A Dual Act Analysis of Slurs

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Abstract and Keywords

Slurs are incendiary terms—many deny that sentences containing them can ever be true. And utterances where they occur embedded within normally "quarantining" contexts, like conditionals and indirect reports, can still seem offensive. At the same time, others find that sentences containing slurs *can* be true; and there are clear cases where embedding *does* inoculate a speaker from the slur's offensiveness. This chapter argues that four standard accounts of the "other" element that differentiates slurs from their more neutral counterparts— semantic content, perlocutionary effect, presupposition, and conventional implicature—all fail to account for this puzzling mixture of intuitions. Instead, it proposes that slurs make two distinct, coordinated contributions to a sentence's conventional communicative role.

Keywords: slurs, pejoratives, semantics/pragmatics, presupposition, conventional implicature

Slurs are an important topic for philosophical investigation for at least two reasons. First, in practical terms, they are extremely potent words. We need to understand the psychological, linguistic, social, and political factors that make them so powerful, in order to figure out how to deal with them. Second, in theoretical terms, they display puzzling behavior that has led philosophers and linguists to occupy seemingly every position in logical space, with no view emerging as champion. Here, I focus on just two of these puzzling features. First, slurs elicit mixed intuitions about truth. Many speakers take slurs' offensive element to undermine the possibility that sentences containing them can ever be true; while many other speakers find it obvious that such sentences can say true things, even as they also do something deeply wrong. Second, slurs

display a puzzling pattern of variability in projective behavior. On the one hand, when they are embedded within complex constructions whose usual effect is to block attribution to the speaker of the embedded content—"quarantining" constructions like conditionals, modals, and indirect speech and attitude reports —utterances containing slurs are typically still offensive: the slur's offensive element "projects" through such plugs and filters, up to speaker. On the other hand, though, there are also many cases where the offensive element is indeed quarantined within such constructions, so that the speaker is inoculated from its offensiveness.

In sections 1 and 2, I survey the leading candidate analyses of slurs: section 1 considers views that treat slurs as making a single conventional contribution, **(p.30)** which is either "thin" or "thick," while section 2 considers views that factor conventional meaning into two parts, in the form of presupposition or conventional implicature. None of these candidates, I argue, capture the puzzling variability in intuitions about truth and in projection. In section 3, I propose a more flexible two-factor view, on which slurs make two distinct, coordinated contributions to a sentence's conventional communicative role: a truth-conditional predication of group membership, and endorsement of a derogating perspective on that group. In contrast to standard two-factor accounts, my view denies that truth-conditional predication is the "only content that counts": although there is a default tendency for the predicative contribution to be "at issue," different semantic constructions and pragmatic contexts can alter the relative prominence and scope of the two contributions.

The focus of this chapter is thus largely taxonomic, although I believe that such taxonomizing promises to clarify how slurs actually work, and in a way that sheds light on the theory of semantics and meaning more generally. Another issue about slurs has also been the subject of recent debate: what *is* it that differentiates them from their (relatively) neutral counterparts? I largely bracket discussion of this issue here, simply assuming the view I argued for in my 2013 article: that a (non-quarantining) use of a slur commits the speaker to the appropriateness of a derogating perspective on the targeted group. Very briefly, a perspective is an intuitive tool for structuring thoughts: a disposition to notice, explain, and respond to some part of the world in certain ways. Perspectives in general may, but need not, include any particular propositional or attitudinal commitments; and they are partly, but only partly, under voluntary control. A slurring perspective in particular treats the property of group membership, g, as highly central in thinking about Gs, both because it treats g as a highly salient feature of individual Gs, and typically also because it treats g as explaining many further properties of individual Gs. From the bigot's perspective, g explains which properties of individual Gs matter and are fitting for Gs to possess; in this sense, they take being g to determine who G-members *are* (see also Jeshion 2013, this volume). More specifically, for some but not all slurs, the perspective constitutes a *stereotype*: a generic characterization of a more or less rich set of

properties, images, and attitudes as fitting for *G*s. In addition, slurring perspectives are also *distancing* and *derogating*: *G*s are thought of as "others" not worthy of respect. While I take slurs to vary too much in affective import, and non-charged, ostensibly affectionate uses to be too common, to encode specific attitudes like contempt into their conventional meanings, such attitudes follow naturally from derogation.

 (p.31) Although I think a perspectival account helps explain otherwise puzzling behavior of slurs—in particular, their representational and attitudinal "slipperiness" and their wide-ranging, insidious cognitive and conversational effects— I take the taxonomic question I pursue here to be largely orthogonal to that identificatory one. Nearly everything I argue here should stand if one replaces a perspectival analysis with an alternative account of slurs' "other" element—say, that slurs express a feeling of contempt, or represent group members as conforming to a stereotype.

Finally, a trigger warning: I will mention various slurs. I do so, first, because I think it is important to keep slurs' complex, visceral, affective, and cognitive powers clearly in focus while engaged in abstract theorizing. Second, I think slurs vary along multiple dimensions, including potency, representational substantiveness, and evaluative import. Our analysis needs to be rich and flexible enough to account for these differences. But I token these expressions in the awareness that even reading them rightly makes many people deeply uncomfortable, and with an acknowledgement that I incur an obligation to compensate with commensurate insight.

1 Univocal Views
The most minimal, straightforward account of slurs holds that a slur's semantic content is exhausted by the predication of group membership. On this "minimalist" account, just one of

(1) Isaiah is a kike.

(2) Isaiah is not a kike.

is true, depending exclusively on whether Isaiah is Jewish. This elegantly captures an important, widespread intuition: that slurs are extensionally equivalent to (relatively) neutral counterpart expressions. In contrast to (other) "thick" terms, like "slut" or "snitch," slurs' descriptive and attitudinal aspects are easily disentangled.[1] Competent, non-bigoted speakers know which groups are the targets of which slurs. A speaker who ascribes "kike" to someone who is not Jewish has made a substantive error, distinct from the conceptual, empirical, social, and moral wrongs he is also laboring under and perpetuating. Further, it is straightforward to identify the conditions of satisfaction of non-declarative **(p. 32)** utterances containing slurs. Thus, even if a non-bigot should refuse the bet in (3) on moral and social grounds, it is clear that the payoff in (3) depends only

on group membership and not on the perspective's appropriateness; and even though the soldier to whom (4) is addressed should refuse to comply, it is clear that the commander's order will have been fulfilled just in case he kills ten Tutsis:

> (3) I'll bet you $10 they hire a chink and a dyke before they even consider a white guy.

> (4) Don't come home till you've cleared the bushes of ten *inyenzi*.[2]

While minimalism neatly captures the intuition of extensional equivalence, even the most minimalist account must acknowledge that *something* starkly differentiates slurs from their neutral counterparts. Luvell Anderson and Ernie Lepore (2013), the most prominent defenders of a minimalist analysis, argue that slurs are offensive because tokening them violates a taboo on their use. The factors leading to prohibition may be socially and politically important. But, Anderson and Lepore claim, they are merely causal, not semantic.

Although I worry that the appeal to taboo fails to capture the distinctive sort of offense slurs produce (Camp 2013), my focus here is on intuitions about their truth and on their projective behavior, so I'll set those concerns aside for now. Anderson and Lepore's semantic minimalism not only elegantly captures a central set of intuitions about truth; it also has a clean explanation for slurs' second puzzling feature, of projection. An utterance of (2), for instance, is naturally interpreted as perpetuating the same offensive perspective as is promulgated by (1). Moreover, the same phenomenon arises with other embedding constructions, such as questions, modals, conditionals, and indirect speech and attitude reports:

> (5) How many dykes do you have working at your site?

> (6) She could have married a chink instead.

> (7) If they promote another bitch out of this damn job before me, I'm going to sue for discrimination.

> (8) {Bridget thinks/says that//According to Bridget} spics can't keep their hands to themselves.

 (p.33) In all these cases, the actual speaker is not committed to the content determined by combining the predication of group membership with the rest of the embedded clause, but still *is* naturally taken to be endorsing the associated perspective. The fact that the perspective "projects" through constructions whose function is to block commitment in this way is *prima facie* surprising. On Anderson and Lepore's view, the effect arises because it is causal rather than compositional: thus, they predict that any use—indeed, any *tokening*—of a slur, regardless of syntactic position, violates its associated taboo. And indeed, such

negated (conditionalized, reporting, etc.) uses do generally trigger the many of same visceral effects, and reinforce many of the same insidious social structures, as the bare atomic predication. As such, such uses are something for which we may rightly hold speakers responsible. But, say Anderson and Lepore, the same also holds for many other aspects of the total speech act that we surely don't want to analyze semantically, including register and accent. So too here, they conclude.

Although (or because) their explanation is simple and powerful, it threatens to work too well, because slurs' truth-assessibility and projective behavior are more variable than their view predicts. In particular, it is possible—sometimes quite easy—to "quarantine" slurs' offensiveness within speech and attitude reports, as in the following:

(9) John thinks that the spics will have taken over the whole neighborhood in another couple years. But of course, I think it's great that we're developing such a vibrant Latino community.

(10) My father screamed that he would never allow me to marry that kraut Webster. (Kratzer 1999)

(11) Churchill thought Gandhi was the most degenerate wog in all of India. (Anand 2007)

Nor is the effect limited to indirect reports. Hom (2008) points to a wide range of what he calls "nonderogatory, nonappropriated" (NDNA) uses, where the slurs' "other" aspect fails to attach to the speaker:

(12) Yao Ming is Chinese, but he's not a chink.

(13) Racists believe that Chinese people are chinks.

(14) Institutions that treat Chinese as chinks are racist.

(15) Am I racist if I believe that Chinese people are chinks?

These examples certainly look like cases where a conventionally commitment-canceling construction does its normal job. If the association between slur and **(p.34)** perspective were merely perlocutionary, it should be entirely immune to such compositional machinery. But that seems not to be the case. Moreover, a minimalist account is committed to denying the highly intuitive claim that an important part of slurs' conventional function—what they are designed to do—is precisely to express something like a derogating perspective. By using a slur, a speaker undertakes a non-defeasible—if frustratingly amorphous—commitment, one that is not undone or excused by a claim to have meant no harm.

All this suggests that the slurs' "other" element is, or at least can be, semantically and normatively relevant. And this also raises more direct trouble for the minimalist's core commitment: to the truth-conditional equivalence of slurs and their neutral counterparts. As we saw, there are good reasons to accept such an equivalence. However, it is not always so easy to hive off a slur's truth-conditional contribution from its perspective, as Mark Richard (2008: 3–4) illustrates:

> Imagine standing next to someone who uses S as a slur…the racist mutters *that building is full of Ss*. Many of us are going to resist allowing that what the racist said was true. After all, if we admit its truth, we must believe that it is true that the building is full of Ss. And if we think that, we think that the building is full of Ss. We think, that is, what and as the racist thinks.[3]

Many theorists and ordinary speakers have the strong intuition that slurs' offensive perspective is such an integral part of their meaning, and so deeply wrong, that simple sentences containing them cannot be true. As Richard argues, if we assess sentences containing slurs, like (1) and (2), as either true or false, we thereby risk becoming complicit in the bigot's perspective ourselves (cf. also Hornsby 2001; Saka 2007**)**.

Hom (2008) explains slurs' conventional association with (something like) a perspective, and its strong potential effect on intuitions about truth, with an analysis at the other semantic extreme from minimalism, one which packs a rich complex of factual and normative assumptions within the slur's predicative content. Here, for example, is his statement of the content contributed by "chink":

> ought to be subject to higher college admissions standards, and ought to be subject to exclusion from advancement to managerial positions, and…, because of being slanty-eyed, and devious, and good-at-laundering, and…, all because of being Chinese.(Hom 2008: 431)

Hom's thick "combinatorial externalism" has precisely the inverse virtues from minimalism. First, it cleanly captures the intuition, expressed by Richard above, **(p.35)** that straightforward predications involving slurs cannot be true: on his view, all atomic predicative uses of slurs are false, because no one is or ought to be treated in the way the slur assumes that being *G* entails and warrants (Hom 2008: 437). Second, by locating the perspective within the slur's core predicative content, Hom's account smoothly explains cases where that perspective is bound with a commitment-canceling operator, as in (9) through (15).

However, for that same reason, Hom's account *fails* to explain the data that motivate a minimalist analysis.[4] As we saw with (3) and (4) earlier, there is a clear sense in which sentences containing slurs *can* be evaluated simply on the basis of group membership. We can also elicit this intuition for assertions, using a revised version of Richard's example. Suppose we are standing before a burning building, next to a bigot who says,

(16) There are twenty-six kikes and fifteen God-fearing Christians in there.

When it is a matter of pressing consequence to determine whether his utterance is accurate, our assessment will straightforwardly depend on group membership alone. By contrast, with analogous sentences containing objectionable "thick" terms like "wanton" or "bitch," determining the term's extension does require deploying the objectionable perspective, at least "at arm's reach."

Hom's view has even more trouble with our second puzzling feature, projection. As he emphasizes, non-projecting occurrences of slurs are real and theoretically important. But projection through conventionally commitment-canceling plugs is much more common, and *prima facie* more theoretically surprising. Hom does have an explanation of these cases—ironically, the same as Anderson and Lepore's: utterances containing slurs can cause offense simply in virtue of tokening them. But, Hom says, we shouldn't infer from a phenomenological fact about "squeamishness" to a semantic conclusion that the slur actually derogates (2008: 435). The unreliability of such inferences is evidenced, he argues, by the fact that direct quotations of slurs, and even occurrences of merely phonetically similar words (e.g., "niggardly") can arouse the same feelings, and cause the same kinds of offense, as use of the slurs themselves do (Kennedy 2003: 94–7, Hom 2008: 435).

 (p.36) It is probably true that slurs gain additional force from being taboo. It is also true that hearers can take offense, sometimes rightly, at mere tokenings of slurs and of semantically distinct words. However, this does not demonstrate that the reason that slurs' offensive component projects through conventionally commitment-canceling constructions, when it does, is entirely perlocutionary. Intuitively, speakers who utter sentences like (2) and (5) through (8) have not merely caused an extra-linguistic effect: they have endorsed the same objectionable perspective as the speaker of an atomic predication like (1), by introducing it into the conversational common ground, where it remains operative unless challenged (Camp 2013).

We can see that mere tokening is not the primary locus of offense, as both Anderson and Lepore and Hom maintain, by noting that responses to atomic predications or to sentences like (5) through (8) which carefully avoid tokening the slur typically still render the hearer complicit in perpetuating the objectionable perspective. Thus, in most circumstances, a direct denial of

(1) Isaiah is a kike.

in the form of

(17) That's not true./That's false.

or

(17') I doubt it./I don't think so./Impossible.

denies only the attribution of group membership, while endorsing or at least accommodating the offensive perspective. Likewise for other constructions that pick up on the content of the initial utterance without explicitly repeating its words, as in the following pairs:

(5) How many dykes are working at your site?

(5_R) I think there are three of them right now.

(6) She could have married a chink instead.

(6_R) She'd be happier if she had.

(7) If they promote another bitch out of this damn job before me, I'm going to sue for discrimination.

(7_R) If they do, and you do, you'll lose.

(8) {Bridget thinks/says that//According to Bridget} spics can't keep their hands to themselves.

(8_R) Well, I haven't found that to be a problem.

 (p.37) In all these cases, the responding speaker accepts, or at least allows to remain standing, a perspective that was introduced via the initial utterance. The fact that a commitment to a perspective becomes part of the discourse suggests that the initial speaker's commitment is generated by her actual *use* of the slur, rather than being merely manifested by her tokening of the term. The further facts that this commitment is non-defeasible, and that it is generated by any literal, sincere utterance in which the slur occurs outside a commitment-canceling construction, suggest in addition that it is part of the slur's conventional meaning, and not just a contingent pragmatic association.

2 Two-Factor Views
In the last section, we observed that slurs are puzzlingly variable in two important respects. First, they elicit intuitions of both truth-conditional equivalence to, and distinctness from, their more neutral counterparts. Second, the derogating perspective that differentiates them from those counterparts

typically, but not universally, projects across commitment-canceling constructions. Neither a "thin" account that treats slurs as entirely semantically equivalent to their neutral counterparts, nor a "thick" account that packs the offensive perspective wholly into the predicative content, can explain this puzzling variability.

The natural move is to split the difference: we need a way to include the derogating perspective within the slur's conventional conversational contribution without assimilating it to the core atomic predication. It is plausible that slurs, unlike thick terms, accomplish two distinct but coordinated things: predication of group membership and commitment to the appropriateness of a derogating perspective (and/or a stereotype, or a feeling of contempt) on the group. Further, it is highly plausible that the predication of group membership contributes to the compositional determination of "at-issue" content. By contrast, the perspective's endorsement appears to be secondary, in a way that prevents it from getting bound up in the compositional machinery and causes it to project out to the actual speaker.

I propose a refined version of this view in section 3. Here, I consider the two established candidates for such a "two-factor" account: presupposition and conventional implicature. Applied to slurs, and specifically to our two respects of puzzling variability, both views make marked improvements over the simple univocal accounts from section 1. Compared to one another, each has distinctive advantages but also correlative weaknesses, which only a more flexible view can reconcile.

(p.38) 2.1 Presupposition

Intuitively, it is perhaps most natural to claim that what differentiates slurs from their neutral counterparts is that they presuppose derogating perspectives. Bigots use slurs because those words reflect a perspective on the targeted group which they take to be, and present as being, appropriate. But at the same time, this perspective is often not their primary point: it is assumed rather than advocated for, as in:

(18) Some spic on the bus said Big Papi is retiring at the end of the season.

(19) It's crazy—he plays ball like a honky.

More importantly for our purposes, treating slurs' perspectives as presupposed nicely explains the puzzling mixture of intuitions about truth. On the one hand, the utterance's at-issue content—what the speaker is profferring as her conversational move—typically depends for its truth (satisfaction) on group membership alone—just as the truth of the at-issue content of an utterance containing "George stopped smoking" depends only on whether George currently smokes. On the other hand, the aptness of the derogating perspective, like the truth of the assumption that George used to smoke, can seem like a pre-

condition on this at-issue content being true, so that granting its truth would involve endorsing the perspective, which a non-bigot is vehemently unwilling to do.

A presuppositional view also thereby explains why non-bigoted hearers find it so difficult to respond to utterances containing slurs. Because any direct response targets only the at-issue content while assuming the perspective as presupposed, it renders the hearer complicit in deploying that perspective themselves—*even* if they avoid actually tokening the slur, as in (17) or (17'). Challenging the perspective requires disrupting the conversational flow in just the way that "George stopped smoking" does, with a "Hey, wait a minute!" interjection of the sort typically treated as diagnostic of presupposition (von Fintel 2004).

A presuppositional view also makes a good start on explaining slurs' projective behavior. It predicts not just that the derogating perspective will pass through negation, but also through other presupposition "holes" (Karttunen 1973) like questions, modals, and knowledge ascriptions. And intuitively, as we've seen, this prediction is borne out: utterances of sentences like

(20) Is George a honky?

(21) John could/might be a spic.

(22) Jane knows that Alex is a kike.

(p.39) do commit the speaker to a derogating perspective on the target group, even if its application to the focal subject is blocked, as in (20) and (21).

The problem with a presuppositional analysis is that, as we already saw in section 1, the perspective appears to be "hyper-projective": it also typically projects across indirect attitude and speech reports, which are supposed to be projection "plugs." Thus, utterances like

(8) {Bridget thinks/says that//According to Bridget} spics can't keep their hands to themselves.

typically implicate the reporting speaker, and not just Bridget, in the derogation of Latinos. Projection across attitude reports is not universal, as cases like (9) through (11) show; but "quarantining" is significantly more difficult and less common with slurs than with standard presuppositions, in a way that calls for explanation.

One way for a presupposition theorist to deal with the ubiquity of projection through indirect reports is to treat the presupposition as indexicalized, so that the expressed attitudes are anchored to the reporting rather than reported context (cf. Lasersohn 2007; Sauerland 2007; Schlenker 2007). One might already worry that positing indexicality undermines the substantiveness of the

presuppositional analysis, by basically defining into existence a class of presuppositions that don't behave like normal presuppositions. Against this, Lasersohn (2007) supports an indexical presuppositional analysis of expressives like "damn" by arguing that they behave like presuppositions in the context of "filters," most notably conditional consequents. In general, when the antecedent of a conditional entails a presupposition that is triggered in the consequent clause, then the presupposition fails to project out of the conditional as a whole: it has been bound by the antecedent. For instance, although "his children" normally presupposes that the referent of "his" has children, the conditionalization of this assumption in the antecedent of

> (23) If John is a father, then his children don't live very close by.

blocks the attribution of this commitment to the speaker. Lasersohn argues that expressives like "damn" bind in just this way: as he says, a speaker of

> (24) I consider John a saint. But if he ever screws me over, I'll crush the bastard like a bug!

"might be accused of being volatile, but not incoherent…The description of John as a bastard is conditionalized on the (unexpected) event of his 'screwing over' the speaker, so that the expressive content does not project up to the sentence as a whole" (2007: 227).

 (p.40) As McCready (2010: 9) notes, the test is already problematic to apply to expressives, because the test requires capturing the relevant entailment relation between antecedent and consequent, and it is unclear what counts as "entailment" for non-propositional, emotive affect. But (24) at least *seems* like a case of binding. By contrast, it is much harder to construct such cases for slurs: for instance, the speaker of

> (25) I think Jews are awesome; some of my best friends are Jewish. But if the new hire is a Jew, then they'll regret hiring a kike.

is still clearly committed to the slur's derogating perspective despite her explicit "disclaimer" and the conditionalization. Perhaps this is due to a failure to capture the relevant entailment; but at the very least, it constitutes an absence of positive evidence for the indexicalized presupposition view.

Because presupposition projection is itself such a vexed topic, I don't think we should lean too heavily on the precise profile of projection and blocking. A more basic problem is that slurs' perspectives don't behave like presuppositions in contexts where the speaker cannot assume mutual endorsement among conversational participants (Potts 2005: 33; Richard 2008: 20). Presuppositions are, by definition, background assumptions: mutually assumed prior to the

utterance, or at least presented as such in anticipation of accommodation (Stalnaker 1974; Lewis 1979). But with "weapon" uses of slurs, as in

(26) You {are a}cunt/faggot/kike!

(27) You'll always be a nigger no matter how many degrees you get.

the speaker almost certainly knows that the hearer actively rejects the perspective. They are not attempting to smuggle the perspective in under the cover of cooperation; nor is the perspective merely ancillary to their main point. Rather, the speaker's primary aim is to actively derogate the targeted group, including especially the individual(s) of whom the slur is predicated. They "hurl" the derogating perspective at the hearer like a rock, in an effort to bully them into submission. These are "fighting words" par excellence: uses "which by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace" (*Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire* 1942). It is important that these are not the only uses of slurs—casual intra-bigot uses as in (18)–(19) are also all too common, and in those cases mutual endorsement is indeed assumed. But a presupposition account needs to deal with the full range of cases, of which weapon cases are a central class.[5]

(p.41) 2.2 Conventional implicature

The main "two-factor" alternative to a presuppositional analysis treats slurs' "other" element as a conventional implicature (CI). The view encompasses a variety of approaches: thus, Williamson (2009) and Whiting (2008, 2013) defend versions of a CI view along traditional Gricean lines, while Potts (2005, 2007) offers a linguistically-driven account which posits syntactically distinct dimensions of meaning. Although the theoretical differences are important, for our purposes what matters is that all of these views assign membership in *G* as the slur's contribution to the compositional determination of at-issue content, and treat the perspective—or other "other" aspect, like a feeling of contempt or endorsement of a stereotype—as a "side comment": a conventionally generated and non-defeasible, but peripheral commitment, not affecting the essential core of "what is said."

Like the presuppositional analysis, CI views include slurs' perspective within their conventional meaning while assessing at-issue truth in terms of group membership alone. However, unlike the presupposition view, the CI view is committed to the claim that the perspective is entirely independent of and irrelevant to the utterance's "real" truth conditions. Like the minimalist, a proponent of the CI view is committed, by definition, to treating slurs as being truth-conditionally equivalent to their neutral counterparts; the two expressions differ only in what they suggest or otherwise inject into the conversational air. As a result, unlike a presupposition account, a CI view must simply deny, or

explain away, the widespread (though again, not universal) intuition that utterances containing slurs cannot ever be true.

The presupposition and CI views also differ in what relation they take to hold between predication of group membership and perspective, in a way that makes at least some difference to the conversational roles they predict slurs' perspectives to play. In particular, where the presuppositional analysis treats the perspective as a background assumption which contributes to fixing at-issue content without itself constituting part of it, a CI view treats it as a supplementary, after-the-fact commentary. For many cases, such as

(5) How many dykes are working at your site?

this latter position seems more apt. In particular, it explains the intuition that part of what is infuriating about a slur is its optionality: the speaker has thrown a volatile assumption into the conversation when they could just as easily have **(p.42)** stuck with a neutral counterpart. Further, in such cases there is also little feeling that the speaker's faulty assumptions must either be provisionally granted or else straightened out before one can assess truth: unlike with many presuppositions, it is entirely clear what group the speaker's word actually refers to, and not merely what the speaker is attempting to claim given faulty assumptions. On the other hand, a presuppositional analysis arguably does better at explaining the sense that a direct response, even a non-tokening one, renders a hearer complicit in endorsing and perpetuating the derogating perspective themselves.

Turning from these rather nuanced differences in conversational role to projection, we find a similar pattern: presupposition and CI views make overlapping but distinct predictions, with distinct explanatory strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, the CI view has a neat explanation of "hyper-projectivity," which the presupposition view struggled to explain. By definition, a conventional aspect of meaning is not cancellable, so it is generated by every utterance of a slur; but *qua* an implicature, the slur's perspective counts as a mere side-comment, not affecting the truth-conditions of "what is said," including what is said by complex constructions like indirect reports. The problem with this prediction, as we saw in section 1, is that projection doesn't always work this way: in a restricted but robust range of cases, the speaker is indeed "quarantined" from the slur's perspective. So a CI view, just like the minimalist view, fails to explain the puzzling variability in projection.

In his (2007), Potts modifies his (2005) analysis to allow for such quarantined cases: instead of treating expressive terms like "damn" and "bastard" as automatically and directly updating the "expressive setting" of the actual context of utterance, he now takes them to contain a "judge" parameter, which takes the speaker as its default value but can be shifted when the speaker

clearly distances herself from the attitude. While this accommodates the data, it also renders Potts's view structurally much closer to an indexical presupposition view like Lasersohn's, and compromises much of the motivation for positing an entirely independent "dimension" of expressive meaning.

We can see the pervasiveness and depth of the problems that indirect reports pose for a CI view by looking at what Kent Bach (1999: 340) calls the "IQ Test" (for "indirect quotation') for "what is said":

> An element of a sentence contributes to what is said in an utterance of that sentence iff there can be an accurate and complete indirect quotation of the utterance (in the same language) which includes that element, or a corresponding element in the 'that'-clause that specifies what is said.

Bach argues against conventional implicatures as a useful theoretical category by arguing that the test classifies putative CIs like "but" and "therefore" as belonging **(p.43)** to "what is said." Hom (2008: 425) argues on the same grounds that many reports which replace slurs with their neutral counterparts, as in

> (14) Institutions that treat Chinese as chinks are racist.

> (14$_R$) *A* said that institutions that treat Chinese as Chinese are racist.

are intuitively incomplete, sometimes to the point of incoherence. While I doubt that the notion of "what is said" is itself robust and stable enough to support fine-grained semantic theorizing, Bach's test does suggest that the choice to employ a slur, and the commitments a speaker thereby undertakes, are often too central to the speaker's overall speech act to be elided from an indirect report. Because the defining commitment of the CI view is that a slur's perspective (or other "other" element) is a mere side-comment, not affecting what is said, it simply cannot accommodate these cases. Further, we find a marked contrast here with analogous indirect reports of other candidate CIs:

> (28) Bill Russell, the two-term Republican city counselor, is going to get me a job.

> (28$_R$) John said that Bill Russell will get him a job.

> (29) Damn! My fucking cell phone is on the fucking fritz again.

> (29$_R$) Jane said that her cell phone isn't working again.

These reports are much more plausibly "complete and accurate," even though they leave out important aspects of the original utterance. So the incompleteness that renders reports like (14$_R$) false is not just a general

phenomenon arising from a report's ignoring some information or feeling—or from the violation of a taboo.

The problem of incompleteness—the fact that substitutions of slurs by their neutral counterparts often leave out something essential, which affects the intuitive truth-value of a larger sentence, in a way the CI view cannot explain—is not limited to indirect reports. Because a CI view holds that slurs are truth-conditionally equivalent to their neutral counterparts, it is committed to treating sentences like

(30) I am Jewish, not a kike.

(31) Jews are kikes.

as trivial: (30) is analytically contradictory while (31) is analytically true (Hom 2008: 421–2). Further, the truth of (31) in turn entails the (analytic) truth of

(32) It is true that Jews are kikes.

But as we've seen, many people, ordinary speakers and theorists alike, have the strong intuition that (32) is false. Here, the presuppositional view has a marked **(p.44)** advantage: depending on one's view of presupposition failure, (31) is either false or lacking in truth-value; and in either case, (32) is false.

The problem arises in even more potent form at the level of thought. The commitment to truth-conditional equivalence entails that the CI view, like the minimalist, must allow that the bigot and non-bigot *believe* the same content. In particular, their views entail that a non-bigot who believes that Isaiah is Jewish believes

(1) Isaiah is a kike.

The only difference, on their view, is that the non-bigot wouldn't *express* their belief in those terms. And this in turn entails that bigoted reports of neutral attitudes are true: for instance,

(33) Jane thinks some of her students are spics.

is true just in case Jane believes that some of her students are Latino. However, on a natural reading of the sentence, this seems false: if I were Jane, I would emphatically deny (33), and not just because I found the reporting speaker's way of talking reprehensible, or thought that they had engaged in inappropriate editorialization; I would feel that *I*, and my beliefs, had been wildly mischaracterized.

Williamson (2009: 14) dismisses these observations as a difficulty only for "Frege's simple account of propositional attitude ascriptions," rather than for

the CI's core claim of truth-conditional equivalence. However, the problems can't be traced back to particular details of Frege's account, nor are they obviously addressed by any standard account of attitude ascriptions.[6] More importantly, they don't depend specifically on verbs of indirect report, as Hom's many NDNA examples show.

Building on a proposal in Whiting (2013), the CI proponent might suggest that a report like (38) generates a false *conversational* implicature that Jane endorses the perspective which the actual speaker of (38) conventionally **(p.45)** implicates; in support of this, they might appeal to the feasibility of following an utterance of (38) with a disclaimer like

> (33') Jane thinks some of her students are spics—but of course she calls them "Latinos."

But intuitively, this doesn't do justice to what's wrong with (33). First, it is not clear that (33') really does cancel the objectionable suggestion that Jane endorses the slurring perspective; it is more naturally heard as claiming that Jane has implicit biases that she fails to acknowledge even to herself. More importantly, the proposal fails to account for the fact that on the most natural reading of (33), the report's main *point*, not just a side-comment or effect, is to ascribe the perspective to Jane. Finally, by itself the proposal can't explain cases like (9) through (11), where the actual speaker is quarantined from the slurring perspective. As we might put it, the theoretical challenge is not just to get the derogating perspective *into* the reported attitude or speech act, but also to get it *out* of the reporting context. And because the CI view by definition treats the implicature of perspectival endorsement as conventionally generated, it cannot allow that it can coherently be cancelled.

By contrast, a presuppositional account straightforwardly predicts cases like (9) through (11), where the perspective is bound by an indirect report; its problem is the opposite one, of explaining the much more pervasive phenomenon of hyper-projection. And for these cases, an appeal to non-conventional, conversational implicature is much more plausible: on this line, the reporting speaker's failure to actively repudiate the perspective ascribed to the reported agent suggests a willingness to endorse it; but this suggestion can also be cancelled.

In sum, then: a CI view, by treating a slur's perspective as a mere "side comment" that doesn't affect the "real" truth conditions, overpredicts projection and underpredicts effects on truth-assessment. By contrast, a presuppositional analysis underpredicts projection and (arguably) overpredicts effects on truth-assessment—at least insofar as it entails that one cannot assess the core at-issue claim without assuming the slur's perspective. Finally, both analyses cannot handle "weapon" utterances like (26) and (27), for the same reason: because

both demote a slur's associated perspective to essentially secondary status, they cannot handle cases where group membership is mutually known, and where the speaker's main conversational point is to apply the perspective to the target.

3 From Multi-dimensionalism to Multiple Acts

In section 2, we saw that both types of familiar two-factor views improve considerably on univocal accounts, by splitting the difference between packing **(p.46)** slurs' "other" element all the way in to at-issue predicative content and kicking it all the way out to pragmatics. However, they still fail to predict the particular patterns of puzzling behavior that slurs display with respect to truth-assessment and projection. If these really are the only candidates, we should tinker with them, perhaps in ways like those suggested by Lasersohn and Potts. However, there is reason to think that a deeper problem may be afoot.

The issue of "coloring" has dogged analytic philosophy from its inception. Frege famously says that what words like "but" and "although" add over "and" should not be captured in an ideal language, because they merely "illuminate" the core thought "in a peculiar fashion," but "they do not touch the thought, they do not touch what is true or false" (1892/1948: 226). One fundamental issue for Frege with these aspects of meaning is that they are non-propositional: mere feelings and images rather than full-blooded facts. We can criticize a mode of expression for being inappropriate or "unsuitable" for its content, "as if a song with a sad subject were to be sung in a lively fashion," but, he held, such matters are of no concern to scientific inquiry (1892/1948: 226). Grice shifted the focus to ordinary language, demonstrating that it was not as logically incoherent as Frege and Russell supposed, but he retained the analytic focus on truth, defining "what is said" in propositional, truth-conditional terms.

In contrast to these dismissive stances to expressive meaning, Potts brings "the expressive dimension" within the ambit of syntactic and semantic analysis. But his model is still founded on a robust segregation of expressive and descriptive types of meaning, such that expressive meaning never affects the compositional determination of "at-issue" content. By contrast, other recent theorists have noted that many words conventionally function to do something other than either contribute information to the common ground or express feelings: instead, they indicate evidential status, shape discourse structure, update the profile of salient possibilities, advocate norms, or undertake commitments to plans (e.g., Gibbard 2003; Yalcin 2007, 2012; Murray 2014; Silk 2015). It is notable and theoretically significant that many of these aspects of meaning are indeed typically peripheral rather than at issue in discourse, and often do not enter freely into the compositional machinery. However, the bifurcation is not absolute: many types of "dynamic" and "expressive" meaning do embed within complex operators like conditionals, indirect reports, and alethic and other propositional operators (Charlow 2015; Starr 2014). Thus, an adequate linguistic

theory cannot rigidly segregate compositional, truth-conditional, at-issue content from a hodge-podge category of everything else.

A second, independent but equally fundamental issue with "coloring" is that, as Frege and Grice acknowledged, the further "hints" and "illuminations" conventionally signaled by words are not always merely expressive or imagistic, **(p.47)** but can be propositional. And in these cases, the boundary between mere hint and core sense may be quite blurry. As Frege (1892/1948: 227) puts it,

> Almost always, it seems, we connect with the main thoughts expressed by us subsidiary thoughts which, although not expressed, are associated with our words, in accordance with psychological laws, by the hearer. And since the subsidiary thought appears to be connected with our words of its own accord, almost like the main thought itself, we want it also to be expressed. The sense of the sentence is thereby enriched, and it may well happen that we have more simple thoughts than clauses. In many cases the sentence must be understood in this way, in others it may be doubtful whether the subsidiary thought belongs to the sense of the sentence or only accompanies it.

In a similar vein, Grice's brief and scattered remarks on conventional implicature lean heavily on appeals to what is "strictly speaking" true on "the favored sense" of "what is SAID," and admit that intuitions about truth and falsity in these cases are often mixed.[7]

In response to these problems, theorists including Kent Bach (1999) and Stephen Neale (1999) have suggested that the theoretical category of conventional implicature rests on the false assumption that an utterance can only "really" mean a single proposition: asking speakers to answer "True or false?!" to an utterance that expresses multiple propositions imposes a false choice based on a faulty presupposition of uniqueness. Instead, they propose taking seriously what Grice himself called "the vital clue": "that speakers may be at one and the same time engaged in performing speech acts at different but related levels" (1989: 362). On this approach, a single utterance may conventionally function to commit its speaker to multiple speech acts: a "primary," "at-issue," or "ground-floor" one and a "secondary," "higher-order" one, which is typically a commentary on the at-issue content. In this respect, the multiple acts view is just like a CI view. But in marked departure from the CI view, it grants that all of these may affect **(p.48)** truth value, and may need to be included in a "complete and accurate" report of the utterance and the attitudes expressed.

An important motivation for Neale in advocating a multiple-act model is to preserve a robust form of compositionality. By treating sentences as conventional instructions for generating a *sequence* of speech acts, we can

acknowledge that specific terms and constructions conventionally contribute not-at-issue acts, without assigning those contributions a syntactic role that matches their surface position, in a way that unifies presupposition, at-issue content, and conventional implicature into a single, linear interpretive "stream." Potts implements this basic compositional strategy in a more extended and formalized way, most fundamentally by treating expressive meaning as an entirely distinct "dimension," but also by isolating other forms of conventional implicature, including appositive clauses, illocutionary adverbs, and discourse markers, as mandatorily segregated from the core compositional machinery.

While I take a robust, cross-contextually stable form of compositionality to be an important constraint in theorizing about both linguistic and conceptual meaning (Camp 2004, 2015), I also suspect it is closer to a methodological commitment or regulative ideal, rather than something we actually observe natural language to exhibit (Szabo 2011). Potts's attempt to confine expressive meaning to the syntactic periphery is admirable, both because it avoids the problem of explaining compositional interaction between truth-conditional and other aspects of meaning, and because non-informational meaning does often appear to prefer to operate relatively independently of truth-conditional composition. However, the rigid segregation in his formal model is empirically implausible, given the intimate ways in which description, affective response, and evaluation frequently interact in language, with thick terms being the most classic example (Gibbard 1992; Kyle 2013).

Slurs are especially interesting in this respect, because they contribute both a descriptive and a (broadly) expressive, perspectival element to the conversation. Unlike with thick terms, in the case of slurs these contributions can be fairly cleanly distinguished, both conceptually and compositionally. Further, there is indeed a strong preference for the descriptive content to contribute compositionally to at-issue content, and for the perspectival element to scope out. But crucially, this preference is not rigidly encoded in the way that a CI view (let alone a minimalist one) posits.

The most fundamental problem with both presuppositional and conventional implicature views is that they inflexibly relegate slurs' "other" element to an essentially secondary status, when in fact it can be included within, or even comprise the entirety of, the at-issue content, as is most clearly demonstrated by weapon uses. A further problem is that the theoretical and empirical distinction between presupposition and conventional implicature is itself often unclear, **(p. 49)** with some classic theories, like those of Karttunen and Peters (1979), identifying them. Multiple-acts theorists, like Bach and Neale, make an important theoretical advance over traditional views of conventional implicature; but they still assume a conventionally fixed compositional structure which mandatorily assigns contents fixed, distinct statuses: as presupposed, central, or commentary. And this assumption is incompatible with the more flexible

behavior that is displayed by slurs, which in turn generates the puzzling variability in intuitions about truth and in projective behavior that we explored in sections 1 and 2.

Recently, Simons, Tonhauser, Beaver, and Roberts (2010) have proposed a unified analysis of "not-at-issue" content, which aims to explain projective behavior entirely in terms of at-issue status. On their view, at-issue status is a fundamentally pragmatic property, but it is determined in a predictable and constrained way by discourse structure: content is at-issue if it contributes at least a partial answer to the Question Under Discussion. Their proposal is bold in its simplicity and raises a host of important theoretical and empirical questions; my interest here is just in the idea of a default classification into at-issue and non-central status, which is conventionally marked but fundamentally driven by the purposes and structure of discourse. According to this core thought, at-issue content is determined compositionally and available for direct uptake by other conversational participants; by contrast, peripheral content projects out of compositional construction and introduces commitments in a way that falls outside direct challenge. Some constructions, like clefting, appositive clauses, and focus, conventionally mark a contribution's status as at-issue, and a strong form of infelicity results when there is a clash between this conventional marking and the status assigned by discourse structure.[8] Conversely, some terms, such as illocutionary adverbs like "frankly," may make a single contribution that is mandatorily peripheral. But other terms may make multiple conventional contributions; and, in some of those cases, which element contributes to the compositional contribution to at-issue content may be more flexible.

Applied to slurs, this idea entails that, in simple cases, the predication of group membership either applies to an individual or contributes to a quantificational construction to form a core proposition which may be asserted, asked, or ordered. Likewise, in most complex constructions, such as negation, questions, **(p.50)** orders, modals, and conditionals, the predication of group membership compositionally determines the at-issue contribution, while endorsement of the perspective is added directly to the conversational record, much as Potts suggests. However, we also predict that when the purposes and structure of the discourse are appropriate, then the perspectival element can be included as part or all of the at-issue contribution.

We'll examine how this applies to our puzzling variability in intuitions about truth and projection in a moment. First, though, I need to note one feature of my specific account. Throughout this discussion, I have simply assumed that slurs' "other" contribution is commitment to the appropriateness of a derogating perspective on the targeted group, while also claiming that my arguments generalize to other views, for instance on which the "other" contribution is a feeling of contempt, or belief in a stereotype. However, a specifically

perspectival version of a dual-acts view does have distinctive explanatory advantages. Perspectives are modes of interpretation that structure an overall collection of thoughts in an intuitive, holistic way without necessarily committing to any particular proposition, emotion, or evaluation. Moreover, commitment to the appropriateness of a perspective is not itself a straightforwardly doxastic attitude; in this sense, my view is broadly expressivist, although it abjures any conventional connection to the expression of specific feelings like contempt (Camp 2013). This comports with the general fact that broadly expressivist contents prefer to scope out of core compositional machinery. At the same time, perspectives are more closely tied to representation than the sheer affect that is evinced by purely emotive epithets like "damn" or "awesome." *Qua* modes of interpretation, perspectives can be assessed for epistemic aptness (Camp forthcoming). And for any given agent, a perspective will be implemented in a host of propositions that ascribe more specific features to members of the targeted group; indeed, for some slurs, the association with a stereotype may be conventional. This makes perspectives susceptible to evaluation for truth, and to ascription in cognitive terms: by talking about what agents think or believe, or claim or suggest. Thus, because perspectives themselves involve a puzzling mixture of connectedness to and independence from propositional truth, we should expect that they will interact in puzzling ways with assessment for truth and with truth-conditional constructions. Another version of a dual-acts view that proposed an alternative analysis of slurs' "other" element would thus need a different explanation of why slurs are so much more variable in their behavior than other words with a conventional effect of "coloring."

That said, let's turn to explaining our two core puzzling phenomena. First, by abandoning the assumption that assessment for truth must turn on a single proposition, a dual-acts view straightforwardly accounts for mixed intuitions about the truth of even atomic predications like (1). Supposing Isaiah is Jewish, **(p.51)** an utterance of (1) really does get something right *and* something wrong; we don't need either to dismiss what it gets wrong as failing to cross a posited threshold of sufficiency for rendering the utterance "strictly speaking" false, or to deny that the purely predicative content can be evaluated as true. Depending on the focus of the conversation, the speaker's communicative purposes, and our own evaluative purposes and commitments, we may accord more or less weight to the perspective in assessing the truth of the overall utterance.

Explaining projective variability is trickier, and more theoretically interesting. The short answer is that the dual-acts view simply helps itself to an interpretive flexibility that established two-factor views reject. But this is not very helpful; the challenge is to predict when perspectival commitment will be included alongside, or replace, the core group-denoting content as the at-issue contribution. As we have seen, the data here are complex and messy; but I think we can make a start. First, by default, and especially when both the semantic

and conversational focus are narrowly informational, the predication of group membership alone will be at-issue, and the perspectival commitment will scope out of the compositional construction of at-issue content, to be imputed to the actual speaker. However, second, when the conversation is directed toward more broadly "interpretive" conditions, and the sentence contains an operator which is sensitive to such interpretive concerns, then it will bind the perspective. Binding does not itself automatically cancel commitment to the perspective by the actual speaker; rather, it merely enables the speaker to quarantine themselves from it *if* they sufficiently signal their distance. Finally, when predication of group membership is ruled out as a relevant conversational contribution, because either manifestly true or blatantly false, then the perspective may be coerced into making a predicative contribution to at-issue content.

Indirect reports are the most obviously "interpretive" constructions, and the most obviously variable. In general, we often use speech and attitude reports to indicate and explain a reported agent's overall state of mind. Further, speakers who use slurs are often motivated to employ them as opposed to their neutral counterparts because they take the associated perspectives to suggest and explain a broader pattern of facts and evaluations which they in turn take to support their at-issue claim. These two features combine to produce default readings of indirect reports that commit the reported speaker to the slurring perspective, as in

> (9′) John says that the spics will have taken over the whole neighborhood in another couple of years.

That is, when these two features are present, a "complete and accurate" report *should* indicate that the reported speaker has undertaken a perspectival **(p.52)** commitment: leaving this out would ignore a crucial part of what the reported speaker did and why. This default assumption is strengthened when the reporting verb is more interpretively rich: for instance, with "screamed," "called," "described" or "blasted," or "characterize," "consider," or "treat." By contrast, reports that employ more narrowly information-focused verbs, like "claimed," "averred" or "attested," or "calculate," "conclude," or "determine," are more naturally construed as simply attributing the predication of group membership to the reported agent.[9]

In addition to the default but defeasible assumption that indirect reports accurately reflect the reported speaker's overall state of mind, there is also a general default but defeasible assumption that an indirect report accurately reflects salient aspects of the report*ing* speaker's mental state. Again, this is not distinctive to slurs; as Karttunen (1973: 175) says, indirect reports are often "leaky" plugs for presupposition. So, for example,

(34) Jane told me that George has stopped smoking.

strongly suggests that the reporting speaker themself believes that George once smoked. More generally, by treating some aspect of reported content as not-at-issue, a reporting speaker suggests that they themself take it to be part of the common ground, either antecedently or by accommodation. In the case of slurs in particular, given how loaded and repugnant they are, a reporting speaker's failure to strongly distance themselves from the perspective often constitutes positive evidence of endorsement. Given this, a reporting speaker may rightly be held responsible for not having explicitly repudiated it or engaged in circumlocution—*even* for direct quotation (cf. Harris & Potts 2009: 546–7; Lasersohn 2007: 228).

So, the default reading of an indirect report containing a slur is (a) that it captures an overall state of mind or speech act by the reported agent, in which group membership and perspective are intimately connected, and (b) that the reported speaker also endorses this state of mind or claim. But this reading is just a default, not universally mandated. On the one hand, if the reporting speaker employs an interpretively rich reporting verb and clearly distances themselves from the **(p.53)** perspective, then the perspective can be "quarantined," as in (9) through (11).[10] On the other hand, if the conversation is narrowly focused on the exchange of information, as in

(16$_R$) George{told me/calculated} that there are twenty-six kikes and fifteen God-fearing Christians in the building.

then the attribution of the perspective to the reported speaker won't plausibly contribute to explaining the attributed content, with the result that the reporting speaker's own choice to token the slur is more plausibly attributed to her personal endorsement; the reported speaker's attitude is then left unclear. Thus, in contrast to

(33) Jane thinks some of her students are spics.

a hearer of (16$_R$) should be at least somewhat hesitant about concluding that George is a bigot, and even if George himself is not a bigot, will be under pressure to admit that there is an important sense in which the report is true. The likelihood that the perspective will scope out of the report entirely, attaching *only* to the actual reporting speaker, increases the greater the incongruence between reported content and slurring perspective is, as in

(34) Jane says that her Feminazi friends are parading around in their panties for one of those "Take Back the Night" extravaganzas.

So far, then, we've seen that plugging versus projection of slurs' perspectives through indirect reports depends on the perspective's semantic and pragmatic

relevance to explaining the overall reported act or attitude, and on the plausibility of consonance between perspective and group membership for both reporting or reported speaker. In these respects, slurs merely heighten dimensions of projective variability that are already displayed by indirect reports in general. Further, this variability is not limited to verbs that report specific acts and attitudes: it also extends to other interpretively focused terms like "consider" or "treat," as in

> (14) Institutions that treat Chinese as chinks are racist.

> (35) Angela quit because they treated her like a chink.

In these cases, the speaker criticizes as racist, or explains Angela's actions by appeal to, a type of treatment which is defined, not by group membership alone, **(p.54)** but by the slur's associated perspective. In this sense the perspective does contribute to the larger compositionally-determined at-issue meaning.

We find a markedly different pattern of projection when we turn to plugging constructions that focus on narrowly truth-conditional information. In those cases, the perspective's semantic irrelevance to the construction makes it much more likely to project through, to the actual speaker. In particular, bound "quarantining" readings seem to be extremely rare for modals and conditionals. The best candidates I have encountered are negative quantified cases, like

> (36) If there were any kikes, there would be 16 million of them. But there aren't any.[11]

Where the core predicative contribution of the slur in to the embedded sentence in (14) is analytically trivial, its contributions to the antecedent and negative existential in (36) are pragmatically uninformative and blatantly false, respectively, given the ubiquity of the knowledge that there are Jewish people. This conversational inappropriateness undermines the default contribution of exclusively group membership to at-issue content; instead, the slur functions to contribute something more like Hom would predict: "people who are Jewish and thus appropriately construed by a derogating perspective." But again, even if plugging is possible in some such truth-conditional contexts, constructions of this sort are rare, and intuitively involve some kind of linguistic coercion or metalinguistic application.

One might expect negation also to function in a way that is narrowly truth-conditional. And indeed, the default interpretation of

> (2) Isaiah is not a kike.

does deny that Isaiah is Jewish while endorsing the derogating perspective on Jews as a whole. As such, a non-bigoted speaker should be highly reluctant to use (2), or its non-tokening analog

(2′) He is not.

to respond to the atomic predication in (1). However, if (2) is uttered in a context where it is manifestly common knowledge that Isaiah is Jewish, or if the slur is overtly contrasted with its neutral counterpart, as in

(12) Yao Ming is Chinese, but he's not a chink.

then negation can indeed target, and thereby bind, the perspective. That is, as with (36), because utterances of these sentences cannot be interpreted as making relevant, substantive, coherent conversational contributions if the larger **(p.55)** construction takes the predication of group membership as its input, the perspective steps in as the slur's at-issue contribution.

Parallel to the variability we've observed in indirect reports, we also find important variability among forms of denial. Denials of atomic predications like (1) that are couched in more narrowly epistemic or truth-conditional terms, such as

(17′) I doubt it./I don't think so./Impossible.

exhibit a stronger preference to target the predication of group membership; while more broadly interpretive forms of denial, like

(17′′) You're wrong./Bullshit.

are more easily used to target the perspective—again, given manifest common knowledge of actual group membership and clear contrast with a neutral counterpart. This constitutes a fairly marked contrast from at least many putative cases of conventional implicature, such as "although" or "tu/vous". Thus, the contrast contributed in (37), and the familiarity contributed in (38):

(37) Although she is French, she is brave.

(38) Et puis tu, Brutus, me trahir ainsi.

are much more difficult to target directly than the perspective contributed in (1) is (Jayez & Rossari 2004; Horn 2010).[12]

Finally, attending to the relative relevance of narrowly informational versus broadly interpretive information in determining which of the slur's two speech-act-potentials is primary, and which therefore serves as the focus for further compositional and conversational attention, also allows us to smoothly explain "weapon" uses like

(26) You{are a}cunt/faggot/kike!

(27) You'll always be a nigger no matter how many degrees you get.

(p.56) which are so problematic for both presuppositional and conventional implicature views: here again, the fact that predication of group membership would be conversationally inert forces the perspective to step in as the at-issue contribution.

4 Conclusion

Slurs are so infuriating in part because they are so viscerally and socially potent while also being so representationally and evaluatively slippery: they introduce a noxious way of thinking that cannot be articulated and repudiated by means of any particular proposition. They are also infuriating because they typically introduce this noxious perspective as a side-note, with predication of group membership as their primary contribution. This makes them a lot like both presuppositions and conventional implicatures. But as we've seen, they differ from standard cases of both in important ways, especially with respect to intuitions of truth and projection through complex constructions. I have argued that at least for slurs, we need to abandon the assumption of a fixed and absolute demarcation into "content that counts" and content that is merely supplementary, whether this is antecedent to or follows upon "what is strictly speaking said." Although there is a default preference for predication of group membership to be at-issue and endorsement of a perspective to serve as commentary, this is merely a default, and both assessment for truth and projection depend on whether the semantic and conversational focus is narrowly informational or broadly interpretive.

Many theorists still take the conventional, compositional determination of truth-conditional content to define semantics; on this view, slurs' "other," perspectival commitment is by definition non-semantic. The fact that this commitment is conventionally associated with a particular expression, the fact that it can affect assessment for truth, and the fact that it can interact in systematic ways with the larger compositional machinery, all strongly suggest that it calls for a semantic analysis. Moreover, slurs are not unique in this: language is a tool for communication, and exchanging information is just one of our purposes in using it. As a result, many of our words and sentences mix truth-conditional and broadly "expressivist" and "dynamic" functions in interesting ways.

One might worry that permitting these "other" dimensions of meaning to intrude into semantics explodes any hope of a systematic, predictive theory of sentence meaning. On the contrary, I think that it is only by taking clear account of these multiple dimensions, and of the nuanced ways in which they do and don't interact with each other and with the surrounding discourse structure and **(p. 57)** conversational context, that we stand a chance of grounding abstract semantic theory in actual use in a robust and principled way.

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Notes:

([1]) There are important complications here, involving stereotype-restricted, appropriated, loose, and metaphorical extensions of slurs. Although I think these complications are theoretically revealing, they don't undermine the basic point that slurs aim at an independently identifiable group.

([2]) A slur meaning "cockroach," used in the Rwandan genocide to refer to Tutsis. For insightful analysis of the role of hate speech, including slurs, in this historical context, see Tirrell (2012, 2013).

([3]) cf. Dummett (1981: 527): "Most of us will not say that S is true: [we] will simply say, 'I should never say that' or 'No one should ever say that.'"

([4]) The view has other unpalatable consequences. Hom's "null-extensionality thesis'—that no one falls within the extension of a slur—entails that slurs are "conceptually unrelated" to what one would pre-theoretically have taken to be their extensionally equivalent neutral counterparts (Hom & May 2013). Further, Hom and May (2013) maintain that the moral facts which render atomic predications like (1) false are so conceptually fundamental to the moral fabric of reality that a bigot who believes (1) fails to understand what the word "kike" means. While for Hom, these are illuminating implications, I take them to be highly counterintuitive results.

([5]) Richard argues that it is a general fact about our linguistic community that speakers know that they cannot assume mutual endorsement of the offensive perspective, and so that slurs' "other" element *never* functions presuppositionally. I think this is an overly optimistic, and overly monolithic, assessment of the linguistic community, which is much more variegated.

([6]) Williamson (2009: 26) also concludes from cases like (34) that "pejorativeness is a more sophisticated phenomenon" than one might have thought. Insofar as his CI view treats "pejorativeness" as a matter of

implications generated by speech, he concludes that "pejorative concepts [cannot] occur at a quite primitive level of thought," since the only way to have pejorative *thoughts* is to "engage in silent communication with oneself," in order to "manipulate[] the rhetorical effects of one's own thoughts on oneself." But this conclusion is highly implausible: just as Anderson and Lepore's claim that slurs are offensive because they are prohibited seems to get the causal and normative story backward, so too here we want to say that the bigot chooses his words *because* it reflects how he thinks, not that he is a bigot because he has talked himself into it. This conclusion also runs afoul of empirical evidence suggesting that stereotypes and in-group preferences are developmentally prior to and more easily accessible than concepts (in philosophers' sense of that term) (e.g., Porter 1971; Higgins & King 1981; Devine 1989; Rhodes et al. 2012; Leslie 2008, 2014).

(^{7}) Thus, Grice writes:

> If I say (smugly), *He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave,* I have certainly committed myself, by virtue of the meaning of my words, to its being the case that his being brave is a consequence of (follows from) his being an Englishman. But while I have said that he is an Englishman, and said that he is brave, I do not want to say that I have SAID (in the favored sense) that it follows from his being an Englishman that he is brave, though I have certainly indicated, and so implicated, that this is so. I do not want to say that my utterance of this sentence would be, STRICTLY SPEAKING, false should the consequence in question fail to hold.

> (1989: 45, emphasis in original)

Similarly, he admits that "one might perhaps be less comfortable about assenting to its truth if the implied contrast did not in fact obtain" (1961: 127), but insists that "the nonrealization of this condition would also be regarded as insufficient to falsify the speaker's statement" (1989: 361).

(^{8}) So, for instance,

> ((i)) It was Dave who baked lasagna.

contributes the information that Dave baked lasagna to the common ground; but it is infelicitous as a response to the question

> ((i_Q)) What did Dave make?

because it presents Dave as being the answer to the operative Question Under Discussion and his baking lasagna as being assumed, where the actual QUD focuses on what was brought rather than the agent.

(^{9}) The most common verb of indirect report, "say," is also the most pragmatically variable. Ordinary speech includes a "strict," merely locutionary notion of say which naturally contrasts with full illocutionary commitment, as in "She said that she would be there with bells on, but she didn't mean it: she was lying/speaking metaphorically/being sarcastic" (Camp 2006, 2007, 2013; Bach 2001). It also includes, as Grice (1989) emphasizes, a "strict" but illocutionarily committing use, roughly equivalent to "what is asserted" but closely tied to the sentence uttered. But much of the time, "say" is highly inclusive, encompassing implicatures and permitting fairly free restatements (Cappelen & Lepore 1997).

(^{10}) Harris & Potts (2009) provide empirical evidence from both experimental data and corpus analysis that such perspective-shifting is both systematically possible for evaluatively loaded expressions and also comparatively rare in actual speech.

(^{11}) Thanks to Ryan McElhaney for the example.

(^{12}) Even when cases like (2), (12), or (17'') are interpreted with the perspective as the slur's at-issue contribution, there is still a substantial risk that the utterance is construed as merely denying the perspective's applicability to the particular individual denoted by the noun phrase, leaving its appropriateness for other members of the group unchallenged. I think part of the reason for this effect is because slurring perspectives have generic force, applying to members of the targeted group in virtue of what the slur presents as a common but exception-tolerating "essence" (Leslie 2014; Haslanger 2014). Given this, universally quantified negative sentences followed by contrastive statements, like

((ii)) There are no niggers; there are only African-Americans.

are typically the most effective explicit, direct denials of a slurring predication. There is also important variation among slurs in how easily negation can target the perspective, depending on how robust a stereotype is associated with the perspective: the more stereotypical the perspective, the easier for it to be picked up by negation.

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