1. Introduction

Slurs are semantically perplexing in that they resist assimilation to other well-studied classes of expressions. The projective behavior of their pejorative effects makes trouble for analyses which trace those effects to their at-issue content or presuppositional profile. The difficulty of identifying particular pejorative propositions to which speakers are committed in uttering slurs is equally problematic for treatments which appeal to conventional implicature.\(^1\) The fact that slurs can be competently and literally employed without the intention to express an occurrent attitude of disapproval, and indeed without the intention to express any negative attitude at all, distinguishes them from expressives like ‘jerk’ and ‘asshole’.\(^2\)

The difficulty of accounting for slurs using semantic tools developed for other expressions has led to a number of novel semantic and pragmatic explanations of their behavior. But these, too, are subject to difficulties. Since slurs can lose their offensiveness in certain didactic and reportative contexts, no view which holds that every tokening of

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1. In being difficult or impossible to paraphrase, slurs pattern with expressives like ‘damn’ and ‘bastard’; see Potts (2007) for discussion. Note, however, that I will ultimately suggest a non-expressivist explanation for the difficulty of paraphrasing the pejorative content of slurs.

2. Some expressives can in certain contexts be used without the intention to express an occurrent attitude of disapproval. For example, the occurrence of ‘bastard’ in “That lucky bastard speeds every morning but hasn’t ever gotten a ticket!” does not seem to express the speaker’s disapproval for the individual referred to. Nevertheless, the contrast between slurs and expressives is a genuine one: Uses of expressives which do not require that the speaker intend to express an occurrent negative attitude are limited to certain lexical items and certain linguistic contexts — it is difficult to find uses of ‘asshole’, for example, which do not express the speaker’s occurrent disapproval. Slurs, on the other hand, can systematically be used in place of their neutral counterparts even in situations where speakers are making prosaically factual claims (about, for example, politics, demographics, or sports). This sort of use is characteristic of bigots who hold that slurring terms are “just another way” of referring to members of the targeted group. In such cases, speakers can plausibly deny intending to express any occurrent attitude of disapproval toward members of the targeted group. Thanks to an anonymous referee for emphasizing the unusual behavior of ‘bastard’.
a slur must be offensive (because, for example, taboo) can be correct. Views according to which typical uses of slurs signal allegiance to certain views of or perspectives on the targeted group are more promising, though I will argue below that they are not ultimately successful.

The literature on the semantics and pragmatics of slurs is by now extensive, and the preceding two paragraphs give only the barest sketch of the theoretical options and the difficulties they face. Nevertheless, they will have to suffice for the purposes of my discussion here, as my primary interest is in setting out what I take to be a serious and underappreciated problem for one broad class of theories and presenting a view which is responsive to that problem. I will refer to the class of theories which is my target as speaker-oriented, since they locate the pejorative character of slurs in what they reveal about the attitudes or commitments of the speakers who use them. Correspondingly, I will refer to the problem which I believe renders such theories unviable as the speaker-orientation problem. I discuss speaker-oriented theories as a class, with special attention to the theories of Camp (2013) and Bolinger (2017), in section 2. I present the speaker-orientation problem in section 3.

I believe that expressivist accounts which ascribe to slurs a “second dimension” of non-propositional content are on the right track. However, the view I favor, which I present informally in sections 4–6, differs from a standard expressivist semantics in that it assigns slurs a directive second dimension. One advantage of my directive approach is that it is able to explain the offensiveness of slurs in terms of the offensiveness of directives to demean oneself or individuals for whom one has respect (see section 5). It also opens up a novel way of thinking about the phenomenon of appropriation (see section 8). Section 7 contrasts my view with a number of related semantic theories. A formal implementation of my directive treatment of slurs can be found in the appendix.

In both content and motivation, the account I favor bears an obvious affinity to prescriptivist views of the semantics of moral language. However, my view escapes traditional criticisms of prescriptivism in virtue of its different subject matter and the fact that, as formally implemented in the appendix, it allows clauses containing slurs to embed freely without generating counterintuitive predictions.

Before proceeding, a word of warning: In what follows, I will mention a number of slurs. It is methodologically important, in studying the semantic properties of slurs, to assess the pejorative character of example sentences which contain those slurs themselves rather than euphemistic alternatives (e.g. ‘the N-word’). In partial deference to those who advise avoidance even of quoted slurs, however, I will introduce euphemistic names for slurs which are mentioned multiple times outside of example sentences and semantic clauses.

2. Expressivist Accounts and Speaker Orientation

Let us say that an account of slurs is speaker-oriented just in case it explains their pejorative character exclusively or primarily by appealing to what the use of a slur reveals about a speaker’s doxastic or evaluative attitudes (occurent or dispositional) or commitments. My aim in this section is to provide a brief sketch of the range of speaker-oriented accounts of slurs, highlighting the two I take to be most plausible. In the next section, I will argue that no speaker-oriented account of slurs can be correct.

The most historically influential speaker-oriented approach to the semantics of slurs is expressivism. It will be helpful in what follows to distinguish between simple expressivism and sophisticated expressivism. According to simple expressivists, the pejorative character of a slur is explained by the fact that it is conventionally used to express the speaker’s occurrent negative attitude toward the targeted group. To
include as broad a class of theories as possible, I will understand ‘express’ loosely, so that slurs count as expressing the speaker’s occurrent negative attitude if they are either (i) conventionally associated with a not-at-issue propositional content encoding that the speaker has such an attitude, or (ii) conventionally associated with a non-propositional content corresponding to such an attitude, in such a way that their use is infelicitous if the speaker does not have that attitude. Thus Potts, who variously suggests that slurs conventionally implicate the proposition that “the speaker is in a heightened emotional state regarding” the targeted group (2005, 168) and claims that they non-propositionally express that the speaker is “in a heightened emotional state right this minute” (2007, 171), as well as McCready (2010) and Croom (2011), who are Pottsians in relevant respects, count as simple expressivists.

Simple expressivism is subject to the objection that a competent, literal, non-reclaimed use of a slur need not be accompanied by any occurrent negative attitude on the part of the speaker. Thus the following seem like competent (though, of course, objectionable) uses of slurs:

1. Chinks are so much smarter than the rest of us. (Anderson and Lepore 2013a, 33)
2. I wonder whether Japs like to cuddle their babies as much as Chinks seem to. (Camp 2013, 332)

Recognizing this problem, many expressivists have appealed to more complex attitudes like finding members of a group contemptible or despicable, the tokening of which is understood not to require having any occurrent negative attitude. Sophisticated expressivist accounts hold that slurs are conventionally used to express complex attitudes of this sort towards members of the targeted group. Thus Schlenker (2007), who proposes that slurs presuppose that the speaker believes that members of the targeted group are despicable, and Jeshion (2013; 2018), who proposes that slurs are conventionally governed by a rule of use such that they express the speaker’s contempt for members of the targeted group, are sophisticated expressivists.

Sophisticated expressivism has the resources to account for (1–2) above, since it is at least plausible that speakers employing them sincerely, while not in the grip of an occurrent negative attitude toward members of the targeted group, must have a general disposition to disapprove of them or take up some other negative affective stance toward them. But consider:

3. I love midgets! They’re so adorable, especially when they have whole little families.

The speaker of (3) may have, by her own lights, exclusively positive attitudes toward people of short stature. The pejorative character of her use of ‘midget’ (hereinafter the M-word), as well as the offensiveness of her other dictional choices (‘adorable’; ‘little’), are not plausibly explained by appealing to the expression of an attitude of disapproval or contempt; they seem instead to have to do with the fact that her perspective on people of short stature fails to accord them the dignity they deserve as fully capable adult human beings.5 At the same time, there surely are uses of the M-word which do reveal attitudes of disapproval or contempt. So the sophisticated expressivist is faced with an awkward choice between denying the possibility of sincere, non-appropriated, approving, but nonetheless pejorative uses of slurs (as in (3) above) and appealing to lexical ambiguity to explain how a single slur competently employed can be associated with a variety of affective attitudes.

To avoid the aforementioned problems with simple and sophisticated expressivism, Camp (2013) locates the offensiveness of slurs in their semantically encoded capacity to reveal that the speaker adopts and regards as appropriate a certain perspective.6

5. Note that I do not wish to deny that (3) would be offensive even without its first sentence. The point I wish to make is instead that the use of the M-word in the first sentence of (3) need not signal that the speaker has any offensive attitudes other than the one suggested by her remarks in the second sentence, which is not well characterized as disapproval or contempt.

6. Though Camp’s (2013) talk of slurs revealing speakers’ perspectives suggests
Since perspectives will feature prominently in the view I defend below, it is worth describing them in detail. Camp characterizes a perspective as “an integrated, intuitive way of cognizing members of the targeted group” (2013, 335). As a way of cognizing, a perspective is not any particular propositional content; it is, instead, a “disposition to structure one’s thoughts” (2013, 335) by regarding certain properties of members of the targeted group as particularly prominent and explanatorily central. Thus there is no set of propositions belief in which is either jointly necessary or jointly sufficient for adopting a particular perspective. The perspectives associated with slurs are, according to Camp, dispositions to regard membership in the targeted group as central in that it explains the presence and fittingness of a range of further properties.7

For Camp, perspectives have close ties to the emotions: “a perspective typically motivates certain feelings as appropriate to feel toward its subject” (2013, 335). Camp’s perspectives are thus cognitive dispositions both to organize information in a certain way and, typically, to regard certain emotional responses as appropriate.8 For reasons which will become clear when I discuss appropriation below, I will assume that

perspectives are individuated by their information-organizing properties. Thus the same perspective may be connected with dispositions to token or regard as appropriate certain emotional responses in some individuals but not others. Whether one regards the emotional profile associated with a perspective by a given individual as a contingent property of that perspective as instantiated by that individual or as a distinct, non-perspectival aspect of his or her cognitive life is an issue on which I will not take a position, though the former option is probably closer to Camp’s original conception.

Since perspectives are not attitudes, Camp’s view is neither a form of simple expressivism nor a form of sophisticated expressivism. Nevertheless, Camp characterizes her view as “broadly expressivist” (2018, 50) because it explains the offensiveness of slurs in terms of their connection with the non-doxastic cognitive properties of those who utter them. I regard Camp’s view as the most plausible development of the expressivist approach to the semantics of slurs.

Not every speaker-oriented account of slurs is expressivist in character, however. Bolinger (2017), for example, departs from Camp in regarding the pejorative character of slurs as a pragmatic phenomenon rather than a semantic one. For Bolinger, the offensiveness of a use of a slur depends on (i) a known probabilistic association between uses of the slur and some information φ (such as that the speaker endorses a certain negative attitude toward the targeted group) and (ii) whether the speaker chooses to use the slur when she is able to avoid doing so (e.g. by using its neutral counterpart). Since Bolinger’s view is flexible when it comes to the content of the information φ associated with particular uses of slurs, her view, like Camp’s, circumvents the problems with simple and sophisticated expressivist accounts. I thus regard it as the most plausible development of a pragmatic approach to the pejorativity of slurs.

3. The Speaker-Orientation Problem
The type of intuition which motivates the speaker-orientation problem has been felt at least since the inception of the noncognitivist tradition in

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7. Note, however, that for the purposes of my discussion here, I need not take on board the details of Camp’s account of perspectives; it suffices that there be cognitive dispositions to store and process information about particular topics or groups of individuals, and that some of these dispositions naturally be regarded as demeaning towards the groups they target.

8. With respect to the qualification ‘typically’, it should be noted that Camp holds both that “having a perspective does not entail that one actually engages emotions at every moment one attends to a perspective-relevant situation” and that “some perspectives, such as scientific and theoretical orientations, are largely or entirely devoid of emotion” (2013, 337).
metaethics. Stevenson, for example, argues that, in order to account for the fact that moral language is used “not to indicate facts, but to create an influence”, one must develop a semantic theory to which traditional ethical subjectivism stands as “describing a desert” stands to “irrigating it” (Stevenson 1937, 15, 19; emphasis in original). Hare’s universal prescriptivism is similarly motivated by the intuition that “the function of moral principles is to guide conduct” (Hare 1952, 1). Though the target of Stevenson and Hare’s investigation is moral language rather than slurs, their remarks are methodologically significant in that they identify a class of expressions which seem to perform a distinctive function in discourse and argue that a satisfactory explanation of how this function is performed must appeal to more than the communication of a certain kind of information.

More recently, and with reference to slurs in particular, Williamson (2009) and Camp (2013) have criticized sophisticated expressivism for being unable to explain the pejorative effects of slurs. Thus Williamson writes:

The implicature that ‘Boche’ carries is not merely about the speaker’s psychological state. In particular, what is implicated is not merely that the speaker believes that Germans are cruel... . When someone uses the word ‘Boche,’ one can legitimately ask him to withdraw the anti-German implication; but if it is clear, as it may well be, that he does believe that Germans are cruel, then it is hardly legitimate to ask him to withdraw the implication that he has that belief. (2009, 151–2; emphasis in original)

Camp adds that, on an expressivist treatment, “the hearer should be able to dismiss the speaker’s feelings as just her problem”, as is possible with expressives like ‘damn’ and ‘bastard’ (2013, 333).

Though their objections to expressivism are different, Williamson and Camp are motivated by the same intuition — one which structurally parallels the intuition of Stevenson and Hare: that the expressivist proposal cannot account for the role slurs actually play in conversation. The speaker-orientation problem emerges when this intuition is developed in a certain very natural direction. For if a given class of expressions performs a function in discourse beyond conveying a certain kind of information, then any semantic theory which explains the properties of expressions in that class simply by identifying them as devices for conveying this kind of information must either fail to predict that they perform the extra function or mistakenly predict that any other vehicle for conveying the same information would perform the function, as well. This is because such a theory must either hold that conveying the relevant kind of information is itself sufficient for performing the extra function, in which case consistency requires that it hold that any vehicle which conveys the same information must also perform that function, or hold that conveying the relevant kind of information is not itself sufficient for performing the extra function, in which case identifying the expressions in question as devices for conveying the relevant kind of information does not explain their role in discourse.9

Proponents of speaker-oriented accounts of slurs hold that the distinctive pejorative potential of slurs is explained by the information they reveal about the speakers who use them. They thus hold that the revelation of this information is inherently pejorative; the distinctive role of slurs in discourse is explained by the fact that they are devices for conveying this information. For this reason, speaker-oriented accounts have difficulty accounting for the inoffensiveness of certain utterances not containing slurs. If slurs are offensive because they raise to salience information about the perspectives or attitudes of individuals, then other utterances which do the same should be equally offensive. But they are not.

9. Compare here the Gricean doctrine that conversational implicatures not calculated with reference to the maxim of Manner are nondetachable from the propositional contents which generate them (Grice 1975, 39). The structure of Grice’s argument for the nondetachability of such conversational implicatures parallels that of the first horn of the dilemma I have offered above: Because he holds that the saying of a given proposition in a particular conversational context is itself sufficient for generating the relevant conversational implicatures, he recognizes that he must hold that any way of saying that proposition must generate the same conversational implicatures in that conversational context.
Moreover, in holding that the pejorative potential of slurs is explained by the information they reveal about the speakers who use them, proponents of speaker-oriented accounts commit themselves to a further prediction: that the pejorative potential of slurs will be realized only when the information they reveal about the speakers who use them is not old news. For if the inherently pejorative information revealed by the use of a slur is old news, it is difficult to see how the use of that slur could warrant any further offense on the part of audience members — it is of the nature of revelations that they are one-time affairs. It follows that utterances containing slurs should be inoffensive if the information those slurs reveal about the speakers who use them is old news. But, again, they are not.

By “the relevant information”, let us understand whatever information about the speaker is taken by a given speaker-oriented account to explain the pejorative effects of slurs — different speaker-oriented accounts might hold that the relevant information is, for example, the information that the speaker occurrently tokens a negative attitude towards members of the targeted group, or is disposed to token such an attitude, or has adopted a derogatory perspective toward them. Then we can formalize the two problematic predictions of speaker-oriented accounts as follows:

**(Nondetachability):** The relevant information will have the same pejorative effect regardless of how it is communicated.

**(Novelty Requirement):** If the relevant information is already common ground, the use of a slur will have no additional pejorative effect.

Consideration of an example suggests that neither of these predictions is correct:

Suppose Albert and Benjamin are at a party, and Benjamin asks Albert whether anyone in the room has moved house recently (he seeks practical advice on how to choose a moving company). Suppose also that it is common knowledge between Albert and Benjamin that a group of sexist individuals has established a secluded rural community which they have named ‘Andropolis’, and that individuals wishing to move to Andropolis must pass a strict battery of ideological tests ensuring that they share the sexist attitudes of its founders. Here are three ways in which Albert might reply to Benjamin’s question (while demonstrating their fellow partygoer, Doris):

1. *(4)* That cunt recently moved to Chicago.
2. *(5)* I recently moved to Andropolis, and that woman recently moved to Chicago.
3. *(6)* I recently moved to Andropolis, and that cunt recently moved to Chicago.

*(4–6)* differ dramatically with respect to their potential to cause offense. *(4)* and *(6)* have the characteristic offensiveness of a slur freely chosen over its neutral counterpart. *(5)* might shock Benjamin or cause him to significantly reassess his opinion of Albert, but it lacks the offensive character of *(4)* and *(6)*.

If the offensiveness of a slurring speech act were traceable to what it reveals about the speaker’s perspectives or attitudes, we would (by *(Nondetachability))* expect *(4)* and *(5)*, which reveal exactly the same information about Albert’s perspectives and attitudes, to be offensive to the same extent. Similarly, since the information that Albert has the relevant sexist perspective or attitude is contextually entailed by the first conjunct of *(6)*, we would (by *(Novelty Requirement))* expect the slur in its second conjunct to be pejoratively inert.

Note that the difference between *(4)* and *(5)* or between *(5)* and *(6)* cannot be explained by a difference in the defeasibility or overtness of the commitment to the relevant perspective or attitude. With respect to defeasibility, the commitment in question is contextually entailed by the at-issue content of *(5)*; it is not merely suggested or conversationally implicated. With respect to overtness, we can expand *(5)* or *(6)* so that the entailment is semantic rather than contextual (“I recently moved to Andropolis because I endorse the perspective of its founders...”) without losing the contrast between *(5)* and *(4)/(6)*. Note also that the contrasts
in question cannot be explained by the lack of a taboo expression in (5), since adding one (for example, by inserting ‘fucking’ before ‘Chicago’) does not eliminate them. I thus regard the differences among (4)–(6) as decisive evidence against Bolinger’s account of the offensive potential of slurs, as well as against Camp’s proposal that the semantic function of a slur is to signal a pre-existing commitment to (the appropriateness of) a perspective.

It is worth pausing at this point to discuss the applicability of the speaker-orientation problem to two more recent proposals. First, Camp (2018) seeks to explain the pejorativity of slurs by appealing to the speech act of undertaking a commitment to a perspective. However, if the relevant notion of undertaking a commitment is understood in a pre-theoretical way — that is, if the circumstances under which a speaker can truly be said to have undertaken a commitment in the relevant sense are roughly those in which we would pre-theoretically judge that she has done so — it will be possible to create examples similar to (5) which contrast with (4). For we can imagine that it is common knowledge between Albert and Benjamin that individuals wishing to move to Andropolis must take a solemn vow to uphold its sexist attitudes, and that Albert says, “I recently moved to Andropolis — I would take the vow again if I could! — and that woman recently moved to Chicago”. If the act of undertaking a commitment is understood in a different way, on the other hand, then this aspect of Camp’s view may not ultimately be in tension with the proposal I advance below, according to which slur users direct their interlocutors to adopt derogatory perspectives: Perhaps what is distinctive about undertaking a commitment to a perspective in the relevant sense is that it involves issuing a directive to one’s interlocutors to adopt that perspective.

Second, Jeshion (2018) seeks to develop an expressivist-friendly response to Camp’s objection, discussed above, that, on expressivist treatments of slurs, “the hearer should be able to dismiss the speaker’s feelings as just her problem” (2013, 333). This criticism is not apt, Jeshion suggests, because of facts about expressions of the attitude of contempt: “Because contempt is a moral attitude, its expression has both the normative power to influence how others ought to regard the targets and the right standing to receive normative censure” (Jeshion 2018, 99). But facts about the moral psychology of the attitude expressed by those who use slurs cannot help the expressivist escape the speaker-orientation problem. Modifying the Andropolis case so that it is common ground between Albert and Benjamin that those who move to Andropolis must hold women in contempt does not eliminate the contrast between (5) and (4)/(6). The information that a speaker holds some group in contempt is simply not pejorative in the way a slur is pejorative.

To escape the speaker-orientation problem, the expressivist must hold that the offensiveness of slurs derives not from the nature of the attitude which renders them expressively appropriate but rather from some feature of the act of expressing that attitude. An expressivism which appeals in this way to psychologically efficacious properties of acts is not genuinely speaker-oriented; what bears the explanatory burden is not what is in the speaker’s head (or heart), but something about how she chooses to reveal it to the world.

Such a view escapes the speaker-orientation problem at the cost of leaving much to be accounted for. How does pairing an attitude (information about the tokening of which is not inherently offensive) with a lexical item (the use of which is expressively appropriate only if one tokens that attitude) ultimately explain the characteristic offensiveness of slurs in use? The story cannot be a traditional one according to which uttering the expression is simply a non-reportative way of signaling that one tokens the attitude. One suspects that the expressivist story is missing some crucial ingredient which explains the distinctive interpersonal power of slurs. For this reason, while I cannot claim that the speaker-orientation problem is decisive evidence against this brand of expressivism, I do think that the view I offer in what follows provides a more complete explanation of what is distinctively pejorative about

10. Jeshion (pc) clarifies that this is indeed her preferred response to the speaker-orientation problem.
The failure of speaker-oriented views to explain the pejorative character of slurs leaves us in what may at first seem to be a hopeless theoretical position. We cannot explain the behavior of slurs in terms of the information they convey about those who use them. Nor, if we take seriously Camp’s (2013, 341–2) observation that the user of a slur can plausibly deny commitment to any specific propositional content about the targeted group, can we explain the behavior of slurs by appealing to propositions concerning the groups they target, whether at-issue or otherwise.

But all is not lost. In what follows, I propose a non-propositional, non-speaker-oriented account of the pejorative potential of slurs. Like expressivism, my proposal understands slurs as (inter alia) conventional devices for performing non-assertoric speech acts. Unlike expressivism, my proposal does not locate the offensiveness of slurs in what they reveal about speakers’ attitudes. Instead, I analyze slurs as conventional devices for issuing directives, where directives are understood as updating a different parameter of the conversational scoreboard than assertions. My argument for this proposal will have two parts: In the first, I will give an informal exposition of the formal implementation of the idea that slurs are directives, which is presented in the appendix; in the second, I will provide further motivation for this idea by showing that certain kinds of directives have the same sort of pejorative potential as slurs.

4. Slurs are Directives

In light of the preceding considerations, I propose that, while a slur makes the same contribution as its neutral counterpart to the propositional content (both at-issue and otherwise) of the expressions in which it is embedded, it differs from its neutral counterpart in that it is semantically associated with a not-at-issue directive content. This means that any articulation of a slur (except in direct or mixed quotation) commits a speaker to contributing a not-at-issue directive content to the conversation alongside whatever at-issue content she puts forward: a directive to adopt the perspective towards the targeted group which is lexically associated with the slur.

It is important to distinguish the view I wish to defend from the view that sentences containing slurs are imperatives, on the one hand, and the view that the at-issue contribution of sentences containing slurs is directive in character, on the other. As I understand the term imperative, it belongs to syntax: Certain sentences are imperatives, and these sentences often have interesting syntactic features, such as lacking an overt subject (see Portner (2016) for discussion). I do not endorse the (obviously false) view that every sentence containing a slur is an imperative. Similarly, I do not endorse the view that the primary or at-issue contribution of a sincere and literal utterance of an indicative sentence containing a slur is directive in character. If this were so, one would expect it to be felicitous to respond to such utterances with refusals (“No”, “I won’t do that”, etc.). My proposal is instead that the directive content associated with a slur is not-at-issue. The prediction is thus that it can only be challenged by interrupting the flow of conversation (“Hey, wait a minute! I refuse to think about gay people like that.”).

In holding that the directiveness of slurs is not-at-issue, I part ways with the prescriptivist tradition in metaethics, which holds that the primary or at-issue content contributed by ethical sentences is directive. This renders my view immune to many of the difficulties afflicting Carnap’s proposal that “a value statement is nothing else than a command in a misleading grammatical form” (1935, 24), as well as Hare’s (1952) universal prescriptivism. For example, the fact that my proposal assigns to each slur the same at-issue content as its neutral counterpart allows it

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11. Recall also that the difficulties with both naive and sophisticated expressivism canvassed in the previous section give us reason to seek a non-expressivist treatment of slurs even if it is conceded that certain versions of expressivism have the resources to escape the speaker-orientation problem.

12. For evidence suggesting the at-issue equivalence of slurs and their neutral counterparts, see (e.g.) Williamson (2009, 146–7), Jeshion (2013, 240), and Camp (2013, 330).
to escape the Frege–Geach problem and provides a natural explanation of the truth-aptness of slurring utterances.

Let us say that an expression or construction is a directive just in case it is semantically associated with a directive content. My proposal is then conveniently summarized by the slogan: Slurs are directives. More needs to be said, however, about the nature of directive content. Following Portner (2016), I understand the term directive content such that it refers to whatever kind of semantic content is the at-issue content of imperative sentences. There is disagreement in the literature about whether directive content is propositional; I have opted in the formal development of my view for a treatment according to which directive contents are properties, but it would be straightforward to implement the same theory in a propositional framework.13

To say that an expression is a directive is not to say that a sincere utterance of it is associated with any particular illocutionary force. Imperatives are the quintessential directives, and their content can be used to perform (inter alia) commands, suggestions, and invitations. There are various proposals in the literature for how to account for this variability. Portner (2007), for example, uses variation in a contextually supplied selection function — to a first approximation, his idea is that different selection functions pick out different subsets of the set of directive contents, corresponding to different “flavors” of imperative meaning, and that context determines which such function interlocutors use to interpret a given imperative.14

So the thesis that slurs are directives leaves open the nature of the illocutionary acts performed in slurring. On many accounts of directive content, however, to say that an expression is a directive is to assign it a certain kind of dynamic force, where this notion is understood, following Yalcin, as “the characteristic...change to the state of the conversation [it] is apt to produce” (2018, 402). To say that directive contents have a different dynamic force than the contents of indicative sentences is to say that they effect a different sort of update on the conversational scoreboard.

Following Portner (2004; 2007) I will understand the dynamic force of directives in terms of updates to interlocutors’ To-Do Lists. The basic idea of this approach is that each conversational participant is associated with a set of properties — her To-Do List — and that the presence of a property on a speaker’s To-Do List represents its being the case that that speaker is publicly committed to bringing it about that she instantiates that property. If we hold, in the tradition of Stalnaker (1978; 2014), that the dynamic force characteristic of indicatives is to add their propositional contents to the conversational common ground — and if we refer to this sort of dynamic force, which is entirely captured by this sort of update to the common ground, as informational — then we can say that Portner’s proposal is that imperatives differ from indicatives not only in that they denote properties, but also in that the role of these properties in discourse must be captured by assigning them a non-informational dynamic force.

My claim that slurs contribute not-at-issue directive content may thus be understood in part as a claim about their dynamic force: The content that slurs contribute to the not-at-issue dimension of semantic composition has the dynamic force appropriate to directives — it updates the To-Do Lists of interlocutors. Understanding the proposal that slurs are directives in this way frees us from the task of identifying

13. Of course, if directive contents are propositional, then not-at-issue directive contents are of the same semantic type as the contents of conventional implication items like non-restrictive relative clauses. The propositionalist must tell some additional story, then, about what differentiates the two. This sort of issue will be familiar to the propositionalist, since she also holds that indicatives and imperatives have contents of the same semantic type. It is an open question whether propositionalist accounts of imperatives can adequately explain the ways in which they differ from indicatives, given that they assign them the same sorts of contents (see Kaufmann (2012, section 2.3.1) for one attempt to solve this problem, as well as Portner (2016, 607) for critical discussion). In saying that it would be straightforward to implement my proposal in a propositional framework, I mean that it would be straightforward to do so given that the propositionalist is able to tell some adequate story about how directive content differs from ordinary propositional content.

14. See the appendix for a more complete account of the formal details of Portner’s proposal.
the illocutionary force associated with a not-at-issue directive content on any particular occasion of use; indeed, we are free to maintain that
not-at-issue directive contents are not typically associated with any illocutionary force. If required to identify one, we would perhaps best
do so on the basis of the dynamic force and not-at-issue status of the relevant contents: as the force of a peripheral directive. Adopting the convention of referring to the not-at-issue illocutionary forces associated with a type of content using the prefix ‘p-’ (for peripheral), we might then say that the not-at-issue contents of slurs are used to perform p-directives, whereas the contents of non-restrictive relative clauses are characteristically used to perform p-informative. Indeed, I will adopt this way of speaking in what follows, holding that speakers who slur thereby perform p-directives. Those who prefer to think of not-at-issue content as free from any illocutionary force should interpret my talk of peripheral illocutionary acts as a convenient shorthand for claims about dynamic force.

Because to perform a p-directive is not to command, order, beg, or perform any of the other familiar illocutionary acts associated with directive contents, the question of how to account for the illocutionary variety of directive contents does not arise for p-directives. Nevertheless, following Portner (2007), it will be helpful even in the case of p-directives to identify a selection function which encodes information about the “flavor” of obligation those to whom they are addressed are under.

When an audience member is p-directed by a slur-user, is the item added to her To-Do List something she must do (at least, as the speaker sees it) in virtue of the social authority of the speaker over her, as in an order? In virtue of her own desires, as in a bouletic directive? In virtue of what is morally required? If the former, for example, one would expect slurs to function relevantly like orders, in the sense that they would be infelicitous in the mouths of those who lack the right kind of social authority over their addressees. This prediction does not seem to be supported by the evidence; indeed, none of these three familiar directive “flavors” is intuitively appropriate for understanding the distinctive properties of slurs.

Since perspectives are ways of cognizing members of the groups they are about, one appealing thought about the nature of directives to adopt perspectives is that they are interpreted relative to a selection function which picks out what addressees are required to do in light of what is cognitively best. On this sort of proposal, the p-directive associated with a slur updates addressees’ To-Do Lists with the property of adopting the associated perspective, and it is understood that doing so will (allegedly) make addressees better at cognizing members of the targeted group. Since perspectives are non-propositional, the cognitive goodness of a perspective cannot be understood purely in terms of forming new true beliefs. But it may nevertheless be linked to what is epistemically good insofar as the cognitive dispositions which constitute the perspective could dispose those who adopt it to form true beliefs about the members of the targeted group.

I will adopt this proposal in what follows, assuming that the p-directives associated with slurs are always interpreted relative to a selection function which picks out those properties which it is cognitively

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15. This position might be motivated by the observation that though certain not-at-issue clauses — non-restrictive relative clauses, for example — have propositional contents and are associated with informational dynamic force, the speakers who utter them cannot happily be said to have asserted the propositions they encode (nor can they normally be said to have advised or warned their interlocutors about the material in the non-restrictive relative clause, and so forth). One attractive explanation for this observation is that not-at-issue propositional contents are not associated with any illocutionary force. This is only so, of course, if ‘conventionally implicate’ does not itself describe an illocutionary force.

16. As Horn (2007, 52) points out, the contents of non- restrictive relative clauses can also be used to perform a variety of other illocutionary acts. See section 7 below for discussion.

17. I thus take it to be unproblematic to divorce questions about directive “flavor” from questions of illocutionary force. Even if, following Portner, we hold that the

“flavor” contributed by a given selection function can determine the illocutionary force of an associated at-issue directive, we are free also to hold that there can be cases in which “flavor” does not determine illocutionary force. My suggestion is that p-directives are such cases.

18. I think it is plausible that cognitive goodness can be linked to epistemic goodness in this way, but none of my arguments below turn on whether it can, and I will take no stand on the issue in what follows.
best to instantiate. In other words, I will assume that the “flavor” of
the directives associated with slurs is understood to be cognitive (rather
than, for example, moral or teleological). I will remain agnostic concern-
ing whether this fact about slurs is part of their semantics; it seems to me
possible to explain it either by assuming, on the one hand, that speakers
coordinate on the right kind of selection function because it is seman-
tically required for the definedness of the directive content associated
with a slur, or by assuming, on the other hand, that speakers arrive at the
same conclusion pragmatically by ruling out other selection functions
as appropriate choices for a directive to adopt a perspective.

In the appendix, I implement my suggestion that slurs are associated
with not-at-issue directive content using a formal treatment of semantic
multidimensionality inspired by Potts (2005). The treatment begins by
giving a standard model-theoretic semantics for a regimented logical
language. The primary objects of semantic interpretation, however, are
not formulas of this language but rather tree structures, each node of
which can potentially be associated with multiple expressions of the
regimented language. Semantic multidimensionality is handled in the
implementation by exploiting this feature: Multidimensional natural-
language expressions correspond to tree nodes containing multiple for-
mulas. In particular, natural-language slurs correspond to tree nodes
containing two formulas of distinct types: first, a property-denoting
predicate (type \(\langle e, t \rangle\)), and second, a formula of a novel type (type \(p\))
introduced into the system to account for the special properties of slurs.

Type \(p\) expressions denote perspectives; thus a slur contributes to any
tree containing it both a predicate denoting the property which would
have been denoted by its neutral counterpart and an expression corre-
sponding to the perspective semantically associated with that slur. Since
perspectives are dispositional properties, one can think of the domain of
type \(p\) expressions as a distinguished subset of the domain of type \(\langle e, t \rangle\)
expressions — indeed, this relationship is made explicit in the formal
implementation of my proposal.

Trees are well-formed just in case the types of the formulas at
their various nodes match appropriately for composition by function-
application. Since the only semantically multidimensional expressions
in the fragment are slurs, this means that the trees recognized as well-
formed in the system will look much like standard phrase structure trees.
The only difference is that some of the well-formed trees generated by
the fragment will have expressions of type \(p\) on some of their terminal
nodes.

The interpretation rule for tree structures builds a multidimensional
content from an input by (i) constructing the intension of the semantic
value of the root node of the tree (yielding a proposition), and (ii) scan-
ning down the tree for expressions of type \(p\) and forming a set of prop-
erties containing one property for each such expression: the property of
adopting the perspective denoted. The result is that the interpretation
of each well-formed tree is an ordered pair of a proposition and a set of
properties.

The formal pragmatic framework of the fragment, which draws on
involves a conversational scoreboard with two main components: a
common ground, which is a set of propositions representing informa-
tion taken for granted for the purposes of the conversation, and a set
of To-Do Lists corresponding to the interlocutors in the conversation.
The rule for modifying the conversational scoreboard in response to the
utterance of a given tree structure is to add its propositional content to
the common ground and update the To-Do Lists of all interlocutors so
that they include each of its property-contents.\(^{19}\) Thus sincerely uttering
an indicative sentence containing one or more slurs involves simulta-
nously proposing to update the common ground and issuing a set of
directives to one’s interlocutors.\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Strictly speaking, Portner’s (2007) proposal has directives updating both the
To-Do Lists of interlocutors and the common ground, with the latter update
helping to account for the variety of imperative illocutionary act types by en-
suring that interlocutors coordinate on the identity of the contextually supplied
selection function. I follow Portner in assigning this dual role to directives; see
the appendix for details.

\(^{20}\) What happens, on my view, when a slur occurs inside a non-restrictive rela-
tive clause? In such cases, a speaker performs an at-issue assertion while at the
Crucially, the proposal that slurs are directives is able to explain the differences between (4), (5), and (6): In (4) and (6), over and above making a factual claim about Doris, the speaker directs his audience to adopt his sexist perspective towards women. In (5), while the same sexist perspective is raised to salience, no such directive is issued. It thus avoids both the speaker-orientation problem associated with expressivist views and the non-propositionality problem associated with traditional conventional implicature views.

5. The Pejorative Potential of Directives
The success of my analysis of slurs in terms of directive content depends on the plausibility of the claim that it can be offensive to be directed to adopt certain perspectives. Naturally, not every perspective is such that being directed to adopt it is offensive; slurs cause offense because they are associated with perspectives which are, in one way or another, demeaning. I suggest that the pejorative profile of slurs is to be explained by our tendency to take offense at being directed to demean what we value. Thus the perspectives which are apt to cause offense are ones which belittle, vilify, or caricature, and these will cause offense only in those who regard the targeted group as deserving of respect or admiration.21 This is why slurs are most likely to cause offense to those belonging to the groups they target and least likely to cause offense to those who have already adopted a negative perspective toward those groups.

To see that it can be offensive to be directed to demean what one values, imagine the following scenario:

[Hank the Homophobe]: While dancing in a nightclub in the early hours of the morning, a gay couple begins to kiss. This is normal behavior for straight couples in the nightclub. Nevertheless, seeing the gay couple kissing, Hank the Homophobe approaches them from across the room and says, aggressively, “Understand that what you’re doing is disgusting!”

Hank the Homophobe’s actions will naturally be regarded as deeply offensive by his targets. Why? An attractive explanation is that his use of an imperative makes it clear that his performance is intended not merely to express his disgust at overt displays of gay intimacy, but also to pressure his targets into sharing that same disgust: A directive has been issued. But to be directed to regard normal expressions of one’s feelings of emotional intimacy as disgusting is demeaning and therefore offensive.22

In claiming that Hank’s performance is offensive because it involves directing his targets to regard normal expressions of their feelings of emotional intimacy as disgusting, I do not wish to commit myself to the doctrine that all directives are offensive (this is obviously not the case, as witnessed by the inoffensiveness of invitations like “Have a cookie!”), or even to the doctrine that all directives to adopt negative attitudes are offensive. For we can imagine an alternative version of the case in which Hank’s ire is directed at the couple because they are smoking indoors rather than because they are kissing. And the couple would need to be very unusual indeed to value indoor smoking in the right way to find a directive to regard that activity with disgust pejorative rather than merely annoying. My suggestion is instead that directives to adopt

21. The minimal level of respect or admiration for the targeted group associated with a disposition to take offense at the use of a slur depends on the associated perspective. Some perspectives are dehumanizing; uses of slurs associated with these will tend to cause offense in anyone who regards members of the targeted group as possessing even basic human dignity. Other perspectives are demeaning because they involve stereotyped or caricatural ways of cognizing the targeted group; uses of slurs associated with these will tend to cause offense in those who regard the relevant stereotypes or caricatures as pernicious.

22. My claim about [Hank the Homophobe] is thus not merely that Hank’s performance will tend to cause offense in his targets; it is that his performance warrants offense on the part of his targets — it is an offensive performance, and it is in virtue of the fact that it is offensive that it tends to cause offense. See Bolinger (2017, 441) for further discussion of the distinction between warranted offense and actual offense.
negative attitudes towards properties or activities which we value in the right way are offensive.23

Note that Hank’s intentions in [HANK THE HOMOPHobe] are plausibly quite complex. In addition to pressuring his targets to adopt his attitude towards them, he surely also deliberately reveals that he adopts this attitude, and may also intend to produce other effects, such as shaming or dehumanizing his targets. Nothing I have said requires that I deny that Hank’s intentions are complex in this way. Instead, I would like to suggest that, insofar as any of these other features of the case contribute to the offensiveness of Hank’s actions, the explanation of why they do so will appeal to the fact that Hank pressures his targets to adopt his homophobic attitude.

First, while it seems clear that Hank intends his performance to reveal his homophobic attitude (or at least foresees that it will), the lesson of the speaker-orientation problem is that this cannot explain the offensiveness of his actions. There is just nothing inherently offensive about the information that Hank is a homophobe — if this information is to play any role in explaining the offensiveness of Hank’s behavior, it will have to be that the revealing of Hank’s attitude, when combined with certain other features of the case, generates offense. But then it is not clear that the revealing is doing any explanatory work. For this reason, I do not believe the proposal that Hank’s performance is primarily offensive because it reveals his homophobic attitude is promising.

Second, perhaps Hank’s performance is offensive because he intends to bring about some effect in his audience, for example shaming or dehumanizing them. I think it is clear that Hank does intend to shame his audience; perhaps he also intends to dehumanize them. But I would like to suggest that Hank intends to bring about these effects by directing his targets to adopt his attitude towards themselves. Hank’s homophobic attitude is, after all, one according to which displays of gay intimacy are shameful because disgusting. So it seems to me that Hank intends to bring it about that his targets are ashamed by first bringing it about that they regard their behavior as shameful — that is, by directing them to adopt his attitude toward them, according to which their behavior is shameful.

Any alternative explanation which did not appeal to Hank’s efforts to get his victims to share his attitude of disgust would render mysterious how his homophobic display has the power to cause them shame. If there is no pressure for Hank’s targets to join him in regarding their behavior as disgusting, then what is there for them to be ashamed of? Similar remarks apply to the proposal that Hank intends to dehumanize his targets: If there is no pressure for them to adopt an attitude toward themselves according to which they are inferior to other humans, it is difficult to see how Hank could succeed in offending them in virtue of succeeding in dehumanizing them.24

23. What is the right way to value a property or activity such that one will be disposed to regard a directive to take a negative attitude towards that property or activity as pejorative? It is beyond the scope of my discussion here to provide a complete answer to this question. Nevertheless, I think one would not go too far astray in suggesting that, at least when it comes to one’s own properties and activities, one values a property in the right way just in case one regards that property as an important positive or value-neutral part of one’s identity as a person, and one values an activity in the right way just in case one regards it as a natural expression of some property one values in the right way. This suggestion correctly predicts that directives to adopt negative perspectives toward properties or activities which are not generally regarded as matters of identity, such as smoking indoors, are not apt to cause offense. It also predicts (to my mind, correctly) that a directive to adopt a negative perspective toward a property or activity which is generally regarded as a matter of identity will not cause offense if its target regards the relevant property or activity as a negative part of his or her identity. Thus, for example, it predicts that a person who recognizes himself to be prone to fits of anger and regards this as a vice will not be disposed to regard a directive to take a negative attitude toward this aspect of himself as offensive. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify these issues.

24. Perhaps we should distinguish between acts of shaming, on the one hand, and acts performed with the intention of causing targeted individuals to feel shame, on the other. If one can rationally perform acts of the former type (by crying “Shame!”, for example) while being certain that one’s targets are too far gone ever to feel shame, then perhaps it is coherent to suppose that Hank intends to shame his targets but does not intend to bring it about that they feel shame (because he realizes that it is not within his power to do the latter). The possibility of this combination of intentions may seem to undermine my suggestion above...
Third, perhaps Hank’s performance is offensive not because of the attitude it reveals or the effects he intends it to produce in his audience, but instead because of the way in which it reveals this attitude and promotes these effects. This sort of view might appeal to an expressivist who holds that it is the act of expressing rather than the information that the speaker holds the attitude expressed which explains the distinctive properties of expressive lexical items. Perhaps, for example, it is something about Hank’s prosody during his performance, or the fact that we must understand Hank’s intention to shame his targets in terms of an explanatorily prior intention to direct his targets to share his attitude of disgust towards their behavior. Perhaps Hank’s intention to shame his targets does not depend for its intelligibility on any other intention.

A parallel case, however, suggests that this attempt to leave directives out of the explanatory picture is not successful. We can distinguish between acts of asserting a proposition, on the one hand, and acts performed with the intention of causing targeted individuals to come to believe that proposition, on the other. We can then note that it can be rational to assert a proposition even if one knows that one’s audience will not come to believe it — when an individual is testifying before a biased jury, for example. But it does not follow that the act of asserting a proposition does not depend for its intelligibility on one’s proposing to one’s audience that they come to believe it; it is just that, in some cases, it can be rational to make such a proposal while knowing that it will be turned down. In the same way, it does not follow from the fact that Hank might shame his targets while knowing that they will not feel shame (if this is indeed a genuine possibility) that the act of shaming does not depend for its intelligibility on the speaker’s directing his targets to adopt an attitude according to which their behavior is shameful.

Note that the existence of cases like that of testifying before a biased jury, in which it can be rational to contribute to discourse a content with a given dynamic force even if one knows that one’s interlocutors will refuse to update their To-Do Lists with the associated explanatory picture is not successful. We can distinguish between acts of asserting a proposition, on the one hand, and acts performed with the intention of causing targeted individuals to come to believe that proposition, on the other. We can then note that it can be rational to assert a proposition even if one knows that one’s audience will not come to believe it — when an individual is testifying before a biased jury, for example. But it does not follow that the act of asserting a proposition does not depend for its intelligibility on one’s proposing to one’s audience that they come to believe it; it is just that, in some cases, it can be rational to make such a proposal while knowing that it will be turned down. In the same way, it does not follow from the fact that Hank might shame his targets while knowing that they will not feel shame (if this is indeed a genuine possibility) that the act of shaming does not depend for its intelligibility on the speaker’s directing his targets to adopt an attitude according to which their behavior is shameful.

Note that the existence of cases like that of testifying before a biased jury, in which it can be rational to contribute to discourse a content with a given dynamic force even if one knows that one’s interlocutors will refuse to update the conversational scoreboard in the corresponding way, offers us an explanation of certain puzzling utterances. For example, an anonymous referee suggests that my directive account of slurs predicts a kind of practical incoherence in an utterance of “I know you’re all feminists who will go on believing that women are worthy of respect, but that cunt I was married to really messed up my life”. I do not believe my account commits me to any practical incoherence here: The view is not that slurs offend because audience members comply with the associated directives to adopt pejorative perspectives, but rather that being directed to adopt a pejorative perspective toward what one values is itself offensive. Thus a speaker might reasonably utter a slur in order to offend her interlocutors while correctly predicting that they will refuse to update their To-Do Lists with the semantically associated directive content.

Unfortunately for this sort of view, the offensiveness of Hank’s performance seems to be wedded to the force and content of his utterance rather than to the particular way in which he delivers it. In order to control for any effects Hank’s prosody, body language, or choice to cross the room might have on the offensiveness of his performance in [HANK THE HOMOPHOB], we can imagine an alternative case in which he texts his message to the couple from across the room instead of pronouncing it aloud. Intuitively, Hank’s choice to use an electronic medium to convey his message in this alternative case does not significantly mitigate its offensiveness. Indeed, it seems that any way in which we can imagine Hank modifying his performance, so long as we hold fixed that he issues a sincere directive for his targets to understand that their behavior is disgusting, leaves its offensiveness more or less intact. This observation is difficult to reconcile with the thesis that it is idiosyncratic features of Hank’s performance in [HANK THE HOMOPHOB] which explain its offensiveness.

It might be objected at this point that my analysis of the offensiveness of Hank’s performance in [HANK THE HOMOPHOB] in terms of the issuing of a directive to adopt an attitude of disgust must be misguided, since Hank’s performance would have had a similarly offensive character if he had chosen to express himself using an indicative rather than an imperative — for example, by saying, “What you’re doing is disgusting!” This observation does not undermine my analysis, however, since I am concerned only to establish that certain directives can be offensive, not that other speech acts cannot be offensive. As I have suggested above, proposals which trace the pejorative character of slurs to propositional content — whether at-issue or otherwise — can be ruled out on independent grounds.

25. Thanks to Robin Jeshion for emphasizing this worry.
26. Camp (2013) argues convincingly for this claim; see the discussion of (Absent Paraphrase) in section 6 below, as well as Potts (2007) on the “descriptive ineffability” of slurs and expressives.
In any case, if we understand the dynamic force of the act performed in uttering “What you’re doing is disgusting!” as informational, then we have a straightforward explanation for the offensiveness of such an act: By performing it, Hank is proposing that his targets come to believe the propositional content of his assertion, which is the proposition that their behavior is disgusting. But coming to believe that one’s behavior is disgusting requires one to adopt an attitude of disgust toward that behavior. So the imagined assertoric speech act, just like the directive speech act in the original version of the case, is plausibly offensive because it exerts pressure on its targets to regard their behavior as disgusting. Far from undermining my preferred explanation of the offensiveness of Hank’s performance in [HANK THE HOMOPHobe], then, consideration of offensive indicatives lends further credibility to the idea that being pressured to demean oneself is offensive.

Though it is clearest that individuals naturally take offense at being directed to demean themselves, the same considerations can also explain why individuals supportive of the targets or of other gay couples will naturally take offense at Hank the Homophobe’s performance, as well as why individuals who share Hank the Homophobe’s disgust are less likely to take offense at his performance. In the former case, the explanation is that such individuals are being directed to demean what they understand to have significant value for individuals they care about; in the latter case, the explanation is that such individuals are being directed to adopt an attitude which they already share and regard as appropriate.\(^27\)

Note that Hank the Homophobe’s directive is not a directive to adopt a perspective, since a perspective is both richer in structure and different in kind than a simple affective state like disgust. But if it is offensive to be directed to regard oneself with disgust, it is surely also offensive to be directed to view oneself by means of a demeaning perspective, for example a perspective according to which one’s nationality, race, or gender makes it probable and fitting that one instantiate various cognitive or behavioral vices. In both cases, one is directed to think of oneself in a demeaning way, and we should expect the generation of offense in both cases if we find it in one. Thus the proposal that slurs are directives to adopt derogatory perspectives, combined with the plausible claim that directives to adopt derogatory perspectives are pejorative because they require us to demean what we value, offers us a non-speaker-oriented explanation for the pejorative potential of slurs.\(^28\)

6. On the Explanatory Adequacy of the Proposal

I have so far been concerned with presenting a problem for a certain class of accounts of slurs and developing a theory of slurs which is responsive to that problem. Any account of slurs, however, must ultimately be evaluated in light of the whole body of our linguistic and extralinguistic observations about them. A successful account will explain many of these observations and be consistent with the rest; any account which cannot be reconciled with one or more of our observations must be discarded. In this section, I argue that the proposal that slurs are directives, as articulated in the previous two sections, is able to account for a broad range of observations about the linguistic and extralinguistic properties of slurs.

Bolinger helpfully articulates five properties of slurs which any ac-

\(^{27}\) Certain well-mannered individuals who share Hank the Homophobe’s disgust might nevertheless find his performance gauche; similarly, certain latitudinarian individuals who share Hank the Homophobe’s disgust might nevertheless judge that his performance brings into the public sphere an attitude of disapproval which, though appropriate, ought to be kept private. I am not sure that either of these responses is best characterized as offense at Hank’s performance, but even supposing that the well-mannered or latitudinarian individual has reason to take offense at Hank’s performance, it remains true that this offense will be different in character and lesser in magnitude than the offense taken by those who do not share Hank’s disgust.

\(^{28}\) Returning to the distinction drawn in footnote 4 between offending as a thing one person does to another and offensiveness construed as a property of lexical items, we should clarify that the proposal that slurs contribute not-at-issue directives to adopt derogatory perspectives explains their pejorative potential in virtue of holding that, as a matter of semantics, the speakers who utter them do something offensive: direct their interlocutors to demean what they value.
count should capture:

**Offensive Autonomy**: Slurs are offensive even when the speaker does not intend the use to be derogatory.

**Embedding Failure**: The offensiveness of slurs projects out of various forms of embedding, including indirect reports, negations, and mentions.

**Perspective Dependence**: Use of a slur is taken to indicate that the speaker holds derogatory attitudes.

**Offensive Variation**: Not all slurs, even if co-referential, appear to be equally offensive.

**Insulation**: Despite all of the above, slurring terms can occasionally occur inoffensively, and this is true even of particularly potent terms. (2017, 439)

Following Camp (2013), we can add two more items to this list:

**Absent Paraphrase**: The derogatory effects of slurs cannot be captured in terms of any particular propositional content. 29

**Complicity**: Uses of slurs characteristically cause conversational participants to feel complicit in the derogation of the groups targeted.

A number of theorists (Jeshion (2016) and Swanson (fc), for example) have thought it important to explain how the use of slurs contributes to the genesis and perpetuation of broader social patterns of marginalization and oppression. As our final observation, then, let us add:

**Propagation**: Uses of slurs characteristically perpetuate (and may also help to engender) social structures which marginalize and oppress members of the groups targeted.

These eight observations about slurs are not exhaustive. Nevertheless, they represent a broad enough range of phenomena that if the thesis that slurs are directives can be shown to account for all of them, this should be taken as evidence that it is a viable theoretical option. For present purposes, it will be helpful to divide our eight observations into three groups: (Offensive Autonomy), (Offensive Variation), and (Absent Paraphrase) are to be explained, on my view, in terms of the nature of perspectives; (Perspective Dependence), (Complicity), and (Propagation) are to be explained in terms of the directive force of slurring speech; (Embedding Failure) and (Insulation) are to be explained in terms of the details of the formal machinery governing not-at-issue content. I will consider each group of observations in turn.

As we have seen, the perspective associated with a slur is a cognitive disposition to organize information about members of the targeted group and regard particular properties of them as important and explanatorily central. Since perspectives are cognitive dispositions rather than propositional contents, the explanation of (Absent Paraphrase) is straightforward: A directive to adopt a perspective is not a directive to believe any particular propositional content or contents. Recall that a perspective is offensive to the extent that it belittles, vilifies, or caricatures the group it targets. Since different dispositions to organize information and regard certain properties as explanatorily central will belittle, vilify, or caricature in different ways and to different extents, we have a natural explanation for (Offensive Variation) in terms of variation in the inherent offensiveness of the perspectives semantically associated with different slurs. Finally, we can explain (Offensive Autonomy) in terms of (i) the fact that it is possible to be semantically competent with a slur but not realize that the associated perspective is derogatory (this is arguably what is going on in uses of the M-word like the one which occurs in example (3) from section 2), and (ii) the fact that being directed to adopt a perspective is apt to cause offense in those who regard it as derogatory whether or not the speaker shares this belief.

Let us turn next to those observations about slurs which are to be explained, on my view, by the directive nature of their semantic contribution. Recall that it is part of my proposal that the selection function

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29. For example, Camp (2013, 341–2) points out that an individual who has slurred using the word ‘spic’ can plausibly deny commitment to any specific claim about Hispanic people.
paired with the directive content contributed by a slur ensures that it is understood to concern what addressees are required to do in light of what is cognitively (and perhaps also epistemically) best. It is characteristic of directives with this sort of objective flavor that they provide very strong evidence that the speakers who issue them regard them as binding on themselves as well as on their addressees. If a colleague directs me never to purchase factory-farmed meat, and I understand this directive as concerning what is morally required of me (as opposed to, for example, what will make me happiest), then I am under normal circumstances justified in believing that she thinks it is also morally required of her never to purchase factory-farmed meat, and therefore, that (unless she is practically irrational) she never purchases factory-farmed meat. In the case of slurs, if a bigot directs me to cognize members of a particular group in a certain way, and I understand this directive as concerning what is cognitively or epistemically required of me, I will correspondingly under normal circumstances be justified in concluding that she regards herself as cognitively or epistemically required to adopt the perspective she has commended to me, as well, and therefore that (unless she is practically or epistemically irrational) she has adopted it. Thus (Perspective Dependence) emerges from the distinctive nature of the kind of directives contributed by slurs: To slur without adopting the semantically associated perspective would manifest a form of cognitive incoherence or hypocrisy.

(Complicity) and (Propagation) are relatively straightforward to explain on the directive picture. Since a slur-user directs every conversational participant to adopt the derogatory perspective associated with the slur, everyone in the conversation is faced with a decision between actively repudiating the use of the slur, on the one hand, and remaining silent, on the other — in which case they will likely be thought to have agreed to comply with the speaker’s directive. This explains why conversational participants often feel complicit in the derogation of a group when they do not actively contest the use of a slur.30 In the case of (Propagation), if we make the plausible assumption that the adoption of derogatory perspectives can play a causal role in the perpetuation (and perhaps also genesis) of oppressive social structures by leading individuals to form beliefs in a biased manner, then it is easy to see how the act of directing others to adopt such perspectives could similarly help to perpetuate or engender such social structures: It plays a causal role in the spread of that perspective to others.

Turning, finally, to the projective behavior of slurs, we are faced with (Embedding Failure) and (Insulation), which pull in opposing theoretical directions. Though most agree that embedding a slur under negation fails to blunt its pejorative force,31 there is little consensus concerning which environments, if any, successfully insulate speakers from the pejorative character of a slur: Proposed insulating environments include direct and indirect quotation, propositional attitude reports, and ‘treat’-constructions.32 The formal implementation of my proposal presented in the appendix predicts that the projective behavior of slurs parallels the projective behavior of conventional implicature items like non-restrictive relative clauses as this behavior is understood in the framework of Potts (2005): That is, it predicts that the pejorative character of slurs will project out of all environments except quotational ones, in which they are mentioned rather than used. I thus vindicate (Embedding Failure) to the extent that I predict projection out of all non-quotational environments and (Insulation) to the extent that I predict that quotational environments can indeed insulate speakers from the pejorative effects of slurs.33 My decision to work in Potts’s framework

30. This is not to deny that (Complicity) is also at least partly explained in terms of the acquiescence of audience members signaling that they do not regard the speaker’s use of a slur as inappropriate. I thus agree with Camp when she writes that “if the hearer allows the slur’s use to stand uncontested, she implicitly conspires in perpetuating its associated perspective’s public currency” (2013, 344).

31. See, for example, Anderson and Lepore (2013a, 28), Camp (2013, 330), and Bolinger (2017, 443).

32. When I refer to ‘treat’-constructions, I mean constructions like Hom’s “Institutions that treat Chinese as chinks are morally depraved” (2008, 424).

33. Though speaker-oriented accounts of slurs are the primary targets of my criticism, it is worth pointing out that, in predicting that the pejorative effects...
naturally gives rise to two questions: first, whether slurs and conventional implicature items really do pattern together in terms of their projective behavior; second, whether a Pottsian multidimensional analysis correctly captures the projective behavior of conventional implicature items.

Though many have found conventional implicature analyses of slurs congenial precisely because of their projective predictions, others have suggested that slurs do not in fact pattern with conventionally implicated material. Camp, for example, argues that “a CI view, by treating a slur’s perspective as a ‘side comment’ that doesn’t affect the ‘real’ truth conditions, overpredicts projection” (2018, 45). The main worry regarding projection is that conventional implicature analyses predict projection out of attitude and indirect speech reports, which (it is held) can under certain circumstances insulate speakers from the offensiveness of slurs. It is natural to interpret the worry, then, as the result of holding fixed the view that conventional implicature items do always project out of the relevant environments, and questioning whether slurs exhibit the same behavior. With respect to this issue, I will make three brief points.

First, it is not clear that slurs and conventional implicature items do in fact pattern differently when it comes to projection. The kinds of contexts in which the pejorative content of slurs fails to project are ones in which commitment to the content of, for example, non-restrictive relative clauses also fails to project. Thus the following have been taken to be problematic for a conventional implicature analysis:

(7) My father screamed that he would never allow me to marry that kraut Webster. (after Kratzer 1999, 6)

But if speakers can use (7) and (8) without slurring, surely they can also use (7_R) and (8_R) without incurring a commitment to the conventionally implicated material in the non-restrictive relative clauses.

(7_R) My father screamed that he would never allow me to marry that kraut Webster, who always stank of Sauerkraut and Kölsch, or any other damned kraut.

(8_R) John thinks that the spics, who always listen to that awful music, will have taken over the whole neighborhood in another couple years. But of course, I love Latin music, and I think it’s great that we’re developing such a vibrant Latino community.

(7_R) and (8_R) thus seem to provide evidence for the claim that, however conventional implicatures ought ultimately to be formally modeled, the same tools should be used to model slurs.

Second, if (7_R) and (8_R) seem problematic for a Potts-style account of conventional implicatures because such an account predicts no compositional interaction between conventionally implicated content and operators like ‘thinks’, it is worth pointing out that it would be premature to conclude that a different treatment of semantic multidimensionality is required. Potts himself has suggested a pragmatic treatment of such cases which leaves his multidimensional semantic apparatus largely intact: Perhaps non-restrictive relative clauses and related expressions come along with covert free variables specifying the individuals whose commitments or attitudes they characterize, and the values of these variables are resolved by interlocutors flexibly in discourse.34 In addition to this pragmatic strategy, there are a number of semantic approaches which could capture the phenomena without giving up on

34. See Harris and Potts (2009) for details.
the basic multidimensional picture. If, for example, sentences like (7_R) and (8_R) contain covert mixed quotation operators, and if mixed quotation contributes only at-issue content to the proposition expressed by the speaker while presupposing that some salient actual or hypothetical individual did or would literally utter the quoted material,\textsuperscript{35} we have a Potts-friendly explanation of why, for example, it is intuitively the speaker’s father rather than the speaker herself to whom both the pejorative perspective associated with ‘kraut’ and belief in the content of the non-restrictive relative clause attach in (7_R).

Another option would be to generalize the “shunting” types of McCready (2010), which move at-issue content into the conventionally implicated dimension and are independently motivated by a range of linguistic phenomena including Japanese honorifics and benefactives, by introducing types which can move content in the other direction. The conventionally implicated material in (7_R) and (8_R) could then be shunted into the at-issue domain by ‘screamed’ and ‘thinks’, respectively, explaining its failure to project out of the relevant complementizer phrases. Either semantic treatment could be implemented in such a way as to allow sentences to occur either with or without the relevant devices for insulating speakers from the pejorative character of slurs, accounting (when combined with a Pottsian appeal to pragmatic reasoning) for the fact that verbs like ‘thinks’ only allow speakers to escape from criticism for having used slurs in a relatively constrained range of cases.

Third, the substantive philosophical contribution of my analysis, which is that one ought to solve the speaker-orientation problem by understanding the offensive potential of slurs in terms of directive content, is independent of its formal implementation here in terms of Potts’s theory of conventional implicatures. If it emerges that the robust segregation between at-issue and peripheral content enforced by Potts’s system is empirically untenable, and if an alternative formalism is developed which better captures the data, my proposal will not be substantively altered by being implemented using that formalism.

As I have indicated above, an analysis of slurs which explains their pejorative potential in terms of their contribution to a second dimension of semantic composition must predict that this potential does not project out of contexts in which they are mentioned rather than used. I believe that this prediction is correct: The explanation for the distinctive pejorativity of slurs is semantic, and this semantic explanation is lacking in cases where slurs are merely mentioned.

It is sometimes pointed out, however, that a residue of offensiveness remains in certain quotative contexts. Lest this be thought to count against a conventional implicature analysis of the projective behavior of slurs (or indeed any semantic analysis), I would like briefly to mention several possible explanations consistent with my account. First, as Herbert (2017, 143) discusses in detail, it seems that exposure to slurs, even when they are merely mentioned, has a number of psychological effects, including the priming of “pernicious associations” in those who are not members of the targeted group — and, though the question has not been experimentally investigated, there is reason to suppose that the effects of exposure to slurs on members of targeted groups is even more severe. If this is the case, then we can understand the residual offensiveness of certain mentions of slurs in terms of our feelings of resentment toward the speaker for carelessly inflicting these negative psychological effects on her interlocutors. Bolinger suggests another possible explanation for the offensiveness of mentions: that they manifest the speaker’s “disregard for the risk of encouraging derogating uses of the slur” (2017, 452). Thus we can understand the offensive residue associated with certain mentions of slurs as arising from our judgment that those who produce them are negligently or perniciously promoting uses of them in the future.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} This view of mixed quotation is suggested by Maier (2014).

\textsuperscript{36} Note that the viability of these kinds of explanation for the residual offensiveness of mentioned slurs should not be taken to undermine the need for a genuinely semantic explanation of the offensiveness of used slurs. Mentions of slurs are never as offensive as uses of slurs, and therefore the kinds of considerations just canvassed are not in principle able to account for the offensiveness of
Let us turn now from the question of whether my proposal can account for our eight desiderata to the question of whether it can be shown to be explanatorily inadequate on other grounds. In this connection, it may seem that my proposal makes two problematic predictions: first, that those who overhear a conversation in which a slur is used should not be offended, since they are not being directed to adopt the derogatory perspective associated with the slur; second, that bigoted individuals will see no need to use slurs among themselves, since in such contexts it will be presupposed that everyone already adopts the associated derogatory perspectives. I will argue that my directive account in fact makes neither prediction.

First, speakers often produce utterances intended for a partially or fully unspecified audience. For example, as Egan (2009) points out, a speaker can utter, inscribe, or record the second person pronoun ‘you’ with the intention of expressing a singular proposition about whomsoever hears the utterance, reads the inscription, or listens to the recording. Thus a televangelist can say “Jesus loves you — yes, you!”, not knowing who (beyond his live audience) he will thereby have asserted is loved by Jesus. Someone who overhears such an utterance (a member of the stage crew, for example) can reasonably take the speaker to have expressed a content about her, as well. But there is no reason to think that what is true of assertions is not also true of directives; the televangelist could just as well have said “Know thyself!” If it is, then, on the assumption that the directives associated with slurs are similarly open-ended, we have an explanation of why even one who overhears the use of a slur could reasonably take offense.

Second, the worry that the use of slurs will be otiose among bigots in fact threatens most accounts of slurs. Any account which locates the pejorative character of slurs in any form of propositional content, for example, will struggle to explain why it can be competent for speakers to use slurs when it is presupposed that the relevant proposition is true. So one response to the worry is to cry “tu quoque” and be done with it. But there is more to be said. Speakers can often use imperatives even when it is presupposed that the audience will comply. A prelate may conclude her service with the benediction “Go in peace” even if it is common ground between her and the congregants that they will, in fact, go in peace. An anchorman may conclude his broadcast with the injunction “You stay classy, San Diego” even if it is not a live possibility that the city in question will fail to do so. Members of a sports team may exhort one another to “Leave it all on the field” even if they have no doubt that everyone on the team will perform to the best of their ability. In such cases, the directive content serves as an encouraging reminder of the importance of maintaining the status quo. It is plausible that the use of slurs among bigots serves a similar function.

37. An alternative account of cases of overhearing holds that one who overhears the use of a slur may recognize that it is offensive in virtue of recognizing that some individual has been directed to adopt a derogatory perspective toward the targeted group without herself actively taking offense. Though such an account does not go so far as to predict that those who overhear slurring speech should be offended, it does some justice to the intuition that they ought to have some negative evaluative response to the speaker.

38. There is a distinctive form of overhearing case related to this second worry. Suppose that a bigot has inscribed sentences containing slurs in his or her diary with the expectation that no one else will ever see them. Suppose further that a non-bigot happens upon the diary and reads it. There are two puzzling features of the case: First, the bigot inscribes the slurs in a diary which he or she believes will never be read by anyone else; second, it seems clear that the individual reading the diary will naturally have a negative evaluative response to what she reads. We have a natural explanation of the first puzzling feature if we recognize the possibility of encouraging self-reminders of the importance of maintaining the status quo. With respect to the second puzzling feature, though it is perhaps rather implausible to hold that the overhearer regards the inscription as offensive because she recognizes that the bigot has directed himself to adopt his own derogatory perspective, we can explain her negative evaluative response to what she reads in terms of (i) her disapproval of the perspectives semantically associated with the slurs and therefore, by association, of individuals who endorse them, and (ii) the unpleasant contemporary and historical circumstances and events called involuntarily to mind by the act of reading the slurs. Since the normal sources of the offensiveness of uses of slurs are absent in this diary case, we should expect that reading the diary will be less offensive to the non-bigot than, for example, overhearing a bigot using a slur in the context of a speech or conversation with non-bigots. I believe this prediction enjoys considerable intuitive plausibility.
There is a final, flat-footed objection to my proposal: that slurs just don’t seem to be directives. The proposal that “under the hood” they are associated with the kind of non-informational dynamic force characteristic of imperatives may strike some as brutally implausible. In response to this sort of objection, I would urge that the proposal that slurs are directives be evaluated as a solution to a recalcitrant linguistic puzzle rather than on the basis of whether it strikes us as prima facie plausible. As we have seen, many plausible accounts of slurs are shown to be untenable in the light of the speaker-orientation problem and facts about their behavior in embedded environments. We should not dismiss an account which escapes these problems simply because it attributes to slurs semantic features which we would not otherwise have supposed they had. Moreover, the extent to which an account is plausible depends to some extent on what has come before it. Accounts of slurs which attribute to them an expressive dimension would likely seem brutally implausible if there were not a long tradition in metaethics of attributing “under-the-hood” expressive content to normative vocabulary. Perhaps we will someday attain a perspective from which the proposal that slurs are directives is no less prima facie plausible than the proposal that they are expressives.

7. Related Views

The thesis that slurs are not-at-issue directives bears certain similarities to a number of recent proposals which have assigned single expressions or constructions complex, non-informational dynamic forces. Murray (2014), for example, analyzes clausal mood, evidential expressions, and conventional implicature items in a unified framework which appeals not only to traditional updates to the common ground but also to “structuring updates” (which determine how a propositional content affects the common ground) and updates which introduce discourse referents for propositions. Murray and Starr (fc) develop a related approach, according to which sentences containing evidentials simultaneously update the conversational information state with multiple propositions and a discourse referent. Horn (2007, 52) tantalizingly notes that explicit performatives can be embedded in non-restrictive relative clauses, though he does not offer a semantic treatment of this phenomenon. To my knowledge, however, the literature does not yet contain a theory according to which any mixed-content expression is associated with not-at-issue directive force.

A final proposal worth discussing in this connection is Camp’s (2018) dual-act analysis of slurs. Like me, Camp proposes that slurs are conventional triggers for the performance of non-assertive, non-expressive speech acts. Her view differs from mine, however, in two important respects. First, following Simons et al. (2010), she regards at-issueness as a pragmatic phenomenon. Accordingly, she argues that which speech act performed by uttering a sentence containing a slur is at-issue varies from context to context. Second, she identifies the non-assertoric speech act triggered by a slur as the undertaking of a commitment to a perspective. Thus, on her view, sometimes it is the undertaking rather than the proposition expressed by an utterance which is at-issue, though the proposition is at-issue by default. Her view thus lies somewhere on a continuum between expressivism and the view that slurs are directives: It distances itself from expressivism in that the second dimension of meaning it assigns to slurs is not the expression of any attitude, occurrence or dispositional, but inasmuch as it does not clearly assign a dynamic force to the act of undertaking a commitment, it stops short of endorsing a force-based solution to the speaker-orientation problem.

8. Appropriation and Affect

The phenomenon of appropriation has generated a great deal of puzzlement, even being regarded by some as evidence against any semantic treatment of slurs (see, for example, Anderson and Lepore (2013a) and Lepore and Stone (2018)). Before concluding, I would like to point out that the view that slurs are semantically associated with directives to
adopt derogatory perspectives makes available a new way to think about the phenomenon of appropriation.

Two observations about appropriation have been taken to be particularly problematic: first, the observation that appropriation often seems to be the result of an extended and organized process of reclamation; second, the observation that appropriated uses of a slur are often only acceptable for speakers who belong to the targeted group. The first of these observations seems to count against accounts of appropriation which subsume it under general pragmatic principles, such as “echoic” accounts (Bianchi (2014), Cepollaro (2017)), since such accounts predict that appropriation is a matter of creative interpretation in particular conversational contexts rather than broader social change, struggling to make sense of the intuitive idea that there are times during the process of reclaiming a slur at which it is partially but not completely reclaimed. The second observation has made some suspicious of accounts of appropriation which appeal to change in meaning, for example those which posit an ambiguity between reclaimed and non-reclaimed senses of the slur, since claimed meanings, if they exist, should be equally accessible to all (see, for example, Anderson and Lepore (2013a, 42)).

I suspect that seeking a single theory that accounts for both observations may be asking for too much. If we allow that social projects of reclamation and non-pejorative in-group uses of slurs may be distinct phenomena with distinct explanantia, we can escape many of the traditional objections to various proposals about reclamation. Pragmatic accounts of non-pejorative in-group uses, for example, are freed from the burden of explaining extended and organized processes of reclamation. Similarly, we need no longer worry that positing changes of meaning during extended processes of reclamation fails to account for the fact that only in-group members can use certain slurs.

The idea that reclamation and non-pejorative in-group uses are distinct phenomena calling for distinct explanantia also makes intuitive sense of an important distinction: Slurs which have undergone extended processes of reclamation can often be used non-pejoratively by anyone, not just in-group members, whereas slurs which can only be used by in-group members have typically not been reclaimed in this way. ’Queer’ is an example of a slur in the first category; racial and ethnic slurs almost invariably fall into the second.

Let us therefore introduce a distinction between appropriation as reclamation and appropriation as non-pejorative in-group use. Aside from the suggestion that they be treated independently of the phenomenon of reclamation, I will have little to say about non-pejorative in-group uses of slurs — though the “echoic” accounts of Bianchi (2014) and Cepollaro (2017), according to which in-group members are able to use slurs non-pejoratively because context makes it clear that they are uttering them only to “manifest their dissociation from the offensive contents expressed or conveyed” (Bianchi 2014, 40), strike me as promising. Instead, I want to show how the proposal that slurs are directives to adopt pejorative perspectives opens up a new way to understand appropriation as it is exemplified in social processes of reclamation. For while the view that reclamation always involves meaning change is coherent, it still strikes many as implausible: Intuitively, the struggle to reclaim a slur is a struggle to change people’s attitudes towards membership in the targeted group, not a metasemantic struggle to introduce a new meaning for a lexical item and scuttle an old one.

If slurs are semantically associated with perspectives, and if their offensiveness is dependent on the associated perspectives being regarded by relevant parties as derogatory, then it is possible to explain how appropriation can be associated with an extended process of reclamation, as well as how it can admit of degrees, without positing meaning change. Recall that we chose not to regard the affective correlates of perspectives as essential properties thereof. A consequence of this choice is that it is possible for one and the same perspective, understood as a disposition to organize information about the targeted group, to be associated with negative emotions by one individual or at one time and neutral or positive emotions by another individual or at another time. I would therefore like to suggest that the process of reclamation associated with certain appropriated slurs be understood as a process of changing the affective correlates of the associated perspectives. This
is arguably what happened during the appropriation of various slurs targeting LGBT individuals: The appropriation of the slur ‘queer’ in the early 1990s, for example, was arguably possible only because the gay liberation movement of the preceding decades had aggressively challenged the pathologisation of gay and lesbian identities:

...gay liberation theorised that the system would never be radically transformed by those who were invested in it. ...A gay identity was a revolutionary identity: what it sought was not social recognition but to overthrow the social institutions which marginalised and pathologised homosexuality. (Jagose 1996, 36–7)

The “off the couches, into the streets” mentality of gay liberation is plausibly understood as an organized attempt to change the affective responses associated with gay and lesbian identities rather than to alter traditional ways of cognizing information about gay and lesbian people (though there were elements of this latter tactic in the gay liberation movement, as well). It was not argued that it was a cognitive mistake to regard an individual’s being gay as an important part of his identity, a part that explained his possessing numerous other properties; instead, it was argued that a gay identity and its concomitant properties were things to be celebrated rather than despised. It was in the context of the success of the gay liberation movement’s effort to change affective associations with homosexuality on a societal level that the word ‘queer’ came into widespread use as a term of self-identification for LGBT people. Understanding how this could have been so does not require positing a change in the meaning of the word ‘queer’ if we accept the possibility that the gay liberation movement permanently changed the affective correlates of the perspective associated with the term.\footnote{41,42}

9. Conclusion

My remarks above have consisted of three largely independent parts: an argument for the claim that no speaker-oriented account of slurs can be correct, an alternative proposal according to which slurs are semantically associated with not-at-issue directive contents, and a formal implementation of this proposal using Pottsian machinery developed to account for conventional implicature items.

While my primary concern has of course been to develop an adequate semantics of slurs, I hope it has emerged in the course of my discussion

\footnote{41. Note that the continued existence of non-appropriated slurs for LGBT people suggests, on my view, that there is more than one lexically-encoded perspective towards them, and that some such perspectives are still associated with negative emotional responses. The word ‘faggot’, for example, has not been reclaimed, and non-pejorative uses of it are generally available only to in-group members. Note also that I do not deny that the word ‘queer’ can be and sometimes is used in a derogatory way by homophobic individuals. Notably, when it is used as a slur, ‘queer’ usually occurs with a determiner (‘a queer’; ‘the queers’) or as a bare plural (‘queers’); it is more difficult to get a pejorative reading of ‘queer’ when it modifies a noun (‘queer literature’) or is used predicatively (“Taylor is queer”).

42. If this is the correct story about ‘queer’, why haven’t organized efforts to change affective associations with race and gender resulted in the reclamation of pejorative terms targeting women and racial and ethnic minorities? Two explanations suggest themselves. First, it may be that some perspectives, especially those associated with particularly inflammatory racial or ethnic slurs, are not apt for reclamation because the properties of individuals they view as prominent and explanatorily central are not apt to be regarded as neutral or positive. Second, it may be that while reclamation is in principle possible, efforts to change affective associations have not yet had a broad enough reach to result in the full reclamation of the terms in question.}
that my claims touch on broader issues in the study of natural language meaning. As I understand it, the lesson of the speaker-orientation problem is not merely that certain accounts of slurs cannot be correct; it is that we must think more carefully about the explanatory burdens the transmission of information is fit to bear in linguistic theory. Though I have not explored them here, the idea that one aspect of the conventional meaning of an expression can be an instruction to think in a certain way suggests new analyses of expressions like “thick” terms (e.g. ‘lewd’, ‘courageous’) and lexical items exhibiting Fregean “coloring” (e.g. ‘steed’, ‘cur’). The idea of assigning expressions not-at-issue contents with dynamic forces traditionally associated with non-declarative clause types has been largely unexplored in the semantic literature and could potentially prove useful in any number of domains. Even if none of the claims I have made about slurs are ultimately vindicated, then, I hope that I have nevertheless brought certain issues clearly into focus in a way which will benefit future research.

Appendix A. Formal System

I present a simple fragment capturing the semantics for non-quantified subject-predicate sentences containing slurs and their neutral counterparts. Some details have been left out of the presentation; it should be clear how to fill them in. The model presented below is easily integrable into systems which handle quantification, indexicality, plurals, non-assertoric at-issue speech acts, and so forth.

1. Syntax
1.1 Types
1. If \( e, p, \) and \( t \) are types.
2. If \( \sigma \) and \( \tau \) are types, then \( \langle \sigma, \tau \rangle \) is a type.
3. The set of types is the smallest set containing the types described in (1) and (2).

1.2 Meaningful Expressions
Let \( ME_\tau \) be the set of all meaningful expressions of type \( \tau \).
1. If \( c \) is a constant of type \( \tau \), then \( c \in ME_\tau \).
2. If \( \alpha \in ME_{\langle \sigma, \tau \rangle} \) and \( \beta \in ME_\sigma \), then \( \alpha(\beta) \in ME_\tau \).
3. If \( \alpha, \beta \in ME_t \), then \( \neg \alpha, \alpha \lor \beta \in ME_t \).

The set \( ME \) of all meaningful expressions is the union of \( ME_\tau \) for all \( \tau \).

1.3 Partial Lexicon
Names:
- Smith \( \rightsquigarrow s \) (type \( e \)).
- Jones \( \rightsquigarrow j \) (type \( e \)).

Neutral Predicates:
- runs \( \rightsquigarrow \) runs (type \( \langle e, t \rangle \)).
- woman \( \rightsquigarrow \) woman (type \( \langle e, t \rangle \)).

Slurs:
- cunt \( \rightsquigarrow \) woman \( \bullet c \) (type \( \langle e, t \rangle ; \) type \( p \)).

Here \( c \) is a constant of type \( p \) which picks out the derogatory perspective associated with the English expression ‘cunt’.

Remark 1 The symbol ‘\( \rightsquigarrow \)’ indicates the translation relation; it associates each natural-language expression with one or more expressions in our regimented logical language. Thus lexical entries like ‘Smith \( \rightsquigarrow s \)’ indicate that the natural-language expression ‘Smith’ is to be trans-
labeled into our logical language as ‘s’. Lexical entries for slurs differ from
lexical entries for other natural-language expressions in the fragment
in that two expressions of our logical language appear to the right of
the ‘→’. This indicates that they correspond to multiple expressions
of our logical language; when constructing a parsetree for a natural-
language sentence containing such an expression, the terminal node
corresponding to that expression must be associated with both formulas.
The symbol ‘•’ plays the merely notational role of separating formulas
which appear on the same node of a parsetree; it does not have a semantic
function.

1.4 Parsetrees

1.4.1 Definition
A parsetree is a connected, rooted, acyclic directed graph
containing no nodes with more than two daughters, to
each node of which is assigned one or more meaningful
expressions of the language subject to the following admis-
sibility condition.

1.4.2 Admissibility Condition: At-issue Application

\[ α(β) : τ \]

\[ α : (σ, τ) • (γ : p) \quad β : σ • (δ : p) \]

Remark 2 Here the parentheses around type p expressions γ
and δ indicate that they are irrelevant when it comes to determin-
ing whether a tree satisfies the admissibility condition. Admis-
sibility “cares” only about type-matching between non-type-p
expressions.

2. Semantics

2.1 Models
Let a model \( M = (D, \mathcal{W}, \mathcal{V}) \) be an ordered tuple consisting
of a set of domains (\( D \)) as defined below, a set of worlds (\( \mathcal{W} \)),
and a valuation function (\( \mathcal{V} \)), which maps elements of \( \mathcal{W} \) to
functions from the constants of our language to elements of the
corresponding domains.

For each type \( τ \), define the domain of that type \( D_τ \) such that:

- \( D_τ \) is a set of entities disjoint from \( \mathcal{W} \).
- \( D_1 = \{0, 1\} \).
- The domain of type \( ⟨σ, τ⟩ \) is the set of functions \( \{f | f : D_σ \rightarrow \}
\( D_τ \} \).
- \( D_π \subseteq D_⟨(τ,f)⟩ \).

Remark 3 We take \( D_π \) to be a subset of \( D_⟨(τ,f)⟩ \) because perspectives are
dispositional properties. In the intended model, no expression of type \( p \)
is mapped at any world to any element of \( D_⟨(τ,f)⟩ \) which is not a perspective.

2.2 Interpretation of Meaningful Expressions
Define the interpretation function \( [·]^{M,W} \) such that:

- \( [α]^{M,W} = (\mathcal{V}(w))(α) \), if α is a constant.
- \( [α(β)]^{M,W} = [α]^{M,W}([β]^{M,W}) \), for α of type \( ⟨σ, τ⟩ \), β of type \( σ \).
- \( [¬α]^{M,W} = 1 \iff [α]^{M,W} = 0 \).
- \( [α ∨ β]^{M,W} = 1 \iff [α]^{M,W} = 1 \) or \( [β]^{M,W} = 1 \).

2.3 Parsetree Interpretation
Let \( T \) be a semantic parsetree with the expression \( α \) (type \( t \)) on
its root node and distinct expressions \( β_1, ..., β_n \) (type \( p \)) on nodes
in it. Then the interpretation of \( T \) in \( M \) at \( w \) is the ordered pair

\[ ⟨[α]^{M}, \text{adopt}([β_1]^{M,W}), ..., \text{adopt}([β_n]^{M,W})⟩, \]

where \text{adopt} (type \( ⟨p, (τ, t)⟩ \)) is an expression in the semantic met-
language that denotes the relation which obtains between an
individual and a perspective iff that individual adopts that perspec-
tive, and \([α]^{M}\) is the intension of \( α \) in \( M \).
3. Pragmatics

3.1 Conversational Scoreboard

The scoreboard of a conversation at world $w$ and time $t$ is an ordered quadruple $(I, CG, G, h)$, with $I$ the set of interlocutors at $w$ and $t$, $CG$ the common ground at $w$ and $t$ (a set of propositions), $G$ the set of sets of those interlocutors’ goals at $w$ and $t$, and $h$ a parametrized selection function (that is, a function which takes three arguments — a world, an individual, and a set of goals — and returns a subset of that set of goals) such that:

- for all $i \in I$, there is a $G_i \in G$, which is the set of goals to which $i$ is publicly committed at $w$ and $t$ (that is, $i$’s To-Do List at $w$ and $t$).
- $G = \{G_i | i \in I\}$.

Goals have the semantic type of properties. Intuitively, a property’s being a member of $G_i$ indicates that it is $i$’s goal to bring it about that $i$ instantiate that property.

3.2 Assertion Rule

To assertively utter a parsetree with interpretation

$$\langle [\alpha]^{M^t}, \{\text{adopt}([\beta_1]^{M^t,w}), \ldots, \text{adopt}([\beta_n]^{M^t,w})\} \rangle$$

at $w$ and $t$ in the intended model $M^t$ is to propose to add each member of

$$\{\text{adopt}([\beta_1]^{M^t,w}), \ldots, \text{adopt}([\beta_n]^{M^t,w})\}$$

to each member of $G$ at $w$ and $t$, as well as to propose to add both $[\alpha]^{M^t}$ and $[w' : \forall i \in I, \{\text{adopt}([\beta_1]^{M^t,w}), \ldots, \text{adopt}([\beta_n]^{M^t,w})\} \subseteq h(i, w, G_i)]$ to $CG$ at $w$ and $t$.\(^{44}\)

Remark 4 This final addition to the common ground ensures that if the utterance is accepted, it will subsequently be part of the common ground that adopting the perspectives contributed by the parsetree is an obligation with the “flavor” contributed by the selection function $h$ — for our purposes, an obligation interlocutors have in light of what is cognitively best (see section 4 above). In accounting for imperative “flavors” using a selection function and an update to the common ground, I follow Portner (2007).

References


44. My use of the word propose here in characterizing the dynamic force of assertions of sentences containing slurs is not meant to indicate anything about their illocutionary force, but rather to reflect the fact that the update associated

with such an assertion is not invariably applied to the conversational scoreboard; it can be rejected by a speaker’s interlocutors, in which case the state of the scoreboard remains unchanged. Even the most serious commands and the most solemn assertions are proposals in this sense. See (for example) Stalnaker (2014, 51) for more on this use of propose. Thanks to Simon Charlow for pressing me to clarify this issue.


———. (pc). In connection with comments delivered at the 2018 Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association.


Slurs Are Directives

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