

Pejoratives and Relevance: Synchronic and Diachronic Issues

NENAD MIŠČEVIĆ

University of Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

The paper considers a possible relevantist treatment, in the spirit of Wilson and Sperber's work, of pejoratives and argues for three claims concerning them. On the level of synchronic issues it suggests that the negative content of pejoratives, at least in its minimal scope, is the normal part of their lexical meaning, and not a result of extra-semantic enrichment. It thus suggests an evaluative-content approach for the relevantist, in contrast to its neutral-content alternative. On the more general side, it suggests that the relevance theorist owes us a clear story about what kind of material is normally encoded. Concerning the issues of diachronic behavior of pejoratives, the paper suggests primarily the application of relevantist theory of irony, and secondarily some links with theory of metaphor. A relevantist theory of echoic use, and proposed for irony, can be used to understand the appropriation of pejoratives by their original target group, and the reversal of valence that goes with it. There is an interesting parallel between the echoing-cum-reversal processes Wilson and Sperber propose for irony and the repeating-and-reversing process typical of appropriation of pejoratives. Finally, a brief application of the relevantist understanding of metaphor is proposed as a tool for understanding the genealogy of pejoratives of figurative origin. The dynamics, history and development of pejoratives has not been systematically addressed by philosophical theories of pejoratives: a collaboration with relevance theory might prove a useful strategy.

Key words: Pejoratives, relevance, irony, metaphor, semantics, pragmatics.

1. Introduction

Let me start on a more personal note.¹ I have known Dan Sperber from Paris, at least since the early nineties, from visits to Jean Nicod institute. I had a very superficial knowledge of his (and Deirdre's) work, didn't even read *Relevance* from beginning to end. It has all changed with Dan's arrival in Budapest some five years ago. Since then we used to teach in the same, winter semester, I used to visit regularly his seminars and his encounters with local linguists and cognitive psychologists, and we had lots of time to discuss our work. I have learned enormously from all these encounters, and I am very happy we managed to have Dan in Rijeka and Dubrovnik. All this time I was curious about Dan's co-author, Deirdre Wilson. Finally, we had her in Dubrovnik as well, and this is a good reason for celebration.

In this paper I want to inquire about the relevance of the relevance theory for my favorite small area in philosophy of language, theory of pejoratives. To anticipate briefly, I end up showing that “relevance” is here a homological word: relevance theory has the property it talks about, and it is highly relevant to for the issues at hand. Let me first briefly introduce the topic of pejoratives.

In this paper we shall be considering bad epithets for ethnic, racial and gender groups, presumed social kinds, like “Nigger”, “Boche”, “fagot”. We can also call them “generic epithets” in a contrast to non-generic ones like “bastard”; we shall often mention the two groups in the same breadth. Our examples will be pejorative sentences like “Jack is a Nigger.” combining reference to a group (e.g. Afro-Americans and, in general, persons of African descent) with ascription of some negative properties (all this with sincere apologies for mentioning the offensive words). Their use normally expresses negative attitude, so one would expect that pejoratives carry negative content, both descriptive and prescriptive. Pejoratives have been an object of study since the pioneering work of Michael Dummett (1973), continued in the same spirit by Robert Brandom (1994). Nowadays the area is in the full development, with names like Robin Jeshion (e.g. 2013), Tim Williamson (2009), Christopher Hom (2010) and Ernie Lepore (with L. Anderson, 2013) among the prominent recent authors.

Let me note that, following Hom (2010), I shall distinguish derogation from offense. While the two phenomena are closely related, they are not reducible either one to the other. Derogation is a matter of use; by using a pejorative sentence the speaker is downgrading the target. Offense is what happens at the receiving end: the target, or a neutral member of the audience might have the psychological reaction of being offended. If someone says “John is not a Nigger”, he is not intentionally offending John, but is still derogating Afro-Americans. And many people, including Whites (Causasians), might be offended by the very use

¹ Thanks go to Dan Sperber, Deirdre Wilson, Michael Devitt, Dunja Jutronić, Martina Blečić and Julija Perhat.

of the term. In this paper I shall not talk about offense. When I mention “negative content” I mean primarily content that is derogatory.

Now the preview. The paper is organized around three topics. The first is synchronic, the other two diachronic. The first, occupying section 2, concerns the semantic status of the derogatory, negative material. Is it part of the meaning of pejorative, i.e. strictly semantic? Transposed into relevance theory, the question becomes one of its linguistic status: is it encoded, part of the litterary lexical meaning? Relevantists are friends of austerity, so we should concentrate upon the minimal negative material, something like “bad”, “despicable” (e.g. “Boche” would contain “German and therefore despicable”, or “...therefore bad”). Is this minimal negative content encoded? If not, the encoded meaning of “Boche” is just “German”, and everything else is inferred. A larger question looms in the background: What are the criteria that decide what is encoded?

The second topic concerns the diachronic issue at which I find relevance theory most useful. It is the reversal of valence of pejoratives. Let me start with a quote from Hughes and a meta-quote from Rushdie:

Salman Rushdie’s provocative novel *The Satanic Verses* (London: Penguin/Viking, 1988) contains the comment:

“To turn insults into strengths, Whigs, Tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn.” Rushdie then proceeds to give “our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary ... the Devil’s synonym: Mahound” (93). This was a xenophobic medieval name for Mahomet. (Hughes 2006: 382)

“Whig” was once a pejorative; its value then became reversed. Contemporary examples abound. Many theorists notice the phenomenon, but there is no clear account of it as yet. I think relevance theory might help, in particular Wilson and Sperber’s ideas about irony, and section III is dedicated to this topic.

The third and final topic are figurative pejoratives, in particular those originating from metaphores. Many pejoratives are such: “bitch” is a metaphor (from dogs to humans), “Hun” as well,² “cunt” a synecdo-

² “Hun”, derives from a belligerent speech by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1900; Kaiser enjoined his fellow countrymen to be like ancient Huns, merciless with the prisoners, and the British press made a scandal our of it. On http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/...ocument_id=755 one finds the following quote from the Kaiser, listed as the source of the pejorative:

“Should you encounter the enemy, he will be defeated! No quarter will be given! Prisoners will not be taken! Whoever falls into your hands is forfeited. Just as a thousand years ago the Huns under their King Attila made a name for themselves, one that even today makes them seem mighty in history and legend, may the name German be affirmed by you in such a way in China that no Chinese will ever again dare to look cross-eyed at a German.”

The German source quoted is listed as “Johannes Prenzler, ed., Die Reden Kaiser Wilhelms II. [The Speeches of Kaiser Wilhelm II]. 4 volumes. Leipzig, n.d., 2. pp. 209-12.,” and the following further info is listed: “Unofficial version of speech reprinted in Manfred Görtemaker, Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert. Entwicklungslinien [Germany in the 19th Century. Paths in Development]. Opladen 1996. Schriftenreihe der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, vol. 274, p. 357.

che (from part to the whole person, and then presumably from women to men), “Lime” and “Kraut” as well; in my native Croatian, “Ustaša” derives from the name of Croatian Nazis, and when used for all Croats it is a clear synecdoche; similarly “Četnik” for Serbs. The figurative origin is quite telling, for instance, about the unity of the transferred material: with “Hun” it is the negative characteristics (savagery, cruelty, aggressiveness), negative evaluation, expression of negative feelings, and the prescripton (they should be fought!). If the transferred material is so unitary, then the whole must be unitary as well; it reminds one of thick concepts in ethics, combining factual, evaluative, prescriptive and probably expressive dimension. However, before looking at consequence, we should understand the transfer; so, we need a theory of figurative broadening. In section 3.2, I try briefly to deploy the Wilson and Sperber’s theory of metaphorical inference, and apply it, also very briefly to the issue at hand.

The conclusion is optimistic: relevance theory can help our understanding of the diachronic behavior of pejoratives. Its proposals can be worked out within the theory, but they can also be exported into other approaches, and do some work outside of their native territory.

2. *The negative content: encoded or inferred?*

A crucial contrast concerning the semantic content within relevance theory is the contrast between being encoded, part of a lexical meaning and being inferred. Some inferences develop the logical form encoded by an utterance into a fully propositional form (explicatures), whereas others enrich it by non-explicit material (implicatures) (2012: 12—references with years only refer to the two books by Sperber and Wilson (1995 and 2012)). As we mentioned, the first question to be asked when it comes to a possible relevantist treatment of pejoratives concerns the status of the negative content. If a term is officially considered to be derogatory, it is plausible that it carries some fixed negative content with it. Not all agree; LePore and his collaborators are recent counter-examples (e.g. Anderson and LePore 2013). How would a relevantist treat the negative content? Why think it is part of encoded meaning?

Let me start with a pertinent quote, of two passages of *Relevance* in which Wilson and Sperber offer a sketch of a framework, and an interesting example. Here is the framework. It begins with a linguistic description determined by the grammar, which is considered to be quite universally valid. It then passes to semantics:

Second, this linguistic description yields a range of semantic representations, one for every sense of the sentence uttered. Each semantic representation is a schema, which must be completed and integrated into an assumption about the speaker’s informative intention, and can be as complex as the speaker cares to make it. Moreover, each schematic sense is generally quite different from all the others, and can be completed in quite different ways. (1995: 175)

It looks as if these semantic representations, associated with the lexic, are relatively stable. We now need an example of a word with bad content, and our authors offer one:

Consider utterance (1), for example:

(1) He's a bastard.

Let us assume that on the basis of a linguistic analysis of (1) and an assignment of contextually accessible referents, the speaker might be taken to be asserting any of (2a–d):

(2) (a) Peter is a nasty man.

(b) Bob is a nasty man.

(c) Peter is illegitimate.

(d) Bob is illegitimate. (1995:175)

It is (2)(a) and (2)(b) that are relevant here. They seem to pick up the negative meaning of "bastard", namely "a nasty man". To my ears the negative content of "bastard" is not more stable or better known than the negative content of "Nigger" and "bitch". If the first is there, part of the lexical meaning, the other two are there as well.

Prima facie, the bad assumptions are part of the meaning (in a wide sense of the term) of the pejorative. Are there obstacles to identifying the core bad assumptions about the targets of a given use of a pejorative P with the meaning of P? A popular but not super reliable test is the following question: suppose a person, A, does not know about these assumptions. Does she know what "P" means? Does a visitor who knows that "nigger" refers to Afro-Americans, but has no idea about the stereotype of Afro-Americans associated with "nigger" know the meaning of the term? Is it appropriate to tell her that you will teach her the shocking *meaning* of the term? My hunch is that it is.

Further, how does the non-native speaker find out the meaning of "bastard"? It is what you find in the ordinary dictionary. For pejoratives, most often you find some of the bad material in the dictionary, as a part of the lexical meaning.

Here is the entry for "bitch" in John Ayto: *The Oxford Dictionary of Slang*. It begins by listing the most general meaning, common to several bad words:

"An unpleasant or despicable female person."

And goes on to note:

"The majority of opprobrious epithets applied to women contain, or can contain, some suggestion of immorality, particularly sexual promiscuity. ...

bitch (1400) In early use often applied specifically to a prostitute, and latterly often applied specifically to a malicious or spiteful woman; from earlier sense, female dog ..." (2000: 228) (the year 1400 refers to the first appearance of the term, NM)

Similarly, *Random House Dictionary* (1994) specifies the meaning of "cunt" when applied to a male: "a despicable, contemptible or foolish man." None of the example in itself clinches the point, but taken together they re-enforce the *prima facie* plausible assumption that claims

about “uncivilized manners”, “slave-like status or behavior”, and the like just enter the meaning of the slurs in question. In other words, if stereotypes associated with pejoratives are listed as their meanings, and the ascription of properties etc. indicates that they belong to the meaning of the slur, then pejoratives are not purely performative and expressive, but semantic.³

The same goes for correspondences between languages. The *Collins English-German Dictionary* entry for “bitch”: (=woman, as they put it), offers two direct equivalents, “Miststück” and “Hexe”, noting that they are “spiteful”. The expression “don’t be a bitch” is rendered as “sei nicht so gemein or gehässig”, and “she’s a mean bitch” as “sie ist ein gemeines Stück.”

Of course, this is all merely *prima facie* evidence. But where should we look further? Let me borrow from the traditional view of lexical-semantic meaning and offer you five more criteria, compiled from literature and listed by Zoltan Gendler Szabo in his introduction to *Semantics vs. Pragmatics* (2005: 6).

a) Competence. Typically, some but not all of what the speaker conveys could be grasped by any competent speaker without special knowledge.

Seems that if holds for our pejoratives, say “bitch” and “nigger”: any competent English speaker can grasp the negative material the speaker conveys.

b) Encoding. This is just the presence in the dictionaries, we started with.

c) Compositionality. Typically, some but not all of what the speaker conveys is compositionally determined (by the syntax and the lexicon).

We have seen that our relevantists say the same about the two meanings of “bastard”. I see no reason not to apply it to pejoratives.

d) Rules. Typically, some but not all of what the speaker conveys can be ascertained by following rules, as opposed to elaborate cognitive strategies.

³ Standard dictionaries indeed talk about senses of slurs, exactly in terms of stereotypes and figurative origins that we sketched. Geoffrey Hughes notes for instance the following:

In his *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785), Francis Grose noted that the basic term negro carried the sense of “slave” in uses like “I’m no man’s Negro.” (2006: 327).

And he comments:

The history of the term in the southern United States is obviously colored by the slave relationship.

Similarly, with the South African equivalent, the term “kaffir” for black people:

From the earliest accounts, the stereotype of the savage predominated, especially in the categorization of the “red” or “raw” kaffir, so called because of the red ochre that they smeared on their bodies.

In their *Zulu Dictionary* (1948), C.M. Doke and B.W. Vilikazi included the following usage note: “Term of contempt for a person (black or white) of uncivilized manners (a swearword if used direct to a person).” (2006: 281).

What elaborate cognitive strategy do you need to understand what the speaker conveyed by calling his female boss a bitch? None.

- e) Truth-conditionality. Typically, some but not all of what the speaker conveys is truth-conditionally relevant.

This is of course, debatable, and denied by relevance theoreticians, but we don't need it here.

- f) Intention-independence. Typically, some but not all of what the speaker conveys is independent of the speaker's specific intentions to talk about this or that.

Holds indeed! Most theoreticians agree that the derogatory content of pejoratives is independent from speaker's intentions.

So, nearly all criteria offered classify pejoratives in the same way; this strengthens the case for semantic nature of the bad content.

In the discussion in Rijeka professor Sperber has distanced himself from the idea that negative meaning is always semantically lexically encoded. Tradeoff between lexical meaning and inference can be achieved in various ways. "We don't have to take a stand on that (i.e. lexical meaning) in order to develop our understanding of the use of pejoratives. We don't need the same lexical meaning in the head of each speaker/hearer", he said, pointing to varieties of idiolects and small-range sociolects. Specific groups use the term each in its own way. But, it is not the case that anything goes, he added.

On the methodological side he has proposed the following: in order to be sure, look at language learning, the acquisition; only then will you have a principled criterion. Finally, he allowed that some of the content might be "linguistic but not involving strictly speaking semantics".

I thank him. The methodological remark seems to me constructive, and I hope someone will do the work. In the meantime, let me note that the negative character is often the first thing a foreigner learns about the meaning of a pejorative. To mention German examples, I have learned that two words, "Kanake" and "Tschusch", have negative meanings, before realizing that the first is applied to Turks and the second to south Slaves; and way before realizing the exact extension of the first, namely Turks, Arabs and Mediterraneans in general. I am still not sure about Tschusch, for instance whether a Kosovo Albanian counts as a Tschusch. But I am absolutely certain of the negative character of the term. How children learn these words is an open question, but the differences should not be dramatic.

The pluralism remark is relevant, but there are limits to its scope. If there are widely based sociolects (especially ones involving a vast majority of the language speakers) that use the term basically in a uniform way, then the term is like "bastard", endowed with a fixed negative meaning. If we can never be sure, than anything goes, the option Sperber wants to avoid.

The contrast points to a wider dilemma: the relevantist account presupposes some fixed lexical meaning, and sufficient commonalities be-

tween speakers to insure the inferential work. If for some word, these conditions are satisfied, then we have fixed lexical meaning. Whether we call it “semantic” or not, makes little difference. If for all sorts of terms, then for pejoratives as well. If these conditions are practically never satisfied, than anything goes. An important morals of all this is that *the relevance theorist owes us a clear story about what kind of material is normally encoded*; relevance theory starts from such material, and for all its richness, its plausibility may ultimately to a large extent depend upon the kind of basic units it is willing to deploy. If we are offered no clear criteria, then ultimately anything goes.

For the negative content of pejoratives, I would opt for the first horn of the dilemma: it satisfies most of the usual criteria for lexical meaning: it is well known and stable accross various social groups, except the targeted group; but the members of that group understand very well its derogatory meaning. So, it should be part of the lexical semantics of the pejorative. How much material goes into negative content is a further issue. I would place in it quite a lot of material (see Mišćević 2012, 2014), but for the relevantist purposes a minimum should be OK, like the meaning “a nasty man” for “bastard”. So much for the synchronic issue, with apologies for brevity.

3. *The life of pejoratives: A diachronic perspective*

Here is a different aspect of the account that calls for the dialogue with relevance theory, namely the dynamics, the history, or development of pejoratives. Here I would like to thank again Dan for all I have learned from him.

The issue of the diachronic behavior of pejoratives has practically not been addressed systematically within the philosophy of language. Linguists, in particular historians of language, have done extensive work and there are some impressive and readable books on the topic, strictly on generic pejoratives Kennedy (2002), or on bad language more generally, for instance Keessen (2009) and Saunders (2011, see the critical discussion by Julija Perhat (2012). I would like to use the opportunity to start addressing it in a more systematic way, with the help of some ideas from relevance theory. I shall briefly discuss two areas. The first I shall approach using strictly the material from relevance theory, namely the issue of appropriation of pejoratives by the members of the targeted group. My second area is the metaphorical or more widely, figurative origin of many pejoratives. Here I shall appeal to relevance theory as one source of ideas and methods.

3.1 *Echoic use, appropriation and the reversal of valence*

In this section I want to borrow an idea, or rather a small but efficient tool-box of ideas, from Wilson and Sperber, in order to explain the famous phenomenon of the change of valence of pejoratives. I believe that the relevantist story about echoic use and about irony can be exported to this new context and do the main explanatory work. Let me start by presenting some background.

Pejoratives often change their valence, from negative to positive. The members of the target group chose “to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn”, to quote Rushdie again. The famous cases are, in American culture, the word “Nigger”, and in German culture “Kanake”, these days normally pejorative for Turkish or Kurdish or Arabic immigrants. Afro-Americans have appropriated the first one, the younger generation of the descendent of Turkish immigrants the second: “we Niggers” and “wir Kanaken” has become a respectable way of internal characterizing of the relevant community.⁴ With appropriation goes reversal of valence: “Niggers are stupid and brutal” vs. “we Niggers are cool”. Similarly, for other groups or “social kinds”. Take the word “bugger” and its French ancestor, word “bougre”; nowadays in French “Mon bougre” is very friendly. “Bitch” as used by many women is positive: “We, bitches are super”. “Bitch” as used by a male chauvinist is negative. The same with “witch”, “dyke”, and other formerly pejorative epithets turned up in the names of small feminist groups, as Hughes points out: “...radical feminist groups similarly chose provocative acronyms such as (...) witch (women’s international-terrorist conspiracy from hell), which, according to its manifesto, was born on halloween 1968.” (Hughes 2006: 352). Finally, a group of friends, women dissident activists in Zagreb, were called witches by their right wing colleagues. Then, they started using the word to refer to themselves (more on this in a moment). As a rule, only members of the targeted group can appropriate the pejorative, reverse its valence and use it positively.

How does all this happen? Little is said in the literature at the general level. However, writing about irony, Wilson and Sperber have pointed out two processes: the first is the ironical echoing by the speaker of someone else’s utterance, and the second is the re-evaluation of the utterance echoed. I want to argue that there is an interesting parallel with the quoting-reappropriation-and-reversal processes that seems to take place in the valence change of pejorative. Let me remind the reader of the way in which Wilson and Sperber bring in echoing in their account of irony. The example is Marry’s comment on the party she found very boring: “The party was a fun.” Wilson and Sperber proposed that what she is doing is “expressing an attitude of scorn towards (say)

⁴ For “Kanake”, the reversal is linked with the publication of the novel by Feridun Zaimoğlu: *Kanak Sprak: 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft*. 1995, 6. Auflage. Rotbuch, Hamburg 2004.

the general expectation among the guests that the party would be fun” (2012: 125). She is echoing the sentence: “The party was a fun”, dissociating herself from it, and re-using it to poke fun on the naive guests who expected something better. In general:

...irony consists in echoing a thought (e.g. a belief, an intention, a norm-based expectation) attributed to an individual, a group, or to people in general, and expressing a mocking, sceptical or critical attitude to this thought. On this approach, an ironical utterance typically implies that the speaker believes the opposite of what was said, but this is neither the meaning nor the point of the utterance (2012: 125).⁵

The central claim of the echoic account is that what distinguishes verbal irony from other varieties of echoic use is that the attitudes conveyed are drawn from the dissociative range: the speaker rejects a tacitly attributed thought as ludicrously false (or blatantly inadequate in other ways). Dissociative attitudes themselves vary quite widely, falling anywhere on a spectrum from amused tolerance through various shades of resignation or disappointment to contempt, disgust, outrage or scorn (2012: 130).

Doesn't this remind one (if one is working on pejoratives) of quoting the pejorative and adding a strong dissociative attitude? With the stress on contempt, disgust, outrage and scorn. Let me re-use the “witch” example from Zagreb which I witnessed personally and where I know the participants well. It was a conflict between nationalist intellectuals with their female anti-nationalist colleagues (some of which are also feminist activists). Let me call the main nationalist professor Victor, and the feminist opponent Rada. Imagine the situation, Zagreb 1989, the tensions between Croatia and Serbia are at their peak and the war is just about to start; right time for a witchhunt. Imagine Victor saying (and writing) about his anti-nationalist female activist colleagues: “These women are real witches.”

Rada pretends to agree: “Now, we are real witches.” Rada is echoing her enemy, and like the Afro-American speaker in the Nigger case, she does not need to pretend she is a nationalist (viz. white racist); the echoing is already clear enough. So, what is Rada echoing? First, both

⁵ And here are the higher genera, the echoic and the attributive:

We define echoic use as a subtype of attributive use in which the speaker's primary intention is not to provide information about the content of an attributed thought, but to convey her own attitude or reaction to that thought. Thus, to claim that verbal irony is a subtype of echoic use is to claim, on the one hand, that it is necessarily attributive, and, on the other, that it necessarily involves the expression of a certain type of attitude to the attributed thought (2012: 129).

Echoing is metarepresentational:

An echoic utterance indicates to the hearer that the speaker is paying attention to a representation (rather than to a state of affairs); it indicates that one of the speaker's reasons for paying attention to this representation is that it has been entertained (and perhaps expressed) by someone; it also indicates the speaker's attitude to the representation echoed. An echoic utterance achieves relevance by allowing the hearer to recognise, and perhaps to emulate, the speaker's interest in, and attitude to, someone else's thought. The speaker may express any one of an indefinite variety of attitudes to the representation echoed (2012: 93).

the content and the attitude of the opponent—Wilson and Sperber are obviously right. But, of course, her uttering goes further: she dissociates herself strongly from Victor, the original speaker and to his buddies, patriarchal nationalists. So, the content is: we the women in the group are witches, but the attitude is anger outrage and scorn. Here, the echoic theory works perfectly. Let us generalize.

The meta-representational echoing of pejorative sentence can express the spectrum from “resignation or disappointment to contempt, disgust, outrage or scorn”. Consider Wilson and Sperber again:

... two features of attributive utterances in general which are also found in echoic utterances. First, attributive utterances (including tacit indirect reports) can be used to inform the hearer about the content not only of thoughts or utterances attributed to a particular individual on a particular occasion, but of those attributed to certain types of people, or to people in general. These may have their roots in culturally-defined social, moral or aesthetic norms, or general human hopes or aspirations (2012: 130).

They stress the normative bias of irony:

There is a widely noted normative bias in the uses of irony. The most common use of irony is to point out that situations, events or performances do not live up to some norm-based expectation. Its main use is to criticise or to complain. Only in special circumstances is irony used to praise, or to point out that some proposition lacking in normative content is false. This bias is unexplained on the classical or Gricean accounts. To illustrate: when someone is being clumsy, it is always possible to say ironically, “How graceful”, but when someone is being graceful, it takes special circumstances to be able to say ironically “How clumsy” (2012: 127).

The ironical reversal goes from positive to negative. The reversal of pejoratives will take the opposite direction. Let us go back to the “bitch” example. Start with the source group, SG, of male users of the term. Imagine then a dissenting woman, call her Jane. At the start Jane’s cognitive system represents the (inimical) concept-representation BITCH_{SG} originated by source group SG, and probably creates a meta-representation $\text{mBITCH}_{\text{SG}}$. She then works on the concept BITCH_{SG} and refigures it, re-evaluating some qualities, deleting them, replacing negative qualities like dangerous, aggressive, promiscuous with positive or neutral ones dangerous-to-one’s enemies, sexy. The negative-positive-contrast yields a very stable symmetry, it works even better here than for irony; in the case of irony, many examples do not presuppose the deployment of the relevant item by interlocutor, see “What a beautiful wheather!” example. In the case of pejoratives, the target group is surrounded by the deployers of the pejorative, so, the assumption of echoing is much more natural

Consider now the stages:

stage zero:

The word “bitch” is used by a big male group M, for the negative concept BITCH of the target group, women, call it BITCH_{SG} .

At the beginning the pejorative is sometimes merely quoted: “we, ‘bitches’ as called by males” (or “we ‘witches’ as called by the right-wing colleagues”). Here, the idea of echoing is very helpful.

stage one, echoing: mention, not use

Jane, a member of the target group quotes “bitch” in a positive context, “We ‘bitches’ are dangerous to our enemies”, meaning, “We, called derogatively ‘bitches’ by male group M are dangerous to our enemies”. Similarly, some Afro-American speaker in the hypothetical initial historical situation is echoing the deeply rooted racist use of the word with strong negative valence: contempt, disgust, outrage or scorn. Here, the utterance of the typical racist is being echoed and no need for pretense. The same with the “witch” example from Zagreb.

So, there is an interesting parallel between the echoing-cum-reversal processes Wilson and Sperber propose for irony and the repeating-and-reversing process typical of appropriation of pejoratives. (In the discussion in Dubrovnik Sperber expressed agreement with my understanding of echoing, and interest in the application to pejoratives. I thank him.)

So much for the direct borrowing from Wilson and Sperber, but their idea of echoing with dissociation is also useful in the next step—step two: after echoing, reverse the evaluation. Echoing and pejorative reversal go naturally together. “Nigger” is negative when white racist’s use it, but we Blacks think highly of ourselves, so, “Nigger” will be good when we use it. The idea is to reverse the evaluation of some quality from the conception-stereotype (or encyclopedic entry in one’s head):—“bitch” involves a sexual component; well it is sexy, “ustaša” involves being similar to Croatian Nazis; well, they were not that bad. The idea is acceptable for relevantists, but also for both semanticist and expressivist theory.

The reversal is worthy of a closer look. Obviously, some initial qualities (I shall use Q for quality) are replaced by some others, or some new qualities are simply added (I shall use the arrow “→” to indicate the change). Also, the positive (+) and negative (−) evaluations are in play. Let me propose a few possibilities. First, the basic ones:

1. Simple reversal of presentation and valuing of given quality Q. The presumably negative quality Q−, is now evaluated positively, and becomes Q+:

(1) Q− → Q+

We can distinguish two cases. The first is purely indexical. Take the Zagreb nationalists disparaging the anti-nationalist feminist group: “The witches hate *us*, nationalists, and this is one feature that makes them bad.” Now, the group starts appropriating the pejoratives: yes, we hate *them*, the nationalists, and this makes us good (“We, ‘witches’ hate you, and we are great!”). The reference in contexts of the two underlined pronouns is the same, the modes of presentation are opposed (us/them), and the valuation follows the modes of presentation.

The second is the non-indexical reversal of evaluation—still echoing content.

Take “Nigger” and consider the reversed property-valuation: it is good to be uncivilized. Being civilized is bad. The same for “bitch”: it is good to be sex-hungry (and analogously, it is good for a male to be gay, for a women to be aggressive against males). A trace of egocentric attitude might be still there in specifying the rationale: the quality is good because it is us who have it.

2. Denial of having of some bad quality from the conception-stereotype:

$$(2) Q- \rightarrow \text{not-}Q-$$

We “bitches” are not sex-hungry, we “Niggers” are not uncivilized, we “buggers” love our partners just as heteros do. Of course, change (2) is incompatible with (1) for the same quality. And indeed, the members of the target group sometimes divide over which one to follow, the typical ‘moderates’ following (2) and typical ‘radicals’ following (1). Outside the appropriation context, the move (2) is, of course, part and parcel of normal, enlightened education against racial, gender and other prejudices: the members of the target group just do not have the traits ascribed to them by the stereotype.

3. replacement of the relevant quality from the stereotype with its positive relative, call it Q^{*+} .

$$(3) Q- \rightarrow Q^{*+}$$

“Bitch” involves a sexual component; well it is sexy (if you need evidence, just look up under “bitch” at Google images: you find a series of attractive young women, with the word “bitch” written on their shirts). The same for Zagreb “witches”: “Witches are powerful and dangerous, we, witches, have our powers and we are dangerous to people like Victor, but we do this in the name of justice and of tolerance between peoples of Yugoslavia”.

In practice, (3) is the middle road between the extremes (1) and (2). You don't want to be depicted as frustrated, sex-hungry person, but also not as an a-sexual and cold one. Replacing “sex-hungry” with “sexy” solves the problem: the link with sexuality is preserved, and in addition, now it is the others who are ‘hungry’, who yearn for you, and not vice versa.

4. Adding new positive qualities, possibly from the stereotypical self-image of the targeted group:

$$(4) \emptyset \rightarrow Q'+$$

For “Nigger” one can add sexy, talented for music and dance, for “bitch” cool, and so on. Here the new elements go way beyond echoing, and the original analogy with ironical echoing-cum-reversal is at its weakest.⁶

⁶ Dictionaries sometimes mention some of the resulting meanings. Here is a selection from entry for “bitch” at dictionary.com:

Next comes possible combination of moves, where several options are possible; I shall mention only two.

First, (2) the denial of having some bad quality Q_- and (3) introduction of some new attractive relatives Q^{*+} of the initial negative one, i.e. the (2) & (3) combination.

(2) & (3) $Q_- \rightarrow \text{not-}Q_- \& Q^{*+}$

The move is very natural, almost trivial, and also has the advantage of offering the target-group friendly folk explanation of why the negative quality is there in the inimical stereotype. Take the trait of being sexually violent, ascribed to members of some minority group. Well, the minority member reasons, if we are irresistibly sexy, and attractive to majority group females, this explains why majority males are afraid of us and represent us as violent (perhaps the argument is not very persuasive to academic audience, but is surely good enough for street bragging).

Second, the (2) & (3) & (4) combination: negate some, replace other with positive relative and add some new, unrelated ones.

$Q_- \rightarrow \text{not-}Q_- \& Q^{*+} \& Q^+ \dots$

This is a promising maximal combination: some negative qualities are just too bad to be retained (e.g. being stupid), some can be re-valued (e.g. being dangerous, if the dangerousness is directed to persons that deserve punishment), some have attractive relatives or apparent relatives and some are just convenient positive qualities from the self-stereotype of the group.

The more semantically and less pragmatically oriented theorist can add a few more stages.

STAGE 3—new concept

Jane has created a positive concept, linked with concepts DANGEROUS TO OUR ENEMIES, SISTERS TO EACH OTHERS, AND SEXY

STAGE 4—from mention to use

Jane completely disquotes “BITCH”, and now uses it for the positive, BITCH⁺ concept.

STAGE 5—conventionalization. Other members of the target group converge on the usage, on which “bitch” has BITCH⁺ concept as its sense.⁷

- –noun 1. a female dog.
- 2. a female of canines generally.
- 3. Slang . a. a malicious, unpleasant, selfish person, especially a woman.
- b. a lewd woman.
- Slang . a. a complaint.
- b. anything difficult or unpleasant: The test was a bitch.
- c. anything memorable, especially something exceptionally good: That last big party he threw was a real bitch.

⁷ To summarize, the more semanticists account can postulate the following stages:

STAGE 0: The word P is used by members of a source group (SG) for the negative

To conclude, the relevantist ideas are extremely relevant and useful. But some of them also go well with the conceptual, more semantacist account. But, there are more diachronic matters to discuss, and we turn to the next one.

3.2 *Pejoratives from metaphors*

A lot of pejoratives are of figurative origin. The most hostile English-language term for Germans, “Hun”, is a metaphor, ascribing to Germans the savageness, aggressiveness and cruelty of Huns. (“Nigger” and “Boche” are not figurative, and this has obscured things in the discussion.) As we pointed out, “bitch” is a metaphor (from dogs to humans), “cunt” a synecdoche (from part to the whole person, and then presumably from women to men). To give examples from other languages, let me mention the main fashionable political chauvinistic pejoratives in my language which are synecdoches as well: the Serbian use of “Ustaša” for all Croats generalizes from Croatian Nazis to the whole nation) and the Croatian use of “Četnik” for all Serbs.

Now, a figurative use involves a lot of work. The Germans-hater takes the vehicle “Hun” and projects some descriptive features (real or imagined) of ancient Huns upon contemporary Germans. Then, he transmits the negative evaluation: Germans are as bad as Huns were. The sexist takes the vehicle “bitch-dog” and projects some descriptive features (real or imagined) upon the person. Then, he transmits the negative evaluation: same supervenience basis in dogs and persons, same value properties in both. The Croatian chauvinist takes the negative features of Serbian “četniks” from the Second World War or from paramilitary criminals from the nineties, and projects them upon all Serbs. With negative features goes negative evaluation. The mere expressive view has no means to account for the conceptual complexity that goes with the genesis of figurative pejoratives. But there is more. We read the following:

Bitch has the longest history in the field as a term of abuse, extending from the fourteenth century up to the present. During this long period it has been applied variously to a promiscuous, sensual, mean, or difficult woman, as well as to a man or thing (Hughes 2006: 23).

concept T of the target group, call it T_{SG} .

STAGE 1: A member G of the target group quotes “P” in a positive context, e.g. “We ‘Ps’ are brave”, meaning, “We, called derogatively ‘Ps’ by SG are brave”.

STAGE 2: G’s cognitive system represents the (inimical) concept-representation T_{SG} , probably creating a meta-representation mT_{SG} ; he then works on the concept T_{SG} (the negative representation), and refigures it

replacing negative qualities $Q_1^- Q_2^- Q_3^- Q_4^-$
with positive or neutral ones $Q_1^+ Q_2^+ Q_3^+ Q_4^+$

STAGE 3: Jane has created a positive T^+ concept, with $Q_1^+ Q_2^+ Q_3^+ Q_4^+$ and some other items as components.

STAGE 4: Jane disquotes “P”, and now uses it for the positive concept.

STAGE 5: Other members of the target group converge on the usage, on which “P” has the positive concept as its sense.

Similarly, the word “cur” meaning just dog, has several uses.

Dr. Johnson comprehensively defined the adjective curish (also first used by Shakespeare) as “having the qualities of a degenerate dog; brutal; sour; quarrelsome; malignant; churlish; uncivil; untractable. (Hughes 2006:137)

Hughes writes:

Shakespeare uses “cur” in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1590). In his works it is a term of withering scorn, most memorably in *Coriolanus* (1608), when the hero castigates the Roman plebs as “You common cry of curs!” meaning “You pack of mongrels!” (III iii 118) (Ibid.).

In all these examples, the speaker is encoding relevant properties in his use of the pejorative. Hans is aggressive; “of course, he is a Hun”. But Helga is cruel to her subordinates; “well, she is Hun”. The listener has to figure out the properties ascribed, answering the why-question. Coriolanus’s enemies are curs, since they are of low birth, but Cesar’s enemies might be curs since they are so aggressive. Person A is a bitch since she is overly sensual (horny bitch), person B since she is aggressive (and she is, let us suppose non-sensual). Why do you call B a bitch, she never showed any interest in man? Oh, I didn’t mean this, I mean that she is dangerously aggressive.

Wilson and Sperber suggest that “the encoded concept helps to activate contextual implications that make the utterance relevant as expected” (2012: 110). On the side of non-specific pejoratives, take the cur example. Ironically, Frege’s translators use “cur” for his example of the mere “tone”, as opposed to content. But, even if with “cur” as used for dogs the negative attitude is (or were) just a matter of tone, it is not when used for people. Coriolanus transfers the qualities of a degenerate dog to Roman plebeians: they are mongrel, brutal, sour, quarrelsome, malignant, churlish, uncivil and intractable.

vehicle concept:		target concept:
MONGREL DOG	→	CUR-LIKE HUMAN (or ROMAN)
components:		components:
MONGREL, BRUTAL, SOUR, QUARRELSOME, MALIGNANT, CHURLISH, UNCIVIL AND INTRACTABLE		NON-PURE ROMAN, BRUTAL, SOUR, QUARRELSOME, MALIGNANT, CHURLISH, UNCIVIL AND INTRACTABLE
qualities pointed to:		qualities pointed to:
mongrel, brutal, sour, etc.		non-pure Roman, brutal, sour, etc.

What can relevance theory of metaphor teach us about the process of understanding?

...interpretation is carried out “on line”, and starts while the utterance is still in progress. We assume, then, that interpretive hypotheses about explicit content and implicatures are developed partly in parallel rather than in sequence, and stabilise when they are mutually adjusted so as to jointly confirm the hearer’s expectations of relevance. And we are not suggesting that the hearer consciously goes through just the steps shown in the tables, with exactly those premises and conclusions (2012: 113).

To apply it to the example at hand, the encoded concept CUR helps to activate contextual implications that make the utterance relevant as expected, and the concept conveyed by the “cur” metaphor is one of degenerateness, brutality; quarrelsome character and impurity of descent, characterised by these implications. The “cur” metaphor is based on fairly central properties of the lexicalised category, i.e. degenerateness, brutality; quarrelsome character and impurity of descent. In discussion with Sperber I have arrived at the following picture of the inference, performed by the Roman plebeian, call him Pauperus.

Coriolanus has said to Pauperus: “You are a cur.”

Now, Coriolanus’s utterance is optimally relevant to Pauperus, since the situation is one of the protest, the two sides facing each other. According to Sperber’s account, Coriolanus’s utterance will achieve relevance by addressing Pauperus’s behavior at the protest.

Curs (in the lexicalised sense) are degenerate, brutal, quarrelsome and of impure descent.

How does the decoding of Coriolanus’s utterance by Pauperus proceed? First, we look at expectations raised by the Pauperus’s recognition of the utterance as a communicative act. Next, at expectation raised by the assumption of relevance, given that Coriolanus is responding to Pauperus’s demands. The assumption is activated both by use of the word “cur” and by Pauper’s wish for a conflict with Coriolanus. So what is tentatively accepted by Pauperus as the point of Coriolanus’s utterance is the following:

Pauperus is degenerate, brutal; quarrelsome and of impure descent.

In short, Pauperus is a cur. Or, if you prefer a longer version, Pauperus is a cur who is revolting against the great Coriolanus. This is the implicit conclusion derivable from the knowledge of lexicalized meaning, together with an appropriate interpretation of Coriolanus’s utterance, which would make her utterance relevant-as-expected. Tentatively accepted as an implicit conclusion of the utterance. So we have interpretation of the explicit content of Coriolanus’s utterance as decoded, which, together with lexical meaning, would imply that Pauperus is degenerate, brutal, quarrelsome and of impure descent. This interpretation is then accepted as Coriolanus’s explicit meaning.

In their work on metaphor Wilson and Sperber offer a fine example of how people interpret a metaphor they meet for the first time. In the example, Peter and Marry discuss whom to invite to Billy’s birthday party. Mary says:

(7) “Archie is a magician. Let us invite him.”

What if Peter has only one encoded meaning for magician, person with supernatural powers.

For that matter, some people may have only a single encoded sense for “magician”: someone with supernatural powers who performs magic. They would still have no difficulty arriving at an appropriate interpretation of (7) by extending the category of real magicians to include make-believe ones.

For other people, the metaphorical sense may have become lexicalised, so that “magician” has the additional encoded sense someone who achieves extraordinary things.

Suppose, such a person hears the utterance of

(29) “My chiropractor is a magician.”

How is she going to react?

They would obviously have no trouble arriving at an appropriate interpretation of (29). Mary did not intend her utterance to be understood literally in (7) and metaphorically in (29); her communicative intentions—like those of all speakers—are about content and propositional attitude... (2012: 114).

And this is the kind of thing Pauperus is doing. The interesting point is that this account is compatible with a range of theories of how figurative pejoratives get lexicalized; my favorite is the account by Deirdre Gentner (see references), but this is a story for another occasion. I have addressed it briefly in Mišćević (2014), and hope to do more.

Let me conclude with a piece of morals concerning semantics. Imagine what things would be like if the affect in the use of slurs were in the typical case like phobia, with no awareness of reasons. Consider the ethnic figurative pejorative and our example of conversation: “Hans is aggressive”; “of course, he is a Hun”. “But Helga is cruel to her subordinates”; “Well, she is Hun”. There is no way to make sense of the conversation(s) if the use of pejorative is blind. The Germans-hater would have no reaction, since he does not “see” that Hans might be aggressive because he is a German, and that the use of pejorative is selling this assumption. The person who uses “bitch” for a woman might accept that she is very sweet and pleasant; after all, *the pejorative has no added cognitive content* on non-semanticist’s view; “bitch” just refers to women. (I don’t deny that in the situations of rage the use of a slur might be utterly non-cognitive, I only deny that this is the typical, let alone theoretically central case). The figurative slurs thus drive home the lesson already adumbrated by stereotypes. *The figurative basis demands cognitive work both from the speaker who is encoding relevant properties, and from the listener figuring out the properties ascribed, and thus answering the why-question by a because-suggestion.* Since stereotype-linked and/or figurative slurs are so ubiquitous, and since they either assume or demand cognitive achievements (knowledge or encoding, or decoding) we may suggest, contrary to the non-semanticist, that the central and standard uses of slurs are cognitive.

In fact, one can argue from figurative slurs and from the need for cognitive effort (or simple of knowledge of relevant presumed properties of the target), that the central and standard uses of slurs are cognitive. Since cognition has to do with truth and falsity, and since the cognitive task is a good indicator of semantic structure, it seems that the ascription of negative properties, etc. indicates that they belong to the meaning of the slur, and that this meaning might confer truth-aptness. I presume that the (nasty) richness of meaning might vary

with pejoratives: all of them involve “contemptible because G” at the very least. The most typical ones carry more information. Some of it is given in the form of conceptual links roughly delineating the core stereotype associated with the pejorative, some in the form of figurative transfer of properties from some vehicle to the target member of G. So, slurs are not purely performative and expressive, but semantic in the traditional, truth-directed sense. But this is again, a story for some other occasion.

4. *Conclusion*

Pejoratives are a hot topic in the philosophy of language, and I have tried to point to some interesting connections between relevance theory and the issues connected with them. Although my general sympathies are with a much richer semantic approach, I have limited myself here to the relevantist perspective, and attempted to show how the ideas proposed by Wilson and Sperber might contribute to the understanding of pejoratives.

The first topic discussed has been a synchronic one, namely the meaning of pejoratives. Two options have been contrasted: the neutral-content relevantist vs. evaluative content relevantist one. On the first option, a typical pejorative, like “Kike”, just has its referential meaning as the only lexical semantic feature; it means “Jewish”, and this is all. All the negative material associated with it is added at various stages of enrichment. On the second, a minimal negative characterization is part of the lexical meaning of “Kike”. I have argued that the relevantist should welcome the second option. The negative material is prominent in the dictionaries, the ignorance of it counts as ignorance of language, and it is often the first thing a foreigner learns about the meaning of a pejorative, and often the last he or she forgets.

We have then turned to diachronic matters the “biographies” of pejoratives and the contribution relevance theory could make to the study of these. The life (history, development) of pejoratives has been studied in detail with particular pejoratives in the focus, but no general theory has emerged; we hope it can emerge in a fruitful dialogue with relevance theory.

We have first addressed the topic of echoic use, appropriation and the reversal of valence. We hope that we have detected a possibility of a central contribution the ideas of relevance theory could make here to the understanding of diachronic processes characterizing the carrier of pejoratives. According to Wilson and Sperber, irony involves two crucial moves: first, echoing some (real or presumed) opinion concerning the topic under consideration (say, the expectations that the weather will be fine), and then using the echoed utterance to suggest the contrary (“What a fine weather!” uttered ironically amidst heavy rain).

Pejoratives can be treated, and are often treated, in a symmetric fashion by a member of the target group. First, the pejorative is just

re-used, echoed, and then its import is reversed, like in irony, but in the opposite direction, from negative to positive. The qualities culled up from the conception (or, encyclopedic entry, to stay with terminology of Wilson and Sperber) associated with the pejorative have to be reworked: some are just deleted, others are re-valued, still others are replaced by more positive counterparts, and all the consistent combinations of changes are often carried through. I hope that the general characterizations of possible changes, offered in section 3.1, can help understand and organize the rich empirical material culled from the history of particular pejoratives. Although the model comes from relevance theory, it is applicable within various approaches; a thoroughgoing semanticist can use it as well. Of course, the model needs testing on particular cases, but the job of the theoretician is to offer plausible ideas for testing.

The final topic, also from the diachronic group, is the topic of pejoratives of figurative origin, which we have narrowed down to those of metaphorical origin. Here, the relevance theory can help with proposals about ordinary understanding of metaphorical utterances. Wilson and Sperber (and also Carston 2010) stress the ordinary character of what is classically seen as metaphorical inference; for them it is just broadening of the same kind as the one that happens in ordinary loose talk, when people use “Kleenex” not for the brand, but simply for paper tissue, and the like. Section 3.2 presents stages of such reasoning, illustrated by the metaphor from Shakespeare’s “Coriolanus”, where the hero addresses the rebellious plebeians as “curs”. Again, the model is applicable within a range of approaches: the semanticists can claim, as I would do, that it successfully accounts for the crucial first phase of a biography of a figurative pejorative. The phase culminates in the creation of a new, figurative concept “cur”, and the word then enters the second phase, with the dominant literal meaning and a fledgling figurative meaning. The later, if successful in actual practice of communication, becomes more and more fixed.

In short, the relevantist proposals are extremely relevant and useful, both on their native pragmatist ground, and as sources of tools for different, say conceptual semanticist accounts. So, let me mention a couple of topics for further research, concerning the career of pejoratives.

The first seems to be the easiest one, namely change of meaning of terms, like with “Führer”, “macho” and “Übermensch”, that started their career as positive ones. This negative reversal seems to follow the same pattern of echoing and dissociation we saw with positive reversals.

The second is much more difficult, and to my knowledge, it has not been much studied. It is pejorativization, the turn from neutral to bad. A fine example is “bastard”, according to the dictionary “acknowledged child of a nobleman by a woman other than his wife.”⁸

⁸ Here is the entry from *Online etymological dictionary*:

Illegitimate child, early 13c., from Old French *bastard* (11c., Modern French *bâtard*), “acknowledged child of a nobleman by a woman other than his wife,” probably from *fil de bast* “packsaddle son,” meaning a child conceived on an

An additional twist is added by the group of expressions that have started their life as politically correct replacements for some very nasty pejorative, and then become pejoratives themselves. In many European languages, from French to Croatian and Bulgarian, there is a word deriving from “paiderastos”, the Classical Greek term for homosexual (with preference for young partners). It has been introduced at least into some of them as a high-sounding, politically correct expression for nasty ordinary words for homosexuals (like “bougre” in French). The word and/or its derivatives (say “pedè”, or “peder” or “pedal”) has soon become the canonical nasty term for homosexuals. These days one finds the use of politically correct terms in politically incorrect contexts, like commercials for “gay away” pills. In Croatia and Serbia one finds walls with graffiti like “Kill Roma”; the politically correct term “Roma” is re-used in the context of intense hatred. Some journalists have argued from this fact that political correctness in all its forms is just pointless; seems to me an over-reaction. But what about a theoretical account?

Here is a simple proposal for a starting point: there is a pejorative concept for homosexuals, or Gypsies, that is associated with the original pejorative (first, “bougre”, second “Cigan”, roughly the same as “Gypsy”) but can be dissociated from it, *preserving all the ascriptions of negative properties*. The old concept then just gets transferred and pasted onto the new word. To put it more picturesquely, there is a nasty pejorative concept stalking the newly introduced politically correct counter-part-terms, and sometimes succeeding in capturing them. Relevance theory might offer a model for understanding how an ordinary reader interprets new graffiti like “Kill Roma”: she starts from the clash of politically correct conception (or entry) associated with “Roma” and the “Kill...” suggestion, keeps the meaning of “Kill...” fixed and then reworks the “Roma” part, or something along these lines. Again, a lot of work needs to be done, and we need a general theory, of the sort creative philosophers of language can produce in collaboration with creative linguists, psychologists, and in the case of pejoratives, sociologists. Professor Sperber belongs to the almost incredible intersection of all four categories, so no wonder that his suggestions turn out to be so fertile.

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improvised bed (saddles often doubled as beds while traveling), with pejorative ending -art (see -ard). (...)

Not always regarded as a stigma; the Conqueror is referred to in state documents as “William the Bastard.” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=bastard>

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