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Abstract	<p>In her analysis of pejoratives, Eva Picardi rejects a too sharp separation between descriptive and expressive content. Carlo Penco reconstructs some of her arguments, endorsing Eva's criticism of Williamson's analysis of Dummett and developing a suggestion by Manuel Garcia Carpintero on a speech act analysis of pejoratives. Eva's main concern is accounting for our instinctive refusal to endorse an assertion containing pejoratives because it suggests a picture of reality we do not share. Her stance might be further developed claiming that uses of pejoratives not only suggest, but also promote a wrong picture of reality. Our refusal to endorse implies rejecting not only a wrong picture of reality but also a call for participation to what that picture promotes.</p>	



Refusing to Endorse: A Must Explanation for Pejoratives

Carlo Penco

1 INTRODUCTION

Since David Kaplan's "The Meaning of 'Ouch' and 'Oops'", there has been a wide amount of discussions on every side of pejorative expressions or slurs, with different kinds of interpretations and new topics, like the problem of appropriation and perspectival shift.¹ Picardi (2006, 2007) presents a set of suggestions concerning the use of pejoratives and their relation to the content of what is said. Her stance is antagonist towards a too easy "pragmatic" view of the matter, according to which a pejorative doesn't touch or is totally independent of what is said and only pertains to the level of implicatures or presuppositions. On the contrary, Eva claims that the use of a pejorative cannot be reduced to something always independent of the assertive content, and that the use of pejoratives may pertain to the truth of the matter, given that it predicates something false of the class to which it refers. Therefore, she would be classified as belonging to the "semantic stance" proposed for instance by Hom (2008, 2010, 2012). According to the semantic stance, the

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21 derogatory content is part of the meaning of the pejorative (e.g. “nig-
 22 ger” *means* something like “black and despicable because of it”), and
 23 therefore a sentence containing a slur attributes an empty property to
 24 the individual in question (Picardi 2006: 72), making the sentence either
 25 false or deprived of truth value. Although she claims that the deroga-
 26 tive aspect of pejoratives is “part of a word’s literal meaning”, I think the
 27 morale of her papers points towards a wider view on the role of pejora-
 28 tives than the semantic one. I will follow Eva’s analysis of multi-proposi-
 29 tion view (§1), her attempt to make derogative terms impinge on truth
 30 conditions (§2), her reaction of Tim Williamson’s criticism of Michael
 31 Dummett (§3), her dubious attitude towards a presuppositional analysis
 32 (§4) and eventually, in (§5), I conclude with a solution that seems to
 33 prompt from her discontent with most answers to the problem of derog-
 34 atory terms.

35 2 SENSE, TONE AND ACCOMPANYING THOUGHTS: 36 A MULTIPLE PROPOSITIONS ANALYSIS

37 In order to distinguish what a pejorative expression add to what is said,
 38 Kaplan (1999) distinguishes *descriptives* and *expressives*: the first *describe*
 39 what is or is not the case; the second *display* what is or is not the case
 40 under a certain perspective or attitude (two expressions may have the
 41 same information content and different expressive content). According
 42 to Kaplan himself, this distinction is not so distant from the Fregean
 43 analysis on the different contribution to content made by sense and tone.
 44 Picardi (2006, 2007) discusses the Fregean distinction in relation to the
 45 use of derogatory words. Frege considered tone or colouring as of prag-
 46 matic significance and not pertaining to the truth-conditional content
 47 of an assertion (the assertoric content). Frege’s distinction antedates the
 48 distinction made by Paul Grice between what is said (truth-conditional
 49 meaning) and what is meant (conventional or conversational implica-
 50 tures), as Picardi (2001) was one of the first to remark. A standard exam-
 51 ple is given in Frege (1897) analysing the difference between:

- 52 1. “That dog howled the whole night”
- 53 2. “That cur howled the whole night”

54 According to Frege, the two sentences express the same truth-con-
 55 ditional content: if the first is true, then the second also is true. Frege





56 claims that (2), although expressing the disapproval of the speaker, can-
 57 not be false if (1) is true. In fact, if we thought that the aversion of the
 58 speaker was *part* of the content, the sentence should be analysed as a
 59 conjunction of (1) “that dog howled the whole night” and something
 60 like (3) “all dogs are despicable and ugly”. Assuming that (3) is false,
 61 the conjunction of (1) and (3) would be false. Therefore, we could
 62 not accept the truth of sentence (2) given that it is an expression of a
 63 complex proposition whose truth-value is false. But we cannot assume
 64 that (2) is false while (1) is true, given that they refer to the same state
 65 of affair. Supported by this argument, Frege distinguished between
 66 thoughts whose assertion is expressed and thoughts that are not
 67 expressed, but only hinted at or “suggested”, in order to influence the
 68 audience. Suggesting something using a particular piece of the lexicon to
 69 refer to an individual does not concern the problem of truth and belongs
 70 to the realm of colouring or tone, which pertains to pragmatic aspects of
 71 language (Frege 1879, 1897, §3). The solution to the analysis of pejo-
 72 ratives seems straightforward: conveying something suggested and not
 73 explicitly asserted, a sentence with a pejorative does not concern what is
 74 said, but what is meant, or the conventional implicature. Picardi is not
 75 happy with this solution and tries different ways to go beyond it.

76 First of all, Picardi criticises Frege for assuming too easily that “dog”
 77 and “cur” are coreferential. If so, the two terms should require substitut-
 78 ability *salva veritate*, but there are counter examples:

79 To his neighbor’s utterance ‘That cur howled all night’, the owner of the
 80 dog may retorts, ‘That dog is not a cur’, but plainly he is not asserting
 81 that his dog is not a dog. Possibly, all curs are dogs, but not all dogs are
 82 curs. All that Frege is entitled to say is that there are contexts of utterance
 83 in which the difference in meaning between “cur” and “dog” makes no
 84 difference to truth-conditions of what is said, whereas there are other con-
 85 texts in which the difference is salient. (Picardi 2006: 62)

86 The main claim given by this example is that we cannot take it for
 87 granted that a neutral term and a pejorative have always the same exten-
 88 sion. However the disagreement between two speakers here does not
 89 grant the conclusion; in fact the two expressions (the neutral one and the
 90 defogative one) have the same extension in the mind of the dog hater,
 91 and when they are used to refer, the reference is normally successful
 92 because the interlocutor easily gets what the speaker has in mind. Saying





93 that it is false that all dogs are curs is an expression of disagreement on
 94 the different uses of the words, not on the factual truth of the assertion
 95 of the speaker (whether the animal—in whichever way you want to refer
 96 to it—howled all night). It seems to me therefore that this argument is
 97 not strong enough to avoid the conclusion that assertions containing
 98 pejoratives have the same truth-conditional content than assertions with
 99 neutral terms, insofar the pejoratives are used to refer and are under-
 100 stood as such.

101 What about a multi propositional analysis? Relying on a long tradi-
 102 tion of research (Kent Bach, Robyn Carston, Francois Recanati), Picardi
 103 claims that the difference between “what is said” and “what is conven-
 104 tionally implicated” is not sharp enough to decide without doubts when
 105 something belongs to the content of an assertion and when it does not,
 106 given that the choice may depend on the *point* of the assertion. A pos-
 107 sible solution might be to translate the sentence (2) with an explicature
 108 (or a free enrichment), as:

- 109 4. “That dog, which is despicable and ugly because of it, howled all
 110 night”.

111 With this peculiar rendering, we might answer to the Fregean strategy
 112 for which it is counterintuitive to take (2) as false considered as a con-
 113 junction (“that dog howled *and* all dogs are despicable and ugly”). In
 114 fact, with (4) interpreted as an explicature of (2) we would really have a
 115 different proposition from (1) and we may admit—in this case—that the
 116 truth of the content of the main assertion (that the dog howled all night)
 117 is affected by the truth-value of the relative clause. This might be a possi-
 118 ble “multi-propositional” solution of the relevance of pejoratives to what
 119 is said.

120 We may claim **therefore** that the use of the pejorative is intended to
 121 imply that the fact that dogs are despicable is a *reason* or a cause why
 122 they howl all night or vice versa. This last point seems the best way to
 123 explain Picardi’s criticism of Kaplan’s analysis of Frege’s accompanying
 124 thoughts (*Nebengedanke*) with which she shares much, but not all. The
 125 discussion starts with Frege’s example:

- 126 5. “Napoleon, who recognized the danger to his right flank, person-
 127 ally led his guards against the enemy position”





128 Picardi remarks that Frege realizes that “the clause expresses more
129 through its connection with another than it does in isolation” (Frege
130 1892: 47). A relative clause cannot be represented always with the same **AQ2**
131 syntactic form. We have different ways to compose an accompanying
132 thought expressed by a relative clause, and while some of them make it
133 independent of the whole, **other** really affect what is said with the com-
134 posed sentence. In the case under discussion, Picardi suggests that what
135 is said may be conceived as inserting a third thought, that is

136 6. “the recognition of the danger is a reason why Napoleon led his
137 attack”.

138 In this case, it becomes apparent that the accompanying thought may be
139 part of what is said, given that it impinges on the truth-condition of the
140 composed sentence. Picardi really makes a case about that. The conclu-
141 sion is that a pejorative may be treated as prompting a further proposi-
142 tion that cannot be conceived just as a conventional implicature, but as
143 an explicature—that is part of what is said—presenting a point, such as
144 individuating the reason explaining the content of the main clause: see-
145 ing the danger of his side is a reason for Napoleon to attack, or being
146 ugly and despicable is a cause for the dog to howl all night—maybe
147 because despicable animals just do that.

148 Although this is a possible analysis of pejoratives that makes justice
149 of the idea that an assertion containing a pejorative may be just false,
150 Picardi eventually rejects it. In fact she claims that the idea of a *specific*
151 completion of a sentence because of a pejorative is not sound; following
152 Sainsbury (2001), she claims that what is relevant with a sentence with
153 expressive content is its *lacking of specificity*, and therefore the sentence
154 “should not be construed as directed to an elliptical proposition that
155 awaits to be spelled out in full” (Picardi 2006: 54).

156 3 DO PEJORATIVE REALLY IMPINGE ON TRUTH CONDITIONS?

157 Without the help of explicatures or free enrichment, however, it becomes
158 difficult to claim that pejoratives pertain to the assertoric content, to
159 what is said. Yet Eva, criticising Kaplan’s too sharp separation between
160 expressives and descriptives, attacks the rendering of this distinction
161 made by Potts (2005, 2008), who considers expressives as conventional **AQ3**
162 implicatures. According to Potts the expressive meaning of a lexical item





163 is *independent* of its descriptive meaning and therefore plays no role in
 164 determining the truth conditions. The main point of disagreement with
 165 the above distinction concerns the claim of *independence* of the expres-
 166 sive content. Eva's criticism of the idea of independence of expressives
 167 works on a basic question:

168 How can we consider the *correctness* of a reported speech in case the origi-
 169 nal speech contained a pejorative?

170 At first sight, reporting an utterance with a pejorative like “that cur
 171 howled all night”, a lover of dogs would probably make a report of the
 172 kind: “*x* said that that dog howled all night”, abstaining to use the pejo-
 173 rative term, but still thinking to have made a correct report of what hap-
 174 pened, preserving at least the truth of the matter. But not everybody
 175 would agree of the correctness of the report. Eva refers to Bach (1999) **AQ4**
 176 whose argument for claiming that conventional implicatures belong to
 177 what is said is that they fail the indirect speech test; if you report John's
 178 having said “Mary is pretty *but* intelligent” as “John said that Mary is
 179 pretty *and* intelligent”, Bach doubts that you have made a correct
 180 report. In the reported speech we should make it clear that the speaker
 181 intended a contraposition between the first and the second property. We
 182 should have an enriched proposition that could make explicit the content
 183 of the contrast. We have seen however that this is not the path followed
 184 by Eva. Which means are still available to fight a analysis of pejoratives
 185 based on the idea of conventional implicature?

186 Instead of following the multi-propositional analysis, Eva pinpoints
 187 another possible problem: the relevance of what is the “at-issue” content
 188 or the question under discussion (QUD). On this point she makes an
 189 example purporting to show the difficulty of sharply separating the asser-
 190 toric content from the implicated content:

191 Whether my leaving out this piece of information renders my report wrong
 192 or simply inaccurate depends on what was the main point of the utter-
 193 ance on the given occasion. And this, in its turn, depends on the audience
 194 I am addressing and on the focus of the conversation: in the course of an
 195 investigation that aims at discovering the culprit of evil deeds against dogs
 196 in a certain neighbourhood it may be useful to give a literal report of what
 197 the people involved say concerning dogs. In a different context, the report
 198 may be less accurate, if, for instance, our interlocutor simply wants to find
 199 out what a notoriously nagging neighbour was complaining about.



200 This is an ingenious effort to defend the claim that pejoratives enter
 201 the question of truth. But it seems to me that here we have two ques-
 202 tions: one question concerns the facts described by the report, another
 203 question concerns the facts concerning the psychology of the speaker:
 204 if we are looking for a devious assassin of dogs, reporting the specific
 205 lexical item impinges on the latter. We might have evidence, although
 206 inconclusive, of the speaker's tendency to perform crimes against dogs.
 207 Here, therefore, a literal report may be of fundamental importance to
 208 denounce the speaker. However, again, derogatory conceptualizations
 209 do not change the "strict" truth-conditional content of a description
 210 of a state of affairs. In fact, in this case, the truth evaluation concerns
 211 (the fact of) which *words* the speaker used, not which *facts* have been
 212 reported about the behavior of dogs.

213 In fact, "that cur" is a complex demonstrative, whose *main* role in the
 214 sentence is the identification of the referent; we may think that it pre-
 215 sents the referent in a wrong way and, from this perspective, is not too
 216 dissimilar to a misdescription. A speaker may make a referential use of an
 217 inaccurate definite description assuming the hearer may understand the
 218 intended referent although the description is false of it, or at least defect-
 219 ive (see also Penco [2010](#), [2017](#)). From the point of view of truth condi-
 220 tions, both misdescriptions and pejoratives may be considered defective
 221 but still able to make the hearer correctly understand the referential
 222 intentions.

223 Picardi ([2006](#): 67) is well aware of the problem, and she refers to
 224 Donnellan on this point. Her use of the similarity with Donnellan's cases
 225 helps to point out the *difference* between the case of misdescriptions and
 226 the case of pejoratives. In case of misdescriptions like "the man drinking
 227 champagne" (while he is drinking mineral water), there is no harm in
 228 using a defective or inaccurate or wrong definite description if your refer-
 229 ential intentions are understood. On the contrary this does not happen
 230 with pejoratives. While with misdescriptions we are in front of a factual
 231 mistake, whose correction is easy to accept ("the person you are refer-
 232 ring is not drinking champagne but mineral water"), in front of a derog-
 233 atory term you cannot simply change the term and be happy, because you
 234 are facing a strong disagreement: what is wrong from the point of view
 235 of dog lovers, may be strongly believed by the dog hater, who would
 236 not recede from his conceptualization of that class (dogs are despicable
 237 because of being dogs and blacks are inferior because of being black).
 238 Besides, given certain circumstances, I may easily report what a speaker



AQ5



239 said using the same misdescription to make myself understood, but this is
 240 not so with pejoratives. In fact I might feel uncomfortable using a pejo-
 241 rative term, on whose grounds and consequences I don't agree. But this
 242 does not mean that I don't *understand* what the speaker said and I have
 243 to distinguish between the facts of the matter described and the point of
 244 view and attitude of the speaker.

245 As Dummett (2007: 527) says, commenting of Picardi's paper, "the
 246 use of a pejorative expression certainly cannot be said to affect the truth-
 247 value of an utterance; it affects its property. But, for the same reason, it
 248 also cannot simply be explained as affecting the tone of the utterance,
 249 or as attaching an implicature to it." The offensive character of certain
 250 terms, Dummett claims, should be accounted for by "the license they
 251 give their user to draw inappropriate consequences". In conclusion, we
 252 cannot use the test of reported speech to claim that pejorative impinge
 253 on the truth of the matter, although we may still take our awareness on
 254 "the tacit commitments we would undertake in accepting a certain way
 255 of referring to people or actions" as a ground to refuse to endorse an
 256 assertion (Picardi 2007: 507).

257 The question seems to shift from the truth-value of an assertion con-
 258 cerning a state of affair (what did the dog do during the night?) to the
 259 justifications and consequences of assertions containing a pejorative. If
 260 truth conditions are not affected, pejoratives certainly affect assertibility
 261 conditions. Different lexical items are connected with different **justifi-**
 262 **cation** and consequences, and using them obliges us to explain why we
 263 have used them and commits us to the consequences of what they mean.
 264 We are entering another kind of problem, that touches upon the mean-
 265 ing of pejoratives: while it seems that truth conditions are affected only
 266 by the *referents* of pejoratives, assertibility conditions may be affected by
 267 their *meanings*. On the meaning of pejoratives, Picardi is very near to
 268 Dummett's classical analysis and contrasts Williamson's criticism of this
 269 analysis.

270 4 PEJORATIVES AS DEALING WITH TRUTH/ASSERTIBILITY 271 CONDITIONS

272 Picardi (2006, 2007) looks back at Dummett's discussion on the logic
 273 of pejoratives. Dummett was interested in the logical role of pejoratives
 274 and in the logical motivations to reject their use. His claim was clear and



275 simple: a pejorative like “Boche”—used to refer to Germans implying
 276 that Germans are more prone to cruelty than other Europeans—would
 277 produce a non conservative extension of the language where the word
 278 was not present: the use of “Boche” would permit inferences and con-
 279 clusions that would not be permitted in the language missing the pejora-
 280 tive (Dummett 1981: 454).

281 Dummett gives Introduction rules and Elimination rules for the term
 282 and shows how they permit conclusions impossible to be derived without
 283 the term. The Introduction Rule for “Boche” (or its condition of appli-
 284 cation) would simply be something like

285 x is German
 286

 287 x is Boche

288 But the consequences of application embed the following inference
 289 (that might be considered the Elimination rule for “Boche”):

290 x is Boche
 291

 292 x is more prone to cruelty than other Europeans

293 Now, if we accept the Introduction and Elimination rules for *Boche*
 294 we should derive something of the following: Angela Merkel is German
 295 therefore is *Boche*, and if Angela Merkel is *Boche*, therefore, she is more
 296 prone to cruelty than other Europeans. We could not **to** derive this con-
 297 clusion from our lexicon only if, following the elegant attitude of Oscar
 298 Wilde, we did not include the lexical item “Boche” in our dictionary.

299 Williamson launches an attack on radical inferentialism and defends
 300 a radical referentialist framework (although he recognizes that there
 301 are intermediary positions that might escape his criticism). He criticizes
 302 Boghossian (2003: 241–42) according to whom “plausibly, a thinker
 303 possesses the concept *Boche* just in case he is willing to infer according to
 304 [Dummett’s rules]”, with the following short argument:

305 Since understanding the word ‘Boche’ (with its present meaning) is pre-
 306 sumably sufficient (although not necessary) for having the concept that
 307 ‘Boche’ expresses, it follows that a willingness or disposition to reason
 308 according to Dummett’s rules is equally unnecessary for having that con-
 309 cept. (Williamson 2009: 8–9)





310 This claim is correct, and maybe Boghossian went a bit too far. Let us
 311 assume that understanding a concept is understanding its introduction
 312 and elimination rules. Mastering those rules is not to be identified with
 313 willingness to follow them, but with an implicit knowledge of them.
 314 Understanding the meaning is understanding what it is or *what it would*
 315 *be using* that inference, even without explicitly doing so or even reject-
 316 ing to endorse it. Williamson may accept that, but then—he would
 317 ask—which is the difference between an inferentialist and a referentialist
 318 account of understanding as a “practical” ability if we cut off the actual
 319 disposition to reason according to the rules? The answer is that, although
 320 there is no difference in “practical” ability, inferentialists are not content
 321 of getting the referent right: they require making the inferential connec-
 322 tions explicit. Explicitly rejecting to use a term is exactly the point of the
 323 difference between a referentialist and an inferentialist view. You refuse
 324 to use a term because you reject the possible consequences of its use;
 325 referential rules on the other hand just point out that the reference of
 326 “German” is the same of the reference of “Boche”; the two classes are
 327 the same class:

328 differences between ‘Boche’ and ‘German’ apparently play no role in
 329 determining reference, and so make no difference to the way in which the
 330 terms contribute to the truth-conditions of sentences in which they occur,
 331 a Fregean might even count ‘Boche’ and ‘German’ as having the same
 332 sense. Frege himself gives just such an account of another pejorative term
 333 (1979: 140): ‘cur’ has the same sense and reference as ‘dog’ but a different
 334 tone. (122)



335 Here we are. Again on Frege, and our examples of pejoratives for
 336 “dogs”! As we have seen, the main role of pejoratives does not concern
 337 just the role of reference fixing, as in case of definite descriptions, but
 338 their role in suggesting inferences to be accepted (conventional impli-
 339 catures). On this point, Williamson himself concedes the idea that con-
 340 ventional implicatures (something derivable and therefore linked to an
 341 inferential structure) of expressions like “Boche” are “part of their mean-
 342 ing in a broad sense of meaning”. But, if we accept an idea of (broad)
 343 meaning as dealing with the inferences connected with an expression,
 344 then Dummett’s proposal is not incompatible with a view of pejorative as
 345 triggering a conventional implicature or a presupposition.



346 A way to interpret Dummett's treatment of pejoratives is then to con-
 347 sider it as a clarification of the rules behind what is expressed and not
 348 stated, rules that should be followed if one accepts the conventional
 349 implicature connected with the use of the pejorative. Accepting a pejo-
 350 rative, we accept a network of inferences, a set of beliefs that the pejo-
 351 rative brings with it. Using an assertion with a pejorative is not only saying
 352 something true with a bad psychological surrounding: it is accepting the
 353 consequences connected to the inferential meaning of the expression.
 354 We are back to the conclusion of the previous discussion: we *understand*
 355 the intended referents of singular terms or complex demonstratives like
 356 "that dog" or "that cur", and we understand to which classes predicates
 357 like "German" or "Boche" refer; although sentences containing them
 358 may have, by substitution of coreferentials, the same truth conditions,
 359 they certainly haven't the same assertibility conditions; in fact, to have
 360 the same assertibility conditions they should also have the same ground
 361 for justification, and we may claim, from our perspective, that nobody
 362 is justified to use "cur" or "Boche" given that those terms imply conse-
 363 quences that we disagree about.

364 5 PROBLEMS OF PEJORATIVES AS PRESUPPOSITION TRIGGERS

365 If a conventional implicature can be considered part of the "broad"
 366 meaning of an expression, then it seems that Picardi (2007: 508) her-
 367 self makes a too strong contrast between "the decision to construe the
 368 explicit derogatory ingredient as a conventional implicature" on one
 369 hand and the idea of construing the derogatory ingredient "as consti-
 370 tutive of word meaning" on the other. The two aspects are not antago-
 371 nist: considering the derogatory ingredient as conventional implicature
 372 implies that its broad meaning is connected with the inferences that are
 373 derivable by its use and are suggested as "calculable" implicature.

374 However, speaking of inferences syntactically plugged into the lexi-
 375 con, conventional implicatures may not be the best solution for treating
 376 pejoratives. The other solution is treating them as triggering presup-
 377 positions. Actually conventional implicatures pass the S-Family test of
 378 presuppositions: they stand also when an assertion is made in negative,
 379 interrogative and modal form ("that cur didn't howl all night", "did that
 380 cur howl all night?", "that cur might have howled all night").

381 Let us then see what happens when treating pejoratives as presuppo-
 382 sition triggers (for a defence of a presuppositional account see Schlenker





383 2007; Macià 2014; Cepollaro 2015). Under this perspective, the use of
 384 a pejorative presupposes the set of beliefs that the pejorative intends to
 385 implicate. This should be coherent with the classical view of presuppo-
 386 sitions for which an utterance of a sentence is *appropriate* if the presup-
 387 position is shared by the participants of a conversation (Stalnaker 1974).
 388 We may consider the use of pejorative not appropriate if we do not share
 389 the presupposition; therefore, as Picardi (2007: 507) claims “we may
 390 abstain from accepting a statement made by others because we are aware
 391 of the tacit commitments we would undertake in accepting a certain way
 392 of referring to people or actions”.

393 This claim is perfectly adequate to a presuppositional analysis, and it
 394 seems to me that presuppositional analysis and the difference between
 395 truth conditions and assertibility conditions come hand in hand; abstain-
 396 ing from endorsing a statement means rejecting the justifications or the
 397 intended background for its assertion.

398 A presentation of a presuppositional analysis might also be framed in
 399 Kaplan’s terminology. Kaplan (1999) was interested in the informational
 400 content that can be derived by expressives; in doing so he attempted
 401 to clarify the rules of correctness of expressives and the correspond-
 402 ence of informational content given by expressives and by descriptions:
 403 the same semantic information can be given with an expressive mode
 404 (ouch, oops, hurray) or with a descriptive mode (“I am in pain” or “I
 405 have just observed a minor mishap” or “I am in state of joyful elation”).
 406 Kaplan describes the problem of giving the rules for correct application
 407 of expressives. And we might say that the felicity condition of the use of
 408 a pejorative is that (1) the person actually believes the information con-
 409 tent expressed by the pejorative and (2) has the correct attitude or emo-
 410 tion towards the class described by the pejorative. Utterances of “that
 411 Boche run away” or “that cur howled all night” are appropriate only if
 412 the speaker really believes that Germans are cruel as such or that dogs are
 413 despicable and ugly as such and has the appropriate emotion of distaste
 414 or dislike (see also Carpintero 2017). This is what presuppositional anal-
 415 ysis amounts to.

416 However, the presuppositional analysis of pejoratives leaves unan-
 417 swered some questions like the following:

- 418 1. In using a slur in a re-appropriation case, people do not share the
 419 prejudice (the belief) attached to the term, yet it seems that their
 420 use is appropriate.



- 421 2. When people who have racist prejudices use the derogatory term
 422 we should say that their use is perfectly “appropriate” because
 423 they share the beliefs supporting that use, yet it sounds awkward,
 424 although correct for the theory, to say that the uses of derogatory
 425 terms are somehow “appropriate”.
- 426 3. when a presupposition is expressed it ceases to be a presupposition
 427 and it is normally accepted while the presupposed content of a slur
 428 is typically a matter of disagreement when explicitly stated.

429 Leaving (1) and (2) to the reader, let us see the problem with (3).
 430 Accommodation (the process through which people accept presupposi-
 431 tions that do not belong to the common ground) is not as normal as it
 432 is in standard cases (where, as Lewis says, presuppositions “spring into
 433 existence making what you say acceptable after all”). A non-xenophobe,
 434 or a non-racist, or a friend of dogs, would not easily accommodate the
 435 presupposition in a sentence that uses a pejorative. He would probably
 436 say, “Hey, wait a moment! Do you think that Germans are more prone
 437 to cruelty than other Europeans? It is not true” or “hey wait a moment!
 438 Do you think that all dogs are despicable? That’s false”. The problem
 439 arises because the presupposition triggered by a pejorative represents a
 440 content on which there may be very strong disagreement.

441 The main defect of presuppositional analysis is that it leaves something
 442 out; offensive or derogatory terms does not only pertain to the *content*
 443 of their presuppositions (and eventually the emotional attitude going
 444 with it); they also involve actions and commitments undertaken in their
 445 use.

446 6 PEJORATIVES AS HIGHER ORDER UTTERANCE MODIFIERS

447 Eva makes a remark on Frege’s view of the derogatory ingredient
 448 attached to the word “cur”:

449 [according to Frege] in the given context the choice of “cur” instead of
 450 “dog” has the value of an exclamation, and, one may add, could be ren-
 451 dered syntactically by means of an exclamation mark, much as assertoric
 452 force is rendered by means of a vertical stroke. Frege held that assertoric
 453 force only shows itself with the help of a suitable notation, but is not
 454 located in any part of speech in particular. Its scope is the whole utter-
 455 ance, not a particular segment of it. The function of an interjection mark



456 encapsulated, as it were, into the meaning of “cur” in the specific utter-
 457 ance is to disclose the attitude of the speaker towards the matter at issue.
 458 It presents the dog as ugly or unpleasant from the speaker’s perspective;
 459 however, as Frege remarks, the dog itself may very well be a handsome
 460 representative of its race. But this circumstance does not render the use of
 461 the interjection incorrect, for in uttering as he did, the speaker might have
 462 wished to disclose his attitude of dislike or fear of dogs in general, not of
 463 this dog in particular. (Picardi 2006: 62–63)

464 Eva here refers also to Kaplan, who distinguishes between “truth *simplic-*
 465 *iter*” and “truth with an attitude”, but—as we have seen—she does not
 466 agree to treat the expressive content merely as something propositional:
 467 “tone need not be expressible by means of *a*, let alone *one* specific, full-
 468 fledged proposition” (Picardi 2007: 503). But which kind of non-proposi-
 469 tional aspect can be conveyed by a derogatory expression?

470 Eva attributes the main reason for accepting the Fregean sugges-
 471 tion of colouring as higher order utterance modifier to the fact that it
 472 detaches the notion of colouring from mere psychological significance.²
 473 A pejorative may impinge on the level of speech acts, on their felicity
 474 conditions or justification (or assertibility) conditions. This is a central
 475 point to be clarified.

476 Eva oscillates between two alternatives often connected: a multi-prop-
 477 ositional account and a higher order account, both of which she tends
 478 to disregard. But I think she has been too quick with disregarding the
 479 idea of higher-order account, maybe because too strictly connected with
 480 the Gricean view. Speaking of higher order account we typically tend
 481 to consider the contribution of some words (expressions like “but” or
 482 pejoratives) as *parasitic* on a ground floor or central speech act (Grice
 483 1989: 361–62).³ But the idea of higher order modifier is not exhausted
 484 by Grice’s view of implicatures (nor by the presuppositional account).
 485 An alternative view may be defined for treating pejoratives as higher
 486 order modifiers that are not just parasitic aspects. Still keeping pejoratives
 487 as connected with a set of inferences (presupposed or implicated),
 488 Carpintero (2015, 2017) tries to give them a further role in the con-
 489 text of dialogue. The novel point that Carpintero makes it *where* to insert
 490 the role of pejorative in the dialogue: not only as part of the content
 491 or as presupposed propositions, but as constraints on the context of dia-
 492 logue. The main consequence of accepting derogatory expressions is
 493 the implicit acceptance of their presuppositional content, given by tacit



494 accommodation. Tacit accommodation implies tacit undertaking of a
495 network of inferences and commitment to the consequences.

496 The main point made by Carpintero is, therefore, that common
497 ground cannot be defined only in terms of shared propositions, but also
498 in terms of different commitments towards those propositions; that's
499 why we feel so uncomfortable when we are included in a conversa-
500 tion where people use pejoratives on whose stereotypical inferences we
501 strongly disagree. Already Stalnaker claimed that we have different atti-
502 tudes towards the contents of the common ground (see Domaneschi
503 et al. 2014). But Carpintero's point is stronger and can be summarised
504 by the claim that our common ground is made not only of propositions
505 and *propositional* attitudes but it also concerns attitudes linked to *illocu-*
506 *tionary* forces, which is a further level of pragmatic commitment.

AQ7



507 Saying that the use of pejorative is linked to illocutionary force is a
508 fundamental step, shared by many others. Langton (1993, 2012) calls
509 "speech acts of subordination" those speech acts used to classify a tar-
510 get class as inferior, legitimate discrimination and deprive it of rights.
511 But her examples are basically explicit acts of subordination like "Blacks
512 are not permitted to vote", where the act is a kind of "verdictive" and
513 the speaker has authority to do that because he is in a social position
514 that allows him to perform the act. Besides, in case the speaker has no
515 authority, the accommodation of the presupposition (given by the failure
516 to question the speaker) would confer authority to the speaker herself, as
517 suggested by Maitra (2012) (McGowan 2004, 2009 speaks of "conversa-
518 tional" exercitives that, differently from Austin's, do not require uptake
519 from the hearers).

AQ8

520 However most of the examples of this literature concern *explicit*
521 and *direct* acts of subordination (like the above quoted "Blacks are not
522 permitted to vote"), or hate speech that is characterised, among other
523 things, by being *directly* addressed to the individuals whom they insult
524 (see also Hornsby 2001: 297). On the contrary our examples (follow-
525 ing Frege's example with "cur") concern the use of derogative words
526 in descriptions of facts or in questions, where the pejorative is part of a
527 descriptive content of a phrase (complex demonstratives, definite descrip-
528 tions) whose main function is to pick a referent. How to describe the
529 subtler way in which the insertion of a pejorative in a normal description
530 of facts changes—to use Lewis' terminology—the conversational score?



531 A first solution is to think of an *indirect speech act*: by putting a
532 *question* such as "do you know what time is it?" I make a *request*; by



533 *describing* a possible situation such as “I will not miss your date” I am
 534 making a *promise*. Following the analogy, we may say that by *describ-*
 535 *ing* a situation with “that Boche run away”, or asking “have you seen
 536 that Boche running away?” I hereby *promote* discrimination and *legiti-*
 537 *mize* behaviour of discrimination. **We may think that** the preparatory
 538 condition is not satisfied. If asked: “can you tell me the time?” I may
 539 answer: “Sorry, I have no watch”, making it clear that the preparatory
 540 condition of the request is not satisfied. Analogously, if asked: “have you
 541 seen a nigger running away?” I may answer: “Sorry, for me there are no
 542 nigger”, because the preparatory condition **to** the act of **subordination**
 543 requires that black people are inferior as such. But the analogy is not so
 544 clear: an indirect speech act is typically a speech act of a kind that is given
 545 by a speech act of a different kind. By a question we make a request,
 546 by a description we make a promise; in case of assertions or questions
 547 containing a derogatory term we are still making an assertion or a ques-
 548 tion. Saying: “hey, wait a moment; he run away, but he is not a nigger”
 549 (as with rejecting a presupposition), we correctly answer the main speech
 550 act; while we cannot say to a question like “do you know the time”
 551 something like, “yes, we do, but unfortunately I have no watch”. The
 552 strategy of indirect speech act after all seems not to be a viable analysis.

553 A second possible answer, that seems to be more coherent with the
 554 main trend in contemporary discussion, is that speech acts with derog-
 555 atory terms contain a peculiar *adjunctive force*: with the same utterance,
 556 we make two kinds of speech acts at the same time (Kissine 2013: 197):
 557 assertions, questions, commands, and other speech acts can be under-
 558 stood as such, and at the same time, when containing a derogatory term,
 559 they are *at the same time* acts of “subordination”. And also, we have two
 560 contents: the (description of the) objective state of affairs (a person who
 561 runs away) and the (promotion of a) derogatory viewpoint concerning
 562 the individual and the group they belong to. Langton (2017) presented
 563 a similar idea at the ECAP Conference in Munich, speaking of “Blocking
 564 as Counter-speech” (e.g. you may assert something normal and at the
 565 same time, through a presuppositional trigger, convey something else
 566 like in “Even John could win!”).⁴ We may conclude that speech acts that
 567 contain derogatory terms (or other subtle means to give a diminishing
 568 perspective on the target) promote and legitimize subordination or other
 569 negative attitudes towards the referent class. And, most of the time,⁵ the
 570 subordination is derived by the use of a predicate that is false of the class





571 in question, for instance, because “the complex properties indicated by
572 racist words are not instantiated” (Picardi 2006: 68).

573 Can we be content in saying that with pejoratives we make two speech
574 acts at the same time? The idea of a speech act of subordination is still a
575 pointer towards an idea to be refined, and we might distinguish levels of
576 subordination, and also other kinds of acts depending on different kinds
577 of pejoratives or on different targets or different social roles (on which
578 see e.g. Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt 2017). The essential feature, besides the
579 actual contempt or disregard of the target, is normally taken to be that in
580 using a pejorative we act to promote and legitimize subordination. What
581 is not yet clear is *how* this promotion is realised.

AQ10

582 My suggestion is that who intentionally⁶ uses derogatory terms looks
583 for company, for sharing the prejudice and avoiding feeling alone. His
584 speech act constitutes a *call for joint responsibility*, asking for sharing
585 an attitude towards the derogatory content, indirectly creating a con-
586 text of commitment to certain behaviour against the target. This is why
587 rejecting to endorse an assertion or answering a question containing a
588 pejorative is the fundamental reaction and avoids the trick of the use of
589 derogatory terms; on the one hand it seems that the racist (or the dog
590 hater) is just stating some facts and therefore we are ready to accept or
591 reject the truth of the matter; but in stating some facts with a certain ter-
592 minology the racist (or the dog hater) is desperately asking for approval
593 of his behaviour and his way of life, and for sharing his positive endeav-
594 our to promote this behaviour and way of life.

595 Summarizing, the use of a derogatory term in a normal speech act
596 gives the act a new feature, besides promoting discrimination or sub-
597 ordination: it is a call for joint responsibility that commits co-conversa-
598 tionalists to *participate* in the actual subordination and deprecation of
599 the individuals or classes defined with a pejorative. Therefore, the use
600 of pejoratives is not just a question of informational content, or of tacit
601 presuppositions, but it is promotion and legitimization of that content
602 through tacit joint acceptance. In accepting a presuppositional content
603 we ourselves turn to be *promoters of* that content, and not only making *as*
604 *if* we believe it.

605 This seems to me a fairly acceptable rendering of the central core
606 of Eva’s analysis concerning the relationship between assertion and
607 endorsement:



608 I may refuse to endorse an assertion because its wording suggests a picture
609 of reality that I do not share. (Picardi 2006: 62)

AQ11

610 The central point of the refusal to endorse is rejecting the call for joint
611 responsibility and leaving the racist alone. And probably, under this
612 “illocutionary” view, we are allowed to say something stronger: the
613 use of words not only “suggests” a picture of reality, but also actually
614 “promotes” it.

615 7 SUMMARY

616 The connection between the speech act and the set of inferences con-
617 nected (either because of implicatures or because of presuppositions)
618 with the pejorative expression builds up a new challenging problem on
619 the relationship between truth conditions and assertibility conditions,
620 and this seems to be the most relevant suggestion left by Eva’s paper.
621 Rejecting to endorse an assertion containing derogatory terms aims both
622 at preventing the derivations of other assertions whose content would
623 entail what we regard as false, and at preventing the promotion of what
624 we considered wrong attitudes towards the object of contempt.⁷





625 NOTES

- 626 1. A short summary of different perspective is given in Bianchi (2014),
627 Bianchi (2015) (also with reference to experimental approaches) and
628 Cepollaro (2015).
- 629 2. The main point is always to antagonize the *reductio* of the phenomenon
630 of tone to the subjective alone, as Picardi (2007: 500) insists: “Tone is as
631 much as conventional and objective feature of word meaning as sense is,
632 and Frege erred in confining it to the realm of psychological association”.
- 633 3. It is in his “Retrospective Epilog” included in Grice (1989), that Grice
634 speaks of “Lower order” and “Higher order” Speech acts.
- 635 4. Thanks to Laura Caponetto for suggesting this connection.
- 636 5. Apparently we do not need a pejorative for an act of subordination, as in
637 Langton’s example “Blacks are not permitted to vote”.
- 638 6. Or, at least, sharing the presuppositions connected with the derog-
639 atory terms. Some people may be unaware of the derogatory aspects of
640 a term, either by not having another “politically correct” term or just by
641 not knowing the derogatory aspect of a term in a context of a community.
642 Travelling abroad may put people at risk of being considered either racist
643 or simply unpolite just by ignorance.







644 7. I would like to thank Filippo Domaneschi for his suggestions on an early
 645 draft of this paper and Paolo Leonardi for his careful reading and further
 646 suggestions, which, unfortunately, I feel to have been unable to follow
 647 properly. A special thank to Laura Caponetto for pointing out some mis-
 648 takes and suggesting repair.





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