evidenced by more straightforwardly linguistic considerations, such as through an analysis of their projection behavior across a diverse range of linguistic contexts. The projection behavior of slurs has been investigated at great length in prior work (Potts, 2007; Hom, 2008, 2010; Williamson, 2009; McCready, 2010; Croom, 2011, 2013; Hom, 2012; Anderson and Lepore, 2013; Hay, 2012; Whiting, 2013), and Hedger (2012, 2013) rightly draws upon considerations of this kind to argue that the projection behavior of slurs differs markedly from that of expressions with purely descriptive content. Hedger (2012, 2013) also draws upon these considerations to ground his defense of PE, which, as I show in Section 4, is explanatorily inadequate and commits one to several untenable conclusions. As it will be made clear in Section 4, the endorsement of PE by Hedger (2012, 2013) along with several others before (Kaplan, 1999; Kratzer, 1999; Potts, 2003, 2005, 2007; Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Pullum and Rawlins, 2007; Potts et al., 2009) in fact rests on suspect a priori intuitions that commit one to denying many basic facts about slurs, such as that slurs largely display systematic differential application (e.g., the slurs *gook* and *slut* are differentially applied towards different targets, with this differential application being systematic) and that slurs can be used non-offensively between in-group speakers. But before discussing reasons for rejecting PE, let us first briefly review it in some detail along with its explanatory merits.

3. Slurs and pure expressivism

In his article "The Semantics of Racial Slurs," Hedger (2012) follows a rich tradition of linguists and philosophers of language that have drawn upon Kaplan's (1999) distinction between *descriptive* and *expressive* content to aid them in their analyses of linguistic expressions (Kratzer, 1999; Potts, 2003, 2005, 2007; Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Pullum and Rawlins, 2007; Potts et al., 2009). The distinction between descriptive and expressive content became well acknowledged as research on expressive content became increasingly fashionable, which was no doubt partly owed to the publication of *The Logic of Conventional Implicature*, where Potts (2005) developed a multidimensional logic $\mathscr{L}_{CI}$ for handling conventional implicatures

---

[1] See adequacy condition 2 of 6 in Croom (2011, p. 355), and adequacy condition 2 of 7 in Croom (2013, p. 200).

[2] See adequacy condition 1 of 6 in Hom (2008, p. 426). See also adequacy condition 3 of 6 in Croom (2011, p. 355), and adequacy condition 3 of 7 in Croom (2013, p. 200).

(CIs) including (on his view) expressives.[3] Following this influential research tradition, Hedger (2012, 2013) draws upon the distinction between descriptive and expressive content in order to provide an analysis of slurring expressions in particular and to argue that slurs are expressions with purely expressive content.[4] As Hedger (2012) explains this distinction, "*descriptive* content [...] represents the world as being a certain way, and as such can be either true or false" whereas "*expressive* content [...] merely display[s] an attitude of the speaker, and as such are not truth-apt" (p. 76; see also Potts, 2005, p. 7).

Hedger (2012) offers examples of expressions with purely descriptive content, which include *black* and *elephant* (p. 78), as well as examples of expressions with purely expressive content, which include *fucker* (p. 77) and all instances of slurs (p. 74, 78; see also Hedger, 2013).[5] Hedger (2012, 2013) draws upon this distinction between purely descriptive and purely expressive content to account for the inoffensiveness of expressions like *Korean American* and the offensiveness of expressions like *gook*. Since expressions with purely descriptive content (e.g., *woman*) are typically inoffensive whereas expressions with purely expressive content (e.g., *fucker*) are typically offensive, by arguing that slurs are expressions with purely expressive content Hedger (2012, 2013) aims to account for the particularly salient ability of slurs to offend. As Hedger (2012) explains his purely expressive view, "The view here offered for your consideration is that slurs contain merely expressive content – i.e., they display an attitude of contempt on the part of the speaker toward their targets – but they lack an extension, and hence don't make truth-apt contributions to semantic content" (p. 77–78). Hedger (2013) further explains that PE is committed to the view that "Slurs express contempt regardless of the attitude or particular use of the speaker. In the case of slurs, the independent meaning *just is* an offensive expression of contempt; hence the expression is part of the semantic content of slurs" (p. 209).[6]

Because Hedger (2012, 2013) follows a tradition of scholarship holding a strict distinction between purely descriptive and purely expressive content such that the content of each expression is either descriptive or expressive but not mixed (Kaplan, 1999; Kratzer, 1999; Potts, 2003, 2005, 2007; Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Pullum and Rawlins, 2007; Potts et al., 2009), Hedger's (2012) strategy is the straightforward one of aiming to show that slurs are not expressions with purely descriptive content and so must be expressions with purely expressive content instead.[7] The way that Hedger (2012) aims to show that slurs are not expressions with purely descriptive content is to show that the projection behavior of slurs differs markedly from that of expressions with purely descriptive content, and that the two must therefore be distinct.

Hedger (2012) provides several examples showing how the projection behavior of slurs differs from that of expressions with purely descriptive content, and such examples have been well-rehearsed in prior work (Potts, 2007; Hom, 2008, 2010, 2012; Williamson, 2009; McCready, 2010; Croom, 2011, 2013; Anderson and Lepore, 2013; Hay, 2012; Whiting, 2013). In "The Expressive Dimension," for instance, Potts (2007) considered the slur *nigger* as an example of an *expressive* item, which is to be distinguished from a *descriptive* item in that only expressives display a joint set of linguistic properties which include (i) nondisplaceability, (ii) independence, (iii) immediacy, and (iv) descriptive ineffability (p. 166–167, 181; see also Potts and Kawahara, 2004, p. 254–255).[8] Since these properties have already been well-discussed, it will suffice to review just one

---

[3] This along with subsequent work by Potts (2007) has been regarded by the linguistic community as "Really Fucking Brilliant" (Geurts, 2007).

[4] Hedger (2012) cites Kaplan's unpublished manuscript from (2004), but since it has been available since at least (1999) I here cite the earlier version.

[5] Hedger (2012) provides no concrete examples of slurs but instead identifies all instances by *S* (p. 74, 78). Although Hedger presumably avoids mentioning examples of slurs in order to avoid appearing prejudice, I believe that doing so is at least partly responsible for many of the failures of Hedger that I point out in the present work, including a weakened ability to notice distinctions between different slurs, a failure to consult concrete examples of how particular slurs have in fact been used, and a general failure to connect theorizing about slurs with empirical data from out-group as well as in-group speakers (also see discussion in Section 3 of Croom, 2014, p. 26). Let us acknowledge at the outset that we are non-prejudice professionals and simply carry on with our linguistic analysis of the relevant examples, so that we can be as clear and accurate in our investigations as possible.

[6] Hom (2008) similarly considered "derogatory autonomy" as adequacy condition 3 of 6 for slurs and claimed that "*The derogatory force for any epithet is independent of the attitudes of any of its particular speakers*" (p. 426). As Hom (2008) argued for this point: "For example, uses of 'chink' carry the same derogatory force no matter how racist or nonracist the particular speaker is towards Chinese people. Another example of autonomy is how derogatory variation is independent of particular speakers' attitudes. A speaker may be extremely prejudiced toward the English and not at all prejudiced toward African-Americans, and yet this psychological state will have almost no effect on the pejorative force of the speaker's uses of 'limey' and 'nigger'" (p. 426). I reject Hom's (2008) inclusion of derogatory autonomy as an adequacy condition on slurs, as well as Hedger's (2012, 2013) acceptance of it, based on empirical grounds since it is a fact that slurs are often used non-derogatorily, and even positively, between in-group speakers. This point is further discussed in Sections 4–5 of the present work, in Section 5 in Croom (2011), in Section 9 in Croom (2013), and in Section 3 in Croom (2014).

[7] The basic arguments in support of PE are provided in Hedger (2013) often relying and referring back to this earlier work, so I here discuss the key arguments in support of PE that are provided earlier in Hedger (2012). Interestingly enough, even though Hedger (2012, 2013) does not cite Croom (2011), it is clear that most of the correct points that are made by Hedger (2012) and Hedger (2013) were already previously discussed in Sections 1–4 in Croom (2011) and Section 5 in Croom (2011), respectively. Explicating these points of comparison is not the main aim of the present work, but the reader can easily see these points of comparison by consulting Croom (2011, 2013) and Hedger (2012, 2013).

[8] As Potts and Kawahara (2004) have argued, when expressions display (i) the property of nondisplaceability, those expressions "tell us about the speaker's beliefs in the utterance situation" (p. 255), (ii) the property of independence, those expressions are "multidimensional in the sense that" each expression "contributes a meaning that is independent of the meaning of the main clause" (p. 256), (iii) the property of immediacy, those expressions are such that each "achieve[s] their intended act simply by being uttered [...] in this sense, they are performative" (p. 257), (iv) the property of descriptive ineffability, those expressions are such that "speakers are never fully satisfied when they [are] paraphrase[d]" (p. 258). Potts (2007) has further suggested that when expressions display (v) the property of perspective dependence, those expressions are "evaluated from a particular perspective," and that, "In general, the perspective is the speaker's, but [that] there can be deviations if conditions are right" (p. 166), and (vi) the property of repeatability, those expressions are such that "If a speaker repeatedly uses an expressive item, the effect is generally one of strengthening the emotive content, rather than one of redundancy" (p. 167). The general idea is that expressions with purely expressive content can be distinguished from expressions with purely descriptive content by the fact that only expressions with purely expressive content will jointly display properties (i) through (iv) or (vi) (according to Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Potts, 2007, respectively).

example Hedger (2012) considers involving the comparison between (1) and (2) below, "when S is a slur normally used to target blacks" (p. 78):

(1)   If David is intelligent, then so is Judith.[9]
(2)   If Obama is an S, then so is his wife.[10]

The basic point being made with an example like this is that, whereas a speaker of (1) can still plausibly deny that they have expressed anything about David (since *intelligent*, an expression with purely descriptive content,[11] is embedded within the antecedent of the conditional), a speaker of (2) *cannot* still plausibly deny that they have expressed anything about Obama (even though the slurring expression *S* is likewise embedded within the antecedent of the conditional). Croom (2011) has offered a similar example before, but one that is somewhat clearer since the comparison it involves (between (3) and (4) shown below) more closely approximates a minimal pair and actually provides a concrete example of the slur under investigation (p. 345). So perhaps it is worth briefly considering it here in (3) and (4) below:

(3)   If I didn't like *African Americans*, then I'd probably be racist.[12]
(4)   If I didn't like *niggers*, then I'd probably be racist.[13]

Since in (3) the descriptive expression *African American* is embedded within the antecedent of the conditional, it is clear that a speaker uttering (3) does not generate the inference that they are racist simply in virtue of uttering (3). The speaker of (3) is only committed to saying that they probably would be racist *if in fact* they did not like African Americans, but that is an *if* they can plausibly deny. So the scope of the descriptive expression *African American* is restricted by the conditional and does not project out to generate the inference that the speaker uttering (3) presumably holds racist views. But notice that in (4), although the slurring expression *niggers* is embedded within the antecedent of the conditional, the derogatory force of *niggers* still manages to *project out* of its embedded position to generate the inference that the speaker uttering (4) presumably holds racist views. "For if the speaker were not currently in possession of derogatory attitudes," Croom (2011) notes, "there are many other non-derogatory neutral descriptive terms that the speaker could have used, for instance, by saying (5a) [provided in (3) above] instead" (p. 345; see also Finlay, 2005, p. 19).[14] Potts (2007) identified this property of slurs as the *immediacy* property, explaining that "the immediacy property ensures that the damage is done as soon as *nigger* escapes his lips" (p. 181), and by considering examples like these which show how the projection behavior of slurs differs markedly from that of expressions with purely descriptive content, Hedger (2012) seems to have a strong case in support of the claim that slurs cannot plausibly be considered as expressions that are purely descriptive.

After first arguing that slurs cannot plausibly be considered as expressions that are purely descriptive, Hedger (2012) then proceeds to further argue that slurs are expressions that are purely expressive instead. That is to say, Hedger (2012) attempts to reinforce the strict conceptual bifurcation between expressions with purely descriptive and purely expressive content that he has inherited from prior scholarship (Kaplan, 1999; Kratzer, 1999; Potts, 2003, 2005, 2007; Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Pullum and Rawlins, 2007; Potts et al., 2009) by attempting to demonstrate that slurs "lack descriptive content whatsoever" (p. 77) and "that slurs contain merely expressive content" (p. 78). Hedger (2012) argues for this further point that slurs are purely expressive by providing three key cases for consideration, the first case being that "When I would look up certain cuss words [in Spanish] I noticed that different dictionaries would give very different English expressions as translations" and that "It occurred to me that a vast number of derogatory expressions (particularly those considered most offensive) don't obviously differ in meaning" (p. 77). Second, Hedger (2012) suggests that we consider the case of "the person who, while working on a car, hurls a wrench in frustration and yells "fucker!" It would be odd to claim that this person has described the wrench or the car as being a certain way" (p. 77). Presumably this is because a purely expressive expression like *fucker* "doesn't describe […] at all, but merely expresses an attitude of contempt" (Hedger, 2012, p. 77). Third, Hedger (2012) suggests that we consider the following case, "when S is a slur normally used to target blacks, and the utterer of (17) [provided in (5) below] points[15] to, say, a person of Swedish decent" (p. 78):

(5)   That person is an S.[16]

In (5) Hedger (2012) suggests that "this utterance still manages to be offensive, and that a Swede who felt that the speaker was expressing contempt toward him would not thereby be making a linguistic error" (p. 78). By providing these three key cases for consideration – the first where Hedger (2012) found different translations for English "cuss words" in Spanish, the second where "It would be odd to claim that this person [that yells *fucker* in frustration] has described the wrench or the car as being a certain way" (p. 77), and the third where "a person of Swedish decent" still manages to be offended by "a slur normally used to target blacks" (p. 78) – Hedger (2012) believes he has thereby provided a compelling case in support of PE's view that, not only are slurs not purely descriptive, slurs further "lack descriptive content whatsoever" (p. 77) and "contain merely expressive content" (p. 78). In his more recent article "Meaning and Racial Slurs," Hedger (2013) further clarifies his "pure expressivist line" of thought by explaining how PE holds that slurs such as *gook* function in the same way as purely expressive expressions such as *blasted* or *ouch*. As Hedger (2013) states, "the same point about [the expression *blasted*] could be made about expressions such as 'ouch' or about racial slurs. The main point is that they don't convey any information beyond the attitude which the speaker expresses by using it" (p. 211).[17]

Before moving on, let us first acknowledge PE's potential explanatory merits. For one, by arguing that slurs are expressions with purely expressive rather than purely descriptive content, proponents of PE can explain why the projection behavior of slurs differs markedly from that of expressions with purely descriptive content. By arguing that slurs lack descriptive content whatsoever, Hedger (2012, 2013) can also deny that slurs are ever aptly applied to individuals with certain descriptive features (e.g., that the slur *gook* ever aptly applies to Koreans) and that sentences involving slurs are ever true (e.g., that claims of the form *x is a gook* are ever true).[18] Hedger (2012) believes that these are important commitments to maintain as non-racists (p. 78) and other scholars before have expressed similar sentiments. For instance, Richard (2008) has previously suggested that speakers using slurs, since "they represent their targets as contemptible because of (for example) their ethnicity or race [...] Therefore misrepresent them, as no one is contemptible for that reason" (p. 7). So since Hedger (2012, 2013) follows Richard (2008) in wanting to make clear that no one is contemptible because of their race, Hedger (2012, 2013) argues that slurs (since they presumably express this) always ("misrepresent," i.e.) fail to represent or pick out their targets, such that the application of a slur in any context "would result in an incomplete predicate on my view, and no clear descriptive content" (Hedger, 2013, p. 207, fn. 8). So perhaps PE is prima facie alluring insofar as it seems capable of allowing one to maintain these commitments and appear non-prejudice. But now that we have reviewed PE and several of Hedger's (2012, 2013) recent arguments in favor of it, let us next turn to consider several important reasons for why it must ultimately be rejected in favor of a mixed or hybrid approach.

4. Problems for pure expressivism

Although proponents of PE seem to have a solid case in support of their claim that slurs and expressions with purely descriptive content are of distinct types, they have not yet provided a solid case in support of their further claim that expressions with purely expressive content are the only alternative to expressions with purely descriptive content and that slurs must therefore be purely expressive rather than purely descriptive. Surely the possibility of a mixed or hybrid account of slurs is possible, such that slurs are most aptly considered as expressions with both descriptive and expressive elements. In fact, the strict conceptual bifurcation between purely descriptive and purely expressive content has recently been challenged by several scholars that have been productively exploring the viability of mixed or hybrid approaches to the analysis of expressions of various kinds, including slurs and moral expressions (Whiting, 2007, 2013; Boisvert, 2008; Schroeder, 2008; McCready, 2010; Croom, 2010, 2012; Gutzmann, 2011; Hay, 2012).

The purpose of this section is not to review the growing literature on mixed or hybrid approaches to the analysis of various expressions, but rather to offer insight into the reasons why one might be motivated to reject a purely expressive account of slurs in particular and to instead adopt a mixed or hybrid approach. Recall that Hedger (2012), for instance, offered three key cases to consider in favor of PE's view that slurs lack descriptive content altogether (p. 77–78). The first case to consider was where Hedger (2012) found different translations for English "cuss words" in Spanish (p. 77). He argued that, since "different dictionaries would give very different English expressions as translations" for these "cuss words," it is plausible to thereby assume that "a vast number of derogatory expressions (particularly those considered most offensive) don't obviously differ in meaning" (Hedger, 2012, p. 77). Thus, in the first case Hedger (2012) offers us in support of PE, he takes an analysis of "cuss words" that suggests different "cuss words" "don't obviously differ in meaning" and assumes that from this analysis a conclusion about "slurs" can be straightforwardly drawn, namely, that different "slurs" don't obviously differ in

---

[17] Hedger (2012) further suggests that slurs may function as a kind of reverse or anti-honorific (p. 78–79), an interesting view that has already been explored in richer (albeit still limited) detail by McCready (2010) in his discussion of the Japanese expression *irassharu* (p. 17) and by Gutzmann (2011) in his discussion of the German expressions *Sie* and *du* (p. 131–132; see also Croom, 2010, 2012). However, Hedger's (2012) discussion on this topic is problematic because he assumes that he can legitimately commit to holding both (a) that slurs have purely expressive content, and (b) that slurs function as a kind of honorific. But as McCready (2010) has pointed out, "honorifics like *irassharu* are instances of mixed content" since they "simultaneously honor some individual and predicate something of her" (p. 17), so it is not yet clear that a slur such as *gook* could (a) be purely expressive *and also* (b) function in the same way as honorifics like *irassharu*, as PE suggests. Indeed, in suggesting the point that slurs may function as anti-honorifics, Hedger (2012) seems implicitly compelled to viewing slurs as involving mixed rather than purely expressive content. I urge Hedger to further follow this compulsion (see also Section 3 in Croom, 2014, p. 26).
[18] "Hedger (2013) claims that "the semantic content of a slur word is not truth apt, and hence that many statements containing a slur will be neither true nor false" (p. 207).

meaning either. And by "meaning" here Hedger (2012) means descriptive content,[19] since he uses this case to argue that slurs lack descriptive content altogether (p. 77; see also Hedger, 2013, p. 206).

What is problematic about this case that Hedger (2012) offers in support of PE is that he treat "cuss words" like *fucker* as equivalent to "slurs" like *nigger* and illegitimately draws conclusions about "slurs" from an analysis of "cuss words." Just as prior proponents of PE have considered expressions like *fucker* and expressions like *nigger* as both similar examples of "expressives" (Kaplan, 1999; Kratzer, 1999; Potts, 2003, 2005, 2007; Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Pullum and Rawlins, 2007; Potts et al., 2009),[20] Hedger (2012) likewise considers expressions like *fucker* and expressions like *nigger* as both similar examples of "epithets" (p. 74, 76–77). But this move by proponents of PE is highly suspect because "cuss words" like *fucker* function in a way that is linguistically quite distinct from "slurs" like *nigger* and the two must accordingly be treated as distinct types of expressions. This point has become increasingly acknowledged recently, with Hom (2010, 2012) and Whiting (2013) holding that *fucker* is a "swear word" whereas *nigger* is a "slur," with Croom (2011, 2013) and Gutzmann (2011) holding that *fucker* is a "pure expressive" whereas *nigger* is a "slur," and with Hay (2012) holding that *fucker* is a "general pejorative" whereas *nigger* is a "slur." Regardless of the somewhat distracting use of different terminology across recent scholarship on slurs, the general point remains that there are sufficiently important differences between expressions like *fucker* and those like *nigger* such that the two must be treated distinctly. For the sake of clarity on this point, let us briefly review how expressions with purely expressive content like *fucker* differ markedly from expressions with purely descriptive content like *Korean American*. Then we can turn to more clearly inspect how slurs are distinct from both purely expressive and purely descriptive expressions. Consider the following examples below, with purely expressive and purely descriptive expressions in predicate position ((6a) and (7a), respectively) and NP position ((6c) and (7c), respectively):

(6a)   T is a *fucker*, but I deny saying anything about his $[x]^d$.
(7a)   T is a *Korean American*, but I deny saying anything about his $[x]^d$.

(6c)   That *fucker* is my colleague, but I deny saying anything about his $[x]^d$.
(7c)   That *Korean American* is my colleague, but I deny saying anything about his $[x]^d$.

Let $[x]^d$ represent a variable that admits only of expressions with purely descriptive content. Substituting expressions with purely descriptive content for $[x]^d$ in the examples above shows that the substitution of certain purely descriptive contents blocks the felicity of purely descriptive cases (7a) and (7c), but does not block the felicity of purely expressive cases (6a) and (6c). This is suggested in the examples involving substitutions below:

(6b)   T is a *fucker*, but I deny saying anything about his [racial identity].
(7b)   T is a *Korean American*, but I deny saying anything about his [racial identity].*

(6d)   That *fucker* is my colleague, but I deny saying anything about his [racial identity].
(7d)   That *Korean American* is my colleague, but I deny saying anything about his [racial identity].*

The idea is that since the particular descriptive features of the target T are inessential to the *speaker* indicating *their own* emotional state, in purely expressive cases (6b) and (6d) the speaker can felicitously call a target a *fucker* while denying that their utterance has anything to do with *certain (e.g. racial) descriptive features* of that target at all. That is, since purely expressive expressions work primarily to indicate the emotional state of the speaker, they can be felicitously uttered regardless of there being a target with certain (e.g. racial) descriptive features at all (Potts, 2005, 2007).

Although proponents of PE seem right to consider expressions like *fucker* as purely expressive, they are quite wrong to consider expressions like *gook* as purely expressive also. For even if we grant that *fucker* is purely expressive, the slur *gook* clearly is not. This is indicated below:

(6a)   T is a *fucker*, but I deny saying anything about his $[x]^d$.
(7a)   T is a *Korean American*, but I deny saying anything about his $[x]^d$.
(8a)   T is a *gook*, but I deny saying anything about his $[x]^d$.

(6b)   T is a *fucker*, but I deny saying anything about his [racial identity].
(7b)   T is a *Korean American*, but I deny saying anything about his [racial identity].*
(8b)   T is a *gook*, but I deny saying anything about his [racial identity].*

---

[19] Descriptive, truth-conditional content is also often referred to in the literature as "at-issue" content (e.g., Potts, 2005, p. 6; Potts, 2012, p. 2516).
[20] Linguistic items that have been identified in the literature as belonging to the class of "expressives" include, for instance, "expressive attributive adjectives" such as *damn* (Potts, 2005, p. 6), "epithets" such as *nigger* (Potts, 2007, p. 181) and *idiot* (Potts, 2005, p. 6), "honorifics" such as *professor* (Potts, 2005, p. 6; for Korean honorifics see Kim and Sells, 2007), "antihonorifics" such as *yagaru* in Japanese (Potts and Kawahara, 2004, p. 267), and "certain interjections" such as *ouch* (Potts and Kawahara, 2004, p. 254).

Notice from the examples above that whereas the purely expressive case (6b) is felicitous on the grounds that expressions with purely expressive content do not target or pick out certain specific descriptive features (such as racial identity) and can therefore be felicitously uttered while denying some particular set of descriptive features (such as racial identity) to its target, the slurring case (8b) is not likewise felicitous. At least in this respect, the slurring case (8b) is not like the purely expressive case (6b), but is instead rather like the purely descriptive case (7b). This point is not specific to racial slurs but is a general point applying to others such as sexual slurs. Consider the following examples:

(9a)   T is a *fucker*, but I deny saying anything about her $[x]^d$.
(10a) T is a *woman*, but I deny saying anything about her $[x]^d$.
(11a) T is a *slut*, but I deny saying anything about her $[x]^d$.

(9b)   T is a *fucker*, but I deny saying anything about her [sexual identity].
(10b) T is a *woman*, but I deny saying anything about her [sexual identity].*
(11b) T is a *slut*, but I deny saying anything about her [sexual identity].*

It is suggested from these examples that whereas the purely expressive case (9b) is felicitous on the grounds that expressions with purely expressive content do not target or pick out certain specific descriptive features (such as sexual identity) and can therefore be felicitously uttered while denying some particular set of descriptive features (such as sexual identity) to its target, the slurring case (11b) is not likewise felicitous. At least in this respect, the slurring case (11b) is not like the purely expressive case (12b), but is instead rather like the purely descriptive case (10b).

This result is unsurprising, for slurs are usually understood to target those descriptive features typically considered to be associated with members belonging to certain classes[21]: *gook* typically slurs Korean Americans, *nigger* typically slurs African Americans, *chink* typically slurs Chinese Americans, and so on. As Anderson and Lepore (2013) rightly point out, there in fact exists a large variety of slurs "that target groups on the basis of race ('nigger'), nationality ('kraut'), religion ('kike'), gender ('bitch'), sexual orientation ('fag'), immigrant status ('wetback') and sundry other demographics" (p. 25). But as we have now seen, purely expressive expressions like *fucker* do not target group members on the basis of race, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, or other such sundry demographic features. In other words, whereas it is generally held that purely expressive expressions like *fucker* and *damn* do not differ in their descriptive content (Potts, 2005, 2007),[22] it seems rather clear that slurs like *gook* and *slut* are in fact distinguished from one another by virtue of (differences among) their descriptive content.

Let us further consider the very different ways in which racial and sexual slurs have actually been used and are commonly understood. With regards to racial slurs, for instance, Easton (2007) writes that the racial slur *nigger* was understood to be "an opprobrious term, employed to impose contempt upon blacks as an inferior race" (p. 41–42) while Blassingame (1979) famously noted in *The Slave Community* that "to relieve themselves of the anxiety of thinking about slaves as men [...] whites of all classes came to rely on language (and especially the use of pejoratives like the N word) in the pursuit of such relief" (p. 14). Rahman (2012) likewise suggests that "the racist use of *nigger* criticizes a presumed innate moral and intellectual inferiority of African Americans" (p. 158) and that "*nigger* became a convenient term for indexing the subhuman characteristics being ascribed to African Americans through this ideology" (p. 143). With regards to sexual slurs, on the other hand, Attwood (2007) discusses how the sexual slur *slut* has been variously defined as a "vulgar promiscuous woman who flouts propriety" (p. 233) or "a woman of a low or loose character" (p. 234), while Blackwell (2004) writes that "The word "slut," a charge easy to level and hard to disprove, is an ambivalent emblem of women's perception of their sexuality" (p. 141). By considering the very different ways in which the racial slur *nigger* and sexual slur *slut* have actually been used and are commonly understood, it becomes especially clear that an application of a particular slur in context does not occur at random, but instead based on considerations of their systematic differential application-conditions, which concern descriptive features of targets such as their racial or sexual identity. In other words, what makes a racial slur *r* a *racial* slur is determined by the content of *r*, just as what makes a sexual slur *s* a *sexual* slur is determined by the content of *s* (Himma, 2002; Hom, 2008). This point can be clarified with the examples below:

(12a) T is a *slut*, but I deny saying anything about her $[x]^d$.
(13a) T is a *gook*, but I deny saying anything about her $[x]^d$.

(12c) T is a *slut*, but I deny saying anything about her [racial identity].
(13c) T is a *gook*, but I deny saying anything about her [racial identity].*

(12d) T is a *slut*, but I deny saying anything about her [sexual identity].*
(13d) T is a *gook*, but I deny saying anything about her [sexual identity].

---

[21] Croom (2011, 2013) offers discussion on the role that the stereotype associated with a particular slur plays and how the descriptive features involved in that stereotype contribute to the predication of certain content in the application of a slur towards its target in context (see also Miscevic, 2011). An explicit outline of how this works was originally presented in Croom, 2011 (p. 355–357), and was subsequently expanded in Croom, 2013 (p. 196–200).

[22] This is because the expressions *fucker* and *damn* are commonly thought of as lacking descriptive content altogether (Potts, 2005, 2007).

Although the sexual case (12a) and the racial case (13a) both involve utterances the felicity of which are blockable by *some* descriptive content, it is evident from these examples that they are not both blockable by the *same* descriptive content. That is to say, that content which blocks the felicity of the sexual slur in (12d) does not block the felicity of the racial slur in (13d), and that content which blocks the felicity of the racial slur in (13c) does not block the felicity of the sexual slur in (12c). Resultantly, since slurs are distinguishable from one another by virtue of their descriptive conditions, it follows that slurs must have descriptive contents (see also Croom, 2011, p. 347–348; Croom, 2013, p. 178–182).[23] Further, these contents must possess sufficient differences among their varieties such that they can be aptly distinguished from one another by competent speakers.[24] Resultantly, it is perfectly clear that, contrary to the claims of PE, slurs are not purely expressive but have a descriptive element also.

The second case Hedger (2012) offered in support of PE was where he argued that "It would be odd to claim that this person [that yells *fucker* in frustration] has described the wrench or the car as being a certain way" (p. 77). But here Hedger (2012) has again taken an analysis of "cuss words" that suggests that "cuss words" fail to describe targets (p. 77) and assumed that from this analysis a conclusion about "slurs" can be straightforwardly drawn, namely, that "slurs" fail to describe targets as being a certain way also. What is problematic here is similar to what was problematic about the first case just discussed, namely, Hedger (2012) treats "cuss words" like *fucker* as equivalent to "slurs" like *nigger* and illegitimately draws conclusions about "slurs" from an analysis of "cuss words." But as we have already seen in response to the first case for PE, "cuss words" like *fucker* function in a way that is linguistically quite distinct from "slurs" like *nigger* and the two must accordingly be treated as distinct types of expressions. So although it is widely acknowledged that expression like *fucker* lack descriptive content and are purely expressive instead, it can nonetheless still be denied that expressions like *nigger* lack descriptive content and are purely expressive also (e.g., Hom, 2010, 2012; Croom, 2011, 2013; Miscevic, 2011; Whiting, 2013; Hay, 2012).

This point can be further reinforced by considering *who might reasonably be offended* by a particular slur. For instance, if expressions such as *fucker* and *nigger* are really expressions of the same type, as PE holds, and no one in particular tends to feel especially targeted by an expression such as *fucker*, then it should follow that no one in particular tends to feel especially targeted by an expression such as *nigger* either. But it seems clearly false that no one in particular tends to feel especially targeted by an expression such as *nigger* (for instance, see Leung, 2004; Jackson, 2005; McLaughlin, 2008; Islam, 2011; Stampler, 2011). So with respect to this point, PE seems committed to a claim that is empirically false. Furthermore, PE also seems committed to the related *normative* commitment that no one in particular *should* feel especially targeted by an expression such as *nigger*, since the slur "lack[s] descriptive content whatsoever" (Hedger, 2012, p. 77) and is instead purely expressive of the state of the speaker (Hedger, 2012; see also Potts, 2003; Potts and Kawahara, 2004; Hedger, 2013). So PE seems committed to the claim that, if anyone in particular *were to feel* especially targeted by a particular slurring expression such as *nigger*, then they would be feeling offended *unreasonably*. For example, if an African American were to feel especially targeted by the slur *nigger*, say more so than a Swedish person (Hedger, 2012, p. 78), then according to PE that African American must be feeling especially targeted *unreasonably* since an African American *should feel no more targeted by the slur nigger than by the purely expressive expressions blasted* or *ouch* (Hedger, 2013, p. 211). Yet this apparent commitment of PE itself seems unreasonable, as it fails to take seriously, for instance, the history and nature of particularly *race-directed* offense (for further discussion on specifically race-directed offense see Fredrickson, 1971; Blassingame, 1979; Bonnell, 1998; Sniderman and Piazza, 2002; Asim, 2007; Smith, 2011; Croom, 2013; Abad-Santos, 2013; Benen, 2013; Cole, 2013; Eccher and Mohr, 2013; Gee, 2013; McLaughlin, 2008; Tracy, Wells and Schapiro, 2013; Washington, 2013; Weisman, 2013; Zimmerman, 2013).[25]

The third case Hedger (2012) offered in support of PE was where he argued that "a person of Swedish decent" still manages to be offended by "a slur normally used to target blacks" (p. 78).[26] The idea Hedger (2012) has here in support of PE seems to be that, since it is *not only* African Americans that find the slur *nigger* offensive, but presumably Swedish people and *others also*, then slurs such as *nigger* are *generally* offensive expressions with respect to everyone. And since each particular slur is presumably such that that slur is *generally* offensive with respect to everyone, then each slur must be *generally and purely* expressive, lacking sufficient descriptive content that might figure into the felicitous *differential* ascription of *particular* slurs towards *particular* targets in context. As Hedger claims, the sentence *Obama is the first S President of the U.S.*, "when S is a slur normally used to target blacks," "fails to offer sufficient descriptive content to predicate anything of Obama" (2012, p. 78) and that "Slurs express contempt but don't say anything about or describe their targets, and thus are composed of purely expressive content" (2013, p. 206).

---

[23] Admittedly, I am not fond of the expression "content," as it might mislead one into thinking that words somehow contained within themselves instructions for their systematic differential application, but I use the expression here to keep the present discussion as relevant to the extant literature as possible. To wear my heart on my sleeve, I am rather with Wittgenstein (1982) when he says, "The rules do not *follow* from the idea. They are not got by analysis of the idea; they *constitute* it. They show the use of the word" (p. 186).

[24] Indeed, Hedger (2012) seems to implicitly if not explicitly accept this, since he seems to have no problem identifying *which slur* is to count as *the relevant S*, "when S is a slur normally used to target blacks" (p. 78). For further discussion see Croom (2014, p. 19).

[25] As well as the history and nature of particularly *sex-directed* offense, etc. (for further discussion on specifically sex-directed offense see Buzinski, 2013; Canadian Press, 2013; Channel 3000, 2013; Cruz, 2013; Huey, 2013; Islam, 2011; Jones, 2011; Vyas and Minaya, 2013).

[26] It should be perfectly clear that in this case that Hedger (2012) considers the real referential work towards the Swedish person is being done by the speaker's *pointing* rather than their *lexical choice*. Hedger (2012) fails to appreciate this important point in his example. (for further discussion see Section 3 of Croom, 2014, p. 21)

But what is problematic with Hedger's (2012) purely expressive analysis of this case is that he conflates being the *target* of a potentially offensive act with being the *witness* of a potentially offense act. A Swedish person that is offended by the use of the slur *nigger* can still take offense as a *witness* of this linguistic act while not taking offense as the *target* of this linguistic act. For instance, even if you are not Korean American, because you are presumably not racist you are still likely to find the slur *gook* offensive *as a witness*. But given whatever racial or sexual identity you happen to have, you are likely to further find some particular slur *particularly offensive as a target*. For instance, if you are Korean American you are likely to find the slur *gook* – but not the slur *boche* – particularly offensive *as a target*. Although PE may be able to offer an account for the *general offensiveness* of slurs *for non-targeted witnesses*, it seems ill-equipped to account for how slurs have the capacity for *particularly targeted offensiveness*. For if it were true that all slurs "lack descriptive content whatsoever" (Hedger, 2012, p. 77) and "that slurs contain merely expressive content" (Hedger, 2012, p. 78), as PE holds, then it would remain ultimately mysterious why in certain contexts a (for instance, racist or in-group) speaker would find the slur *gook* more linguistically apt than the slur *boche* for targeting Korean Americans, and why Korean Americans would presumably feel more directly offended by the slur *gook* than by the slur *boche*. We could call these two problems for PE the challenge of *lexical aptness* and the challenge of *target aptness*, respectively. That is to say, by arguing for the view that slurs like *nigger* function as purely expressive expressions like *ouch* to convey *no information beyond the subjective state of the speaker* (Hedger, 2013, p. 211), PE seems unable to explain why in certain contexts a speaker would find one slur more linguistically apt than another for use (*lexical aptness*) or why in certain contexts some targets would find one slur more directly offensive than another (*target aptness*). Both challenges, although conceptually distinct, result from the fact that both speakers and targets that are competent in the language in which the slur is employed are largely familiar with slurring expressions and their systematic differential application-conditions, which concern descriptive features of targets such as their racial or sexual identity.

Further, PE seems not only to fail at explaining why in certain contexts a speaker would find one slur more linguistically apt than another for use (*lexical aptness*) and why in certain contexts some targets would find one slur more directly offensive than another (*target aptness*), PE also seems unable to account for the basic fact that the use of a slur does not *always or necessarily* express offense. Because Hedger (2012, 2013) argues that slurs contain purely offensive expressive content – as Hedger (2013) proposes, "the offensiveness of racial slurs should be considered part of their semantic content" (p. 206) – he remains committed to the view that slurs are always and necessarily offensive. As Hedger (2013) clearly states, "A slur *can't* be uttered without saying something derogatory" and "Slurs are offensive in *every use, no matter the context* of conversation" (p. 207, my emphasis). Further, in the example statement *Obama is an S*, when S is a slur normally used to target blacks, Hedger (2013) claims that "there is *no way* to characterize the speaker's belief content which does not contain an expression of contempt or in a way which is not offensive" (p. 208, my emphasis).

Now, to be clear, what I *am not* denying here is the view that uses of slurs are highly offensive to most people most of the time. What I *am* denying is merely the much stronger view that uses of slurs are always and necessarily offensive. Being able to account for the basic fact that slurs can be felicitously used in a way that is non-offensive is crucially important for an explanatorily adequate account of slurs,[27] since several scholars have recently called attention to the fact that slurs are not always or exclusively used to derogate.[28] For instance, several scholars have noted that the slur *nigger* has been used non-pejoratively since at least the early 1800s (Dillard, 1977; Stuckey, 1994; Spears, 1998; Jacobs, 2001; Wilson, 2002; Rahman, 2012), and that slurs are in fact frequently picked up and reappropriated by the very in-group members that the slur was originally intended to target, presumably as a means for like speakers to strengthen in-group solidarity or to diminish what derogatory force the slur had previously carried (Aldridge, 2001; Kennedy, 2002; Brontsema, 2004; Croom, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013; Galinksy et al., 2013). This reappropriative use of slurs, which Croom (2013) calls the *non-derogatory in-group use of slurs*, is a bone fide and widespread use of slurs that communicates positive, non-pejorative content or meaning when employed between in-group speakers that differs markedly from the "Pejorative meanings that have historically come from outside the community" (Rahman, 2012, p. 141).

Although a few scholars have briefly touched upon the phenomena of reappropriation in their analysis of slurs (e.g., Brontsema, 2004, p. 1–16; Saka, 2007, p. 146; Hom, 2008, p. 428; Richard, 2008, p. 9; Croom, 2008, p. 43–45; Croom, 2011, p. 349–350; Anderson and Lepore, 2013, p. 41–43; Croom, 2013, p. 190–194), the topic of reappropriation has largely been neglected and often considered tangential to an adequate account (e.g., Hedger, 2012, p. 74–75, 2013, p. 206). But by failing to carefully consider the in-group use of slurs one is left with only a partial and impoverished picture of the full functional capacity of slurs in natural language and social life, while continuing to ignore any possible evidence that might count against the claim that the use of a slur always and necessarily expresses offense. When proponents of PE such as Hedger (2012, 2013) continue to ignore the in-group use of slurs, they further fail to consider as worthy of reflection the distinctive perspectives and linguistic practices of in-group (typically minority) speakers, brushing them off to the side as atypical, tangential, or not in accord with "common sense" (Hedger, 2012, p. 83, 2013). But Hedger's (2012) a priori intuitions about what constitutes "common sense" seem to be based on little more than a priori prejudice masquerading as unquestionable philosophical intuition. For instance, Hedger (2013) simply assumes a priori that slurs are offensive in every use and across all contexts (p. 207) and that characterizing the speaker's belief content involving a slurring expression necessarily requires

---

[27] See adequacy condition 4 of 6 in Croom (2011, p. 355), and adequacy conditions 6 and 7 of 7 in Croom (2013, p. 200).

[28] Even Harris and Potts (2009) acknowledge this, claiming that "while epithets do not convey an *exclusively* negative emotion relation between the referent and the attitude holder, we did not detect any interpretations in our items in which a positive emotional stance was supported in the context provided" (p. 536, fn. 10).

an expression of contempt or offense (p. 208). But instead of simply *assuming* a priori, as Hedger has, that slurs always and necessarily work in just one way (i.e., to express offense), let us rather *look and see* how slurs are in fact used across a diverse range of linguistic contexts. In this respect, perhaps Wittgenstein (1953) offered productive advice to those getting all-too-comfortable in the armchair when he says, "Don't think, but look!" (§66).[29] So let us next look and see.

5. Empirical considerations on the non-derogatory use of slurs

Now, the fact that the same expression can be understood differently by different group members or in different contexts might serve as a surprise to some, but it should nonetheless be recognized that even the communication of Campbell's monkeys has been shown to be context-specific – where "Context could be described in terms of event type, degree of threat, spatial relations within the group, and group movements" (Quattara et al., 2009a, p. 5) – and that the same call can be interpreted differently by different group members or in different contexts. For instance, in "Monkey Semantics: Towards a Formal Analysis of Primate Alarm Calls," Schlenker (2013) makes this point nicely with empirical data on Campbell's monkeys from the Tai Forest and Tiwai Island, which suggests that "*the same alarm call is interpreted differently in the two communities*" (p. 1, original emphasis; see also Quattara et al., 2009b).[30] I mention this example here merely as a way to remind one of the genuine possibility that the same communicative signal may in fact be used and interpreted differently in different social contexts in human and nonhuman communication alike, and that the context of communication is of crucial importance not just for monkey communication but for human communication also. In light of this general fact that the same signal or expression may be used and interpreted differently among communicators in different social contexts, perhaps instances of this occurring with slurring expressions in particular may be viewed with less mystery.

Consider for example a recent report on CBS Sports, where Wilson (2013) discussed how Louis Delmas and Tony Scheffler, close friends and fellow Lions teammates, casually exchange slurs with one another and mutually understand that in these contexts their use of "racial slurs are considered a term of endearment" rather than a term of derogation (see also Foster, 2013; Smith, 2013; Croom, 2014, p. 23). The influential hip-hop lyricist Talib Kweli also reports about the slur *nigger* that, "Our community has been using the word and trying to redefine the context of it for a long time" and "the fact of the matter is that there's a large segment of black people who grew up hearing the word intended as nothing but love" (quoted in Echegoyen, 2006). In *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, Kennedy (2002) also claims that many African Americans continue to non-offensively use the slur "openly and frequently in conversations with one another" (p. 37) and Spears (1998) likewise claims that "the great majority of African Americans, male and female, use [the] N [word] when among other African Americans" non-offensively (p. 239). Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a professor and director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African American Research at Harvard University, also claims that he is not at all offended by the use of the slur in an in-group context among African Americans (Gates, 2009). Russell Simmons, the founder of Def Jam Records, further explains that:

> When we say 'nigger' now, it's very positive. Now all white kids who buy into hip-hop culture call each other 'nigger' because they have no history with the word other than something positive [...] When black kids call each other 'a real nigger' or 'my nigger,' it means you walk a certain way [...] have your own culture that you invent so you don't have to buy into the US culture that you're not really a part of. It means we're special. We have our own language.
>
> (quoted in Jackson, 2005)

Other prominent African American entertainers, such as Richard Pryor (Jackson, 2005), Nas (McLaughlin, 2008), Dave Chappelle (Leung, 2004), Ice Cube, and 50 Cent have also stated that their use of slurs were not intended nor typically understood as offensive (Croom, 2011, p. 350).

It is also evident that the non-derogatory in-group use of slurs is not restricted to racial slurs alone, but also extends to slurs of other kinds such as sexual slurs.[31] For instance, sexual slurs such as *slut* and *bitch* have also been popularly reappropriated for in-group use (Kleinman et al., 2009; Schillinger, 2010; Angyal, 2011). Stampler (2011) for one has noted that "the word "queer" [serves] as an example of a[nother] word that was once strictly pejorative but is now a common sexual identifier used [non-offensively] by the LGBT community." The representatives of SlutWalk, an influential movement including thousands of individuals, expressed their perspective concerning slurs over a radio broadcast in the following way:

---

[29] Relatively little work has been done on the reappropriative or non-derogatory in-group use of slurs, so in this article we will largely focus on examples from which we can draw the most empirically informed insight.

[30] Interestingly, the literature on the communication of Campbell's monkeys has shown that they can use affixation to alter call meaning (Quattara et al., 2009b), and Croom (2013) has recently argued for a similar (although not identical) point about human communication by suggesting that speakers may strategically employ phonological or other linguistic features characteristic of their in-group to strategically signal their in-group status. For instance, Croom (2013) provides the following example of how this works:

Nigger + feature 5 of AAVE(r-less-ness) = *Nigga*.

Relatively more derogatory → relatively less derogatory (p. 193).

[31] It is also evident that the non-derogatory in-group use of slurs is not restricted to English slurs alone, but also extends to slurs in other languages, such as Spanish. For instance, it has been pointed out that "*guachos* is a common epithet [or slur] in Argentina that can be used disparagingly or admiringly" (Ratliff, 2008, p. 199–200).

> One of the most effective ways to fight hate is to disarm the derogatory terms employed by haters, embracing them and giving them positive connotations. This also serves to provide a sex-positive term for women (and men), few or none of which currently exist, and allows sluts (individuals of any gender who have and enjoy frequent consensual sex, especially with multiple partners) to identify as part of a cohesive group for political representation. We feel that offering a place for women who lead such a lifestyle to self-identify as sluts does not disrespect them – indeed, the disrespecting is done by the rapists, the victim blamers who excuse the rape, and the slut shamers who say or imply they are disgracing, degrading, and dishonoring themselves.
>
> (Murray et al., 2011)

Jarvis, the founder of SlutWalk, explains that, "I come from a frame of mind that language is powerful, and [that] you can also change language [...] An aim of the SlutWalk movement is to reappropriate the word "slut"" (quoted in Stampler, 2011; see also Brison, 2011; Jones, 2011; Martin, 2011; Murray et al., 2011). Likewise, Ice Cube says his use of the racial slur *nigger* serves as a defiant "badge of honor" while Richard Pryor says that he "decided to make it my own. Nigger. I decided to take the sting out of it" (quoted in Jackson, 2005).

Empirical research in sociological and cultural studies has also helped to shed light on this issue by suggesting that the non-derogatory in-group use of slurs is especially prevalent in communities highly influenced by what have been considered "counterculture" norms (i.e., norms adopted in opposition to, and for the purpose of subverting, other entrenched sociocultural norms that a group contests). For instance, Cutler (2007) has pointed out that within hip-hop culture, "Whiteness is still marked against a backdrop of normative Blackness" (p. 10–11; see also Boyd, 2002; Alim, 2006; Lee, 2009a, 2009b; Cutler, 2003, 2009). Reasons for this form of *normative reversal* – from what Cutler (2009) considers a backdrop of normative Whiteness to a backdrop of normative Blackness – can be gleaned from a passage in Anderson's (1999) *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*:

> [In the inner city,] the despair, the alienation, and the distress are still there, and this condition encourages the development and spread of the oppositional culture [...] In this scenario, anything associated with conventional white society is seen as square; the hip things are at odds with it. The untied sneakers, the pants worn well below the waist, the hat turned backward – all have become a style. These unconventional symbols have been taken over by people who have made them into status symbols, but they are status symbols *to the extent that* they go against what is conventional [... people embracing the oppositional culture] take heart from professional athletes who confront the system and stand up for themselves. In their view, policemen, public officials, and corporate heads are unworthy of respect and hold little moral authority [...] A counterculture thus emerges, with the purpose of making a cultural statement against a dominate society that many young inner-city blacks feel disrespects them. (p. 112, 36, 234)

As Anderson (1999) explains, because many inner-city residents feel that the wider system has abandoned them and disrespects them, they often find it important to distinguish their appearance and behavior with a marked unconventionality, often influenced by the oppositional norms of the inner city culture (Anderson, 1999). Inner-city residents that find it important to distinguish their appearance and behavior with a marked unconventionality will also often find it important to distinguish their speech styles and strategies also. In "How to Do Things with Slurs: Studies in the Way of Derogatory Words," Croom (2013) has recently suggested that one such strategy involves subverting derogation through linguistic reappropriation such that between *in-group* speakers the slur is used as a *norm reversed variant* of the original paradigmatic derogatory use, and thus understood between in-group speakers as non-derogatory (p. 191).[32] In other words, where S represents a slur and its positive (+) or negative (−) superscript value represents the derogatory value of the slur in context, we can represent the slur in its paradigmatic derogatory use as S^+. But Croom (2011, 2013) suggests that in the context of in-group speakers the slur can be used as a *norm reversed variant* of the original paradigmatic derogatory use (S^+) and thus be understood between in-group speakers as non-derogatory, which can be represented instead as S^-.

Given the interesting way in which reappropriation works and the lack of scholarly attention it has received before, it is perhaps unsurprising that philosophers, linguists, and psychologists alike have started paying it more careful attention. For instance, in a recent article in *Psychological Science* entitled "The Reappropriation of Stigmatizing Labels: The Reciprocal Relationship Between Power and Self-Labeling," Galinksy et al. (2013) conducted ten empirical studies on reappropriation to test its potential effects on speakers and listeners empirically (also see discussion in Galinsky et al., 2003). Interestingly enough, their results suggested that a reciprocal relationship holds between (a) the feeling or sense of power, and (b) self-labeling with a slur such as *queer* or *bitch*. As they report the main results from the ten empirical studies they conducted:

> Self-labelers felt more powerful after self-labeling and observers perceived self-labelers and their group as more powerful. Finally, the label was evaluated less negatively after self-labeling and this stigma attenuation was mediated by perceived power. Importantly, these effects only occurred for derogatory terms (e.g., queer, bitch) but not for descriptive (e.g., LGBT, woman) or majority group labels (e.g., straight). These results suggest that self-labeling with a derogatory label can weaken its stigmatizing force.
>
> (Galinksy et al., 2013, p. 1)

---

[32] A general framework for how slurs may be differentially used by in-group and out-group speakers was introduced in "Slurs" (Croom, 2011) and subsequently expanded in "How to Do Things with Slurs: Studies in the Way of Derogatory Words" (Croom, 2013), so the reader is referred to those works for further discussion.

In accord with Croom's (2011, 2013) suggestion and contrary to Hedger (2012, 2013), these ten empirical studies suggest that in certain in-group contexts – for surely self-labelers stand in an in-group relationship with themselves – the slur is not aptly considered as S$^+$ but rather as S$^-$ instead. So recent empirical studies in fact corroborate other independent reports of in-group speakers claiming to use slurs non-offensively, and provide a serious challenge for proponents of PE such as Hedger (2013) that argue a priori that "Slurs are offensive in every use, no matter the context of conversation" (p. 207).[33] Further, by considering evidence of this kind, it seems clear that careful consideration of the reappropriative or non-derogatory in-group use of slurs is not tangential to an account of slurs at all (contrary to Hedger, 2012, p. 74–75; Hedger, 2013, p. 206), but may in fact offer us crucial insight into the *dynamics* of the derogatory force behind slurs as well as how derogation may be actively and linguistically subverted by those that have been prejudicially targeted. In other words, the fact that slurs, employed in an in-group context, can act to diminish what derogatory force the slur had previously carried may offer us crucial insight into how slurs can shift in graded value from relatively more derogatory (S$^+$) to relatively less derogatory (S$^-$) or from relatively less derogatory (S$^-$) to relatively more derogatory (S$^+$). Moreover, careful consideration of the reappropriative or non-derogatory in-group use of slurs may also offer us crucial insight into how different slurs can carry differing degrees of force at the same time (i.e., *synchronic* variation in force between different slurs at time *t*) as well as how the same slur can carry differing degrees of force at different times (i.e., *diachronic* variation in force between a slur at time *t* and at time *t* + *n*).[34] Again, recall that the salient ability of slurs to offend has been a central point of focus in prior work on slurs (e.g., Anderson and Lepore, 2013, p. 25; Hedger, 2012, p. 74), and it is arguably the case that properly understanding the *dynamics* of how this works involves properly understanding how the derogatory force of slurs can be *both increased and decreased* or *both strengthened and weakened*. Only by acknowledging this point can progress be made in accounting for the full range of empirical data on slurs, especially those involving their non-derogatory in-group use.

Although Hedger (2013) has acknowledged that, for instance, "Christopher Hom (2008) purports to give some examples of non-derogatory uses of slurs," Hedger (2013) immediately goes on to reject Hom's (2008) examples by claiming that "I have yet to find a single informant who sides with Hom (2008) on this issue" (p. 209). But given the fact that in this short section alone we have reviewed a substantial population of competent speakers explicitly claim to use slurs non-offensively (including, for instance, Talib Kweli, Randall Kennedy, Arthur Spears, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Russell Simmons, Richard Pryor, Nas, Dave Chappelle, Ice Cube, 50 Cent, Louis Delmas, Tony Scheffler, and 54% of 1355 participants in an Associated Press-MTV study), it seems clear that if Hedger (2013) has not yet found his "informant" it is perhaps because he has not been listening to a diverse enough range of competent speakers.

For despite the fact that Talib Kweli explains how "the fact of the matter is that there's a large segment of black people who grew up hearing the [slur] word intended as nothing but love" (quoted in Echegoyen, 2006), Hedger (2013) must nonetheless insist on denying the truth of this since PE holds that "Slurs express contempt regardless of the attitude or particular use of the speaker" and that "there is no way to characterize the speaker's belief content [involving the slur] which does not contain an expression of contempt or in a way which is not offensive" (p. 209, 208). And despite the fact that members of SlutWalk, a global movement including thousands of individuals, have explained how they aim at "embracing them [slurs] and giving them positive connotations" (Murray et al., 2011), Hedger (2013) must nonetheless insist on denying the truth of this since PE holds that "the offensiveness of racial slurs should be considered part of their semantic content" (p. 206), that a "contemptuous attitude is part of what a speaker *says* when he uses a slur," and that "A slur can't be uttered without saying something derogatory" (p. 207). And yet again, despite the fact that Galinksy et al. (2013) conducted ten empirical studies suggesting that "Self-labelers felt more powerful after self-labeling and observers perceived self-labelers and their group as more powerful" and that "self-labeling with a derogatory label can weaken its stigmatizing force" (p. 1), Hedger (2013) must nonetheless insist on denying the truth of this since PE holds that each use of a slur expresses "a racist thought, is despicable and ought to be condemned" and that "non-racists cannot assent to any portion of the utterance [involving the slur] whatsoever" (p. 12). Hedger (2013) is not unclear about his view, for he says:

> the offensiveness of slurs is part of their semantic content. No matter the context of conversation, the use of a slur is offensive and expresses contempt. Although Christopher Hom (2008) purports to give some examples of non-derogatory uses of slurs [...] I have yet to find a single informant who sides with Hom (2008) on this issue. Hence, since a slur word is offensive in any context, the offensiveness is part of the semantic meaning of slur words, and is not a result of any peculiar use of slurs. (p. 209)

Although on the face of it Hedger (2012, 2013) appears to be championing a non-prejudicial view of how slurs operate in natural language, it is clear that he has made no attempt whatsoever to actually take into consideration their natural language use among the substantial population of African Americans and women that we have discussed herein (along with

---

[33] In another empirical study conducted by Associated Press-MTV involving 1355 participants, it was also found that 54% of respondents "think it's OK to use them [slurs] within their own circle of friends" and that in such contexts the slur is non-offensive (Cass and Agiesta, 2011; Greene, 2011). And in another empirical study conducted by Rahman (2012) one of the subjects explains "You see, the people who say they're offended are the older adults. Young kids don't understand what the big deal is about the word. They know it's about black people and slavery, but they're like 'that's over'" (p. 161).

[34] In Hom's (2008) influential account, "derogatory variation" is considered as adequacy condition 2 of 6 for slurs (p. 426) and "evolution" is considered as adequacy condition 6 of 6 for slurs (p. 427). Thus the present point can be seen as motivating attention back to these very interesting adequacy conditions that Hom (2008) rightly considers (for discussion of expressions and their "evolution" see e.g. Aldridge et al., 2001; Heffernan, 2005). A purely expressive account of slurs committed to the claim that all slurs simply and purely express contempt as their content, on the other hand, seems to have little to contribute with regards to furthering discussion on these important points.

other targeted minority groups). Thus, PE's blanket claims to the effect that slurs always and necessarily express offense have unfortunately come at the expense of *excluding* as worthy of consideration the linguistic behavior and explicit reports of the very in-group speakers that PE presumably aims to defend. Such a priori exclusion does not strike one as genuinely working *against* prejudice but rather as silently (though presumably unknowingly) perpetuating it. Prejudice does not stop at what we *say* (e.g., McLaughlin, 2008), and I think that to genuinely work against prejudice scholars must further *show* that they consider the linguistic behavior of prejudicially targeted speakers to be just as worthy of scholarly attention – and that their linguistic behavior is just as important to consider for a fully adequate account of slurs – as the linguistic behavior of upper class, majority, and prejudicially non-targeted speakers.

To be clear, my aim here is not to argue that slurs are *never* offensive, for clearly slurs are often terribly offensive when used in *many* contexts. What I am arguing here, however, is that slurs need not *always and necessarily* be offensive, *even if the range of non-offensive applications is restricted to use between certain in-group members alone*. As Dave Chappelle reported in an interview, although he would "be furious" in response to a white speaker using the racial slur *nigger*, when *he uses that slur as an African American* "it feels more like an act of freedom [than oppression]" (Leung, 2004). In other words, just because *Hedger* and *I* may be restricted from using the slur *nigger* non-offensively in conversation with African Americans, that does not entail a *blanket restriction* on the non-offensive use of that slur such that *African Americans are also thereby restricted* from using the slur *nigger* non-offensively in conversation with African Americans. My reasons here are not based on a priori intuition but rather on empirical grounds concerning how slurs are actually used in natural language. And because the inquiry here is a *linguistic* one, I do not purport to impose a license on what is acceptable for a community of fully rational and competent speakers to agree in doing while engaging in conversation with one another. On my view, if prejudicially targeted speakers have discovered a genuine linguistic means for actively subverting the forms of prejudice that they have historically been subject to – which empirical studies by Galinksy et al. (2013) suggest is the case – then I can only commend those speakers on their linguistic ingenuity, attempt to help others understand how this works through careful and open-minded scholarship, and wish them the best of luck in achieving what it is that I think everyone rightly deserves: to be engaged with and heard as fully equal members of humanity.

Although the claims and empirical studies discussed in this section are neither completely unchallengeable nor entirely uncontroversial, when taken together, they provide a compelling case against PE's view that slurs always and necessarily express offense. In holding this claim we have seen that the purely expressive view most recently endorsed by Hedger (2012, 2013) is unable to account for the growing empirical literature on slurs showing otherwise, and so must continuously dismiss this growing body of research on purely a priori grounds. So it would seem that remaining committed to the intuition that slurs always offend, in light of the growing literature on their non-offensive in-group use, could be based on little more than the (perhaps implicit) assumption that the claims made by those that are typically the targets and re-appropriators of slurs (most of which are minorities) must somehow be naïvely inaccurate and that their distinctive in-group practices (including strategic instances of norm reversal and reappropriation) are unworthy of any serious scholarly consideration at all.[35] I hope to have put forward a serious challenge to this view here, and plead that future work on slurs proceed with a more socio-culturally aware and empirically sensitive ear. Arguably, this will lead not only to more socially responsible scholarship on slurs, but reveal that the phenomenon of slurring in particular, and natural language more generally, is more intricate and fascinating than one might have initially supposed a priori.

6. Conclusion

To review, our discussion in this article has proceeded as follows. Section 1 provided an introduction and Section 2 reviewed what slurs are along with several basic facts that an adequate framework for slurs ought to account for. Two such facts included (a) that slurs are differentially applied towards targets with different descriptive features, and (b) that slurs are capable of packing some of the nastiest punches natural language has to offer. In Section 3 we reviewed the purely expressive account of slurs (PE) most recently and explicitly advocated by Hedger (2012, 2013) and looked at how the projection behavior of slurs differs markedly from that of expressions with purely descriptive content. We saw that PE was able to use an analysis of the projection behavior of slurs to both (i) support their claim that slurs are not expressions with purely descriptive content, and (ii) account for the fact (b) that slurs are capable of packing some of the nastiest punches natural language has to offer. We next reviewed three key cases Hedger (2012, 2013) considered in support of PE's claim that slurs are expressions with purely expressive content: the first where Hedger (2012) found different translations for English "cuss words" in Spanish, the second where "It would be odd to claim that this person [that yells *fucker* in frustration] has described the wrench or the car as being a certain way" (p. 77), and the third where "a person of Swedish decent" still manages to be offended by "a slur normally used to target blacks" (p. 78). We critically evaluated these cases in Section 4, finding that all of the arguments presented in support of PE are problematic and that the case for PE remains weak. Finally, in Section 5, we looked at several recent empirical considerations on the non-derogatory use of slurs, which furthered demonstrated the implausibility of PE along with the a priori assumptions that motivate it.

To be clear, this article has shown that Hedger's (2012, 2013) case in support of pure expressivism (PE) fails at least in the following 11 ways: (1) it illegitimately draws conclusions about slurs (e.g., *gook*) from analyses of cuss words (e.g., *fuck*); (2)

---

[35] For a relevant discussion regarding in-group practices of norm reversal, counter culture activities, and linguistic reappropriation, see Croom, 2013, p. 190–194; see also Anderson, 1999; Croom, 2010, 2012; Cutler, 2003, 2007, 2009.

it fails to consider the different ways in which different (e.g., racial and sexual) slurs have conventionally been used (e.g., in race-directed and sex-directed acts, respectively) and are commonly understood; (3) it fails to account for the fact (a) that slurs are differentially applied towards targets with different descriptive features; (4) it falsely suggests that no one in particular tends to feel particularly targeted by particular slurs; (5) it wrongly suggests that if anyone in particular were to feel especially targeted by a particular slurring expression then they would be feeling offended unreasonably; (6) it conflates being the target of a potentially offensive act with being the witness of a potentially offensive act; (7) it fails to account for how slurs have the capacity for particularly targeted offensiveness; (8) it fails to account for both lexical aptness and target aptness; (9) it fails to account for the empirical fact that slurs can be used non-offensively; (10) it fails to offer insight into the dynamics of derogatory force behind slurs, considering neither their synchronic nor diachronic variation; (11) it does not take into consideration the linguistic behavior and explicit reports of robust populations of fully competent (in-group, typically minority) speakers, prejudging in advance that only self-confirming evidence should be taken seriously. In showing that PE is clearly inadequate in at least these 11 ways, we have also found at least 11 reasons for believing that an adequate account of slurs will involve not only an expressive component but a descriptive component also. That is to say, slurs are best accounted for by a mixed or hybrid approach, as I have argued here and outlined in other recent work.

Let us end our discussion on slurs with a relevant lesson from Wittgenstein (1953):

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding that consists in 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate cases. (§122)

Acknowledgements

References

Abad-Santos, A., 2013. 'Olympus Has Fallen' brings out the anti-Asian slurs from its audience. The Atlantic Wire (1 April), <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/entertainment/2013/04/olympus-has-fallen-anti-asian-slurs/63742/>.

Aldridge, K., 2001. Slurs often adopted by those they insult. The Cincinnati Enquirer (5 August), <http://enquirer.com/editions/2001/08/05/loc_2slurs_often_adopted.html>.

Aldridge, K., Thompson, R., Winston, E., 2001. The evolving N-word. The Cincinnati Enquirer (5 August), <http://enquirer.com/editions/2001/08/05/loc_1the_n-word.html>.

Alim, H., 2006. Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture. Routledge, New York.

Anderson, E., 1999. Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City. W.W. Norton & Co., New York.

Anderson, L., Lepore, E., 2013. Slurring words. Nous 47, 25–48. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2010.00820.x.

Angyal, C., 2011. A few words about reclaiming "slut". Feministing (16 May), <http://feministing.com/2011/05/16/a-few-words-about-reclaiming-"slut"/>.

Asim, J., 2007. The N Word. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York.

Attwood, F., 2007. Sluts and riot grrrls: female identity and sexual agency. Journal of Gender Studies 16, 233–247. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09589230701562921.

Benen, S., 2013. GOP congressman uses anti-Latino racial slur. MSNBC (29 March), <http://maddowblog.msnbc.com/_news/2013/03/29/17515566-gop-congressman-uses-anti-latino-racial-slur>.

Blackwell, B., 2004. How the jilt triumphed over the slut: the evolution of an epithet, 1660–1780. Women's Writing 11, 141–161. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09699080400200225.

Blassingame, J., 1979. The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South. Oxford University Press, New York.

Boisvert, D., 2008. Expressivism–assertivism. Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 89, 169–203. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0114.2008.00315.x.

Bonnell, V., 1998. Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Boyd, T., 2002. The New H. N. I. C. (Head Niggas in Charge): The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop. New York University Press, New York.

Brison, S., 2011. An open letter from black women to SlutWalk organizers. The Huffington Post (27 September), <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-brison/slutwalk-black-women_b_980215.html>.

Brontsema, R., 2004. A queer revolution: reconceptualizing the debate over linguistic reclamation. Colorado Research in Linguistics 17, 1–17, <http://www.colorado.edu/ling/CRIL/Volume17_Issue1/paper_BRONTSEMA.pdf>.

Buzinski, J., 2013. Rating the best and worst athlete apologies for gay slurs. Salon (10 June), <http://www.salon.com/2013/06/10/rating_the_best_and_worst_athlete_apologies_for_gay_slurs_partner/>.

Camp, E., forthcoming. Slurring perspectives. Analytic Philosophy.

Canadian Press. 2013. Kingston couple shocked by homophobic slurs, threats. Toronto Star (22 July), <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/07/22/kingston_couple_shocked_by_homophobic_slurs_threats.html>.

Channel 3000. 2013. Gay slurs leave Baraboo truck owner frustrated. Channel 3000 (22 July), <http://www.channel3000.com/news/gay-slurs-leave-baraboo-truck-owner-frustrated/-/1648/21093540/-/q44u32z/-/index.html>.

Cass, C., Agiesta, J., 2011. Poll: young people see online slurs as just joking. MSNBC (20 September), <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44591677/ns/technology_and_science-tech_and_gadgets/t/poll-young-people-see-online-slurs-just-joking/>.

Cole, K., 2013. Maverick hockey trio accused of starting fight with racial slurs. Omaha (15 August), <http://www.omaha.com/article/20130815/MAVS/130819281/>.

Croom, A., 2008. Racial epithets: what we say and mean by them. Dialogue 51, 34–45, <http://semanticsarchive.net/Archive/ThiMjU0N/Racial%20epithets%20What%20we%20say%20and%20mean%20by%20them%20-%20Croom%202008.pdf>.

Croom, A., 2010. A game theoretical analysis of slurs and appropriative use. Fourth North American Summer School in Logic, Language, and Information (26 June), Indiana University. <http://www.indiana.edu/~nasslli/NASSLLIwebprogram.pdf>.

Croom, A., 2011. Slurs. Language Sciences 33, 343–358. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2010.11.005.

Croom, A., 2012. Face, race, and the psychology of slurring in a cultural context. In: University of Pennsylvania Program on Democracy, Citizenship, and Constitutionalism Annual Conference, 27 April. University of Pennsylvania.

Croom, A., 2013. How to do things with slurs: studies in the way of derogatory words. Language and Communication 33, 177–204. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2013.03.008.

Croom, A., 2014. Remarks on "The semantics of racial slurs". Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations 13, 11–32, <http://www.addletonacademicpublishers.com/images/Adam_M._Croom-Remarks_on_the_Semantics_of_Racial_Slurs%20.pdf>.

Cruz, E., 2013. The 'F' word. The Huffington Post (25 January), <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eliel-cruz/the-f-word_b_2521805.html>.

Cutler, C., 2003. "Keepin' it real": white hip-hoppers' discourses of language, race, and authenticity. Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 13, 211–233. http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2003.13.2.211.

Cutler, C., 2007. The co-construction of whiteness in an MC battle. Pragmatics 17, 9–22.

Cutler, C., 2009. "You shouldn't be rappin", you should be skateboardin' the X-Games: the construction of whiteness in an MC battle. In: Alim, H., Ibrahim, A., Pennycook, A. (Eds.), Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language. Routledge, New York, pp. 195–212.

Dillard, J., 1977. Lexicon of Black English. Seabury, New York.

Easton, A., 2007. A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States; and the Prejudice Exercised Towards Them. Knapp, Boston.

Eccher, M., Mohr, E., 2013. Minneapolis cops accused of using racial slurs in Apple Valley bar fight. Twin Cities (2 August), <http://www.twincities.com/localnews/ci_23785382/more-minneapolis-cops-accused-using-racial-slurs-apple>.

Echegoyen, H. (Producer), 2006. The N Word: Divided We Stand. Post Consumer Media.

Finlay, S., 2005. Value and implicature. Philosopher's Imprint 5, 1–20, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0005.004>.

Foster, T., 2013. For two Lions, racial slurs are friendly banter. The Detroit News (8 August), <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20130808/SPORTS0101/308080035>.

Fox 10 News, 2010. Man gets 25 years to life for racial slur killing. My Fox Phoenix (9 December), <http://www.myfoxphoenix.com/story/18092539/man-gets-25-years-to-life-for-racial-slur-killing>.

Fraleigh, D., Tuman, J., 2010. Hate speech. In: Fraleigh, D., Tuman, J. (Eds.), Freedom of Expression in the Marketplace of Ideas. Sage Publications, London, pp. 139–166.

Fredrickson, G., 1971. The Black Image in the White Mind. Wesleyan University Press, Middletown.

Galinsky, A.D., Hugenberg, K., Groom, C., Bodenhausen, G., 2003. The reappropriation of stigmatizing labels: implications for social identity. In: Polzer, J., Neale, M., Mannix, E. (Eds.), Identity Issues In Groups. Elsevier Science Press, Greenwich, pp. 221–256.

Galinksy, A., Wang, C., Whitson, J., Anicich, E., Hugenberg, K., Bodenhausen, G., 2013. The reappropriation of stigmatizing labels: the reciprocal relationship between power and self-labeling. Psychological Science 1–10.

Gates, H., 2009. 10 questions. Time (16 February), 9.

Gee, O., 2013. Riot police 'resorted to racial slurs' in Husby. The Local: Sweden's News in English (20 May), <http://www.thelocal.se/48026/20130520/>.

Geurts, B., 2007. Really fucking brilliant. Theoretical Linguistics 33, 209–214. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/TL.2007.013.

Greene, R., 2011. Slurs: are the kids all right? The Economist (20 September), <http://www.economist.com/blogs/johnson/2011/09/slurs>.

Gutzmann, D., 2011. Expressive modifiers and mixed expressives. In: Bonami, O., Hofherr, P. (Eds.), Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics, vol. 7. Colloque de Syntaxe et Sematique de Paris, Paris, pp. 123–141.

Harris, J., Potts, C., 2009. Perspective-shifting with appositives and expressives. Linguistics and Philosophy 32, 523–552. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10988-010-9070-5.

Hay, R., 2012. Hybrid expressivism and the analogy between pejoratives and moral language. European Journal of Philosophy, 1–25. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2011.00455.x.

Hedger, J., 2012. The semantics of racial slurs: using Kaplan's framework to provide a theory of the meaning of derogatory epithets. Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations 11, 74–84.

Hedger, J., 2013. Meaning and racial slurs: derogatory epithets and the semantics/pragmatics interface. Language and Communication 33, 205–213. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2013.04.004.

Heffernan, V., 2005. Epithet morphs from bad girl to weak boy. New York Times (22 March), <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/22/arts/television/22chie.html>.

Himma, K., 2002. On the definition of unconscionable racial and sexual slurs. Journal of Social Philosophy 33, 512–522. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0047-2786.00156.

Hom, C., 2008. The semantics of racial epithets. Journal of Philosophy 105, 416–440.

Hom, C., 2010. Pejoratives. Philosophy Compass 5, 164–185. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2009.00274.x.

Hom, C., 2012. A puzzle about pejoratives. Philosophical Studies 159, 383–405. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11098-011-9749-7.

Hoover, E., 2007. Fighting words. The Chronicle of Higher Education (16 February), <http://chronicle.com/article/fighting-words/32405/>.

Huey, A., 2013. The other 'F' word. The Huffington Post (30 May), <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/asher-huey/the-other-f-word_b_3356024.html>.

Islam, S., 2011. Faisalabad bullying case: boy killed classmate over 'homophobic slur'. The Express Tribune (6 November), <http://tribune.com.pk/story/288367/faisalabad-bullying-case-boy-killed-classmate-over-homophobic-slur/>.

Jackson, D., 2005. Epithet stung, even for Pryor. The Boston Globe (14 December), <http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2005/12/14/epithet_stung_even_for_pryor>.

Jacobs, H., 2001. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Dover, Mineola.

Jones, S., 2011. Feminist critics of SlutWalk have forgotten that language is not a commodity. The F Word: Contemporary UK Feminism (8 June), <http://www.thefword.org.uk/features/2011/06/the_politics_of_slutwalk>.

Kaplan, D., 1999. The Meaning of Ouch and Oops: Explorations in the Theory of Meaning as Use (unpublished manuscript). University of California, Los Angeles.

Kennedy, R., 2002. Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word. Vintage Books, New York.

Kiefer, M., 2010. Man sentenced in stomping death of woman in Phoenix. The Arizona Republic (10 December), <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/2010/12/09/20101209phoenix-racial-slur-slaying-sentence.html>.

Kim, J., Sells, P., 2007. Korean honorification: a kind of expressive meaning. Journal of East Asian Linguistics 16, 303–336. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10831-007-9014-4.

Kratzer, A., 1999. Beyond ouch and oops: how descriptive and expressive meaning interact. Cornell Conference on Theories of Context Dependency (26 March), Cornell University. <http://semanticsarchive.net/Archive/WEwNGUyO/Beyond%20%22Ouch%22%20and%20%22Oops%22.pdf>.

Kleinman, S., Ezzell, M., Frost, C., 2009. Reclaiming critical analysis: the social harms of "bitch". Sociological Analysis 3, 47–68.

Lee, J., 2009a. "Battlin' on the corner: techniques for sustaining play. Social Problems 56, 578–598, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sp.2009.56.3.578>.

Lee, J., 2009b. Escaping embarrassment: face-work in the rap cipher. Social Psychology Quarterly 72, 306–324. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/019027250907200405.

Leung, R., 2004. Chappelle: 'an act of freedom': comedy central comedian talks about using the 'N' word in jokes. 60 Minutes, CBS News (29 December), <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/10/19/60II/main650149.shtml>.

Martin, M., 2011. Beauty shop: optional tax, 'SlutWalk' opposition. National Public Radio (26 October), <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/26/141719335/beauty-shop-optional-tax-slutwalk-opposition>.

McCready, E., 2010. Varieties of conventional implicature. Semantics and Pragmatics 3, 1–57. http://dx.doi.org/10.3765/sp.3.8.

McLaughlin, E., 2008. Rapper has defiant words for new album. CNN Entertainment (16 July), <http://www.cnn.com/2008/SHOWBIZ/Music/07/16/music.nas/index.html>.

Miscevic, N., 2011. Slurs and thick concepts: is the new expressivism tenable? Croatian Journal of Philosophy 11, 157–180.

Murray, J., Sacks, R., Schimmel, S., 2011. Our response to the conversation with Ross Reynolds' coverage of SlutWalk Seattle on KUOW 94.9 FM. SlutWalk Seattle (15 May), <http://slutwalkseattle.com/post/5527937600/our-response-to-the-conversation-with-ross-reynolds>.

Potts, C., 2003. Expressive content as conventional implicature. In: Kadowaki, M., Kawahara, S. (Eds.), Proceedings of the North East Linguistics Society 33. GLSA, Amherst, pp. 303–322.

Potts, C., 2005. The Logic of Conventional Implicature. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Potts, C., 2007. The expressive dimension. Theoretical Linguistics 33, 165–197. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/TL.2007.011.

Potts, C., 2012. Conventional implicature and expressive content. In: Maienborn, C., von Heusinger, K., Portner, P. (Eds.), Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning, vol. 3. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 2516–2536.

Potts, C., Asudeh, A., Cable, S., Hara, Y., McCready, E., Alonso-Ovalle, L., Bhatt, R., Davis, C., Kratzer, A., Roeper, T., Walkow, M., 2009. Expressives and identity conditions. Linguistic Inquiry 40, 356–366.

Potts, C., Kawahara, S., 2004. Japanese honorifics as emotive definite descriptions. Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory 14, 235–254, <http://elanguage.net/journals/salt/article/view/14.253/1745>.

Pullum, G., Rawlins, K., 2007. Argument or no argument? Linguistics and Philosophy 30, 277–287. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10988-007-9013-y.

Quattara, K., Lemasson, A., Zuberbuhler, K., 2009a. Campbell's monkeys concatenate vocalizations into context-specific call sequences. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 1–6. http://dx.doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0908118106 (early edition).

Quattara, K., Lemasson, A., Zuberbuhler, K., 2009b. Campbell's monkeys use affixation to alter call meaning. PLoS One 4, e7808. http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0007808.

Rahman, J., 2012. The N word: its history and use in the African American community. Journal of English Linguistics 40, 137–171. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0075424211414807.

Ratliff, B., 2008. The Jazz Ear: Conversations over Music. Henry Holt, New York.

Richard, M., 2008. When Truth Gives out. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Saka, P., 2007. How to Think About Meaning. Springer, Netherlands.

Schillinger, L., 2010. Sexual politics: book review of "Big girls don't cry: the election that changed everything for American women" by Rebecca Traister. The New York Times, Sunday Book Review (16 September), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/19/books/review/Schillinger-t.html?pagewanted=all>.

Schlenker, P., 2013. Monkey semantics: towards a formal analysis of primate alarm calls. In: Twenty-Third Semantics and Linguistic Theory Conference, 3–5 May. University of California at Santa Cruz.

Schroeder, M., 2008. Being For: Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Smith, D., 2011. Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others. St. Martin's Press, New York.

Smith, D.M., 2013. Two Lions say racial slurs show their friendship. NBC Sports (8 August), <http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2013/08/08/two-lionssay-racial-slurs-show-their-friendship/>.

Sniderman, P., Piazza, T., 2002. Black Pride and Black Prejudice. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Spears, A., 1998. African–American language use: ideology and so-called obscenity. In: Mufwene, S., Rickford, J., Bailey, G., Baugh, J. (Eds.), African American English. Routledge, New York, pp. 226–250.

Stampler, L., 2011. SlutWalks sweep the nation. Huffington Post (20 April), <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/20/slutwalk-united-states-city_n_851725.html>.

Stuckey, S., 1994. Going Through the Storms: The Influence of African American Art in History. Oxford University Press, New York.

Tracy, T., Wells, N., Schapiro, R., 2013. Jackie Robinson statue defaced with racist slurs, swastikas outside Cyclones park, News offers reward. New York Daily News (7 August), <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/brooklyn/jackie-robinson-statue-defaced-swastikas-brooklyn-article-1.1420102>.

Vyas, K., Minaya, E., 2013. Venezuela government under fire for anti-gay slurs. The Wall Street Journal (16 August), <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323455104579015431118697694.html>.

Washington, J., 2013. 'I'm not racist': common claim after racial slurs. Associated Press (23 May), <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/im-not-racist-common-claim-after-racial-slurs>.

Weisman, A., 2013. Despite rampant racial slurs in 'Django Unchained,' African Americans flock to theaters. Business Insider (3 January), <http://www.businessinsider.com/despite-rampant-racial-slurs-in-django-unchained-african-americans-flock-to-theaters-2013-1>.

Whiting, D., 2007. Inferentialism, representationalism and derogatory words. International Journal of Philosophical Studies 15, 191–205. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09672550701383483.

Whiting, D., 2013. It's not what you said, it's the way you said it: slurs and conventional implicatures. Analytic Philosophy.

Wilkinson, E., 2011. Racial slur led to killing of innocent teen. King 5 News (9 December), <http://www.king5.com/news/local/Racial-slur-led-to-killing-of-innocent-teen-135354268.html>.

Williamson, T., 2009. Reference, inference and the semantics of pejoratives. In: Almog, J., Leonardi, P. (Eds.), The Philosophy of David Kaplan. Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 137–159.

Wilson, H., 2002. In: Gates, Henry Louis (Ed.), Our Nig: Or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, third ed. Vintage Books, New York.

Wilson, R., 2013. Lions' Scheffler, Delmas use racial slurs as terms of endearment. CBS Sports (8 August), <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/blog/eye-onfootball/23069221/lions-scheffler-delmas-use-racial-slurs-as-terms-of-endearment->.

Wittgenstein, L., 1953. Philosophical Investigations. Blackwell, Oxford.

Wittgenstein, L., 1982. In: Lee, D. (Ed.), Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1932–1935. University Press, Chicago.

Zimmerman, M., 2013. Hawaii representative apologizes over racial slurs and threats she made to state workers. Hawaii Reporter (1 March), <http://www.hawaiireporter.com/hawaii-representative-apologizes-over-racial-slurs-and-threats-she-made-to-state-workers/123>.