ORIGINAL RESEARCH

An account of overt intentional dogwhistling

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Abstract

Political communication in modern democratic societies often requires the speaker to address multiple audiences with heterogeneous values, interests and agendas. This creates an incentive for communication strategies that allow politicians to send, along with the explicit content of their speech, concealed messages that seek to secure the approval of certain groups without alienating the rest of the electorate. These strategies have been labeled *dogwhistling* in recent literature. In this article, we provide an analysis of overt intentional dogwhistling (OID). We recognize two main stages within the OIDs' way of conveying a concealed message: the expression of a perspective together with the transmission of an accompanying positioning message *vis-à-vis* the OID targeted sub-audience, and the inferential extraction (by the target audience) of a set of cognitive and non-cognitive contents inferred on the basis of the former stage. Furthermore, we identify three linguistic mechanisms whereby these contents may be transmitted: conventional meaning, conversational implicature and perlocutionary inferencing. Hence, on our view OIDs are not a uniform category, as they may differ as to what extent the concealed content is speaker-meant, and thus actually communicated by the speaker.

Keywords Dogwhistles · Political communication · Implicit communication · Covert messaging

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1 Introduction

Dogwhistles are speech acts that explicitly convey a certain content to an audience, while simultaneously sending a different, concealed message to a specific subset of that audience.[1] Examples discussed in the literature often belong (though are not limited) to political communication, where the speaker typically addresses an heterogeneous audience. By way of illustration, consider utterances (1)–(4):

(1) Some people want to increase spending for new prisons to lock up violent inner city criminals.[2]

(2) By the same token, being "tested" and "reviewed" by agencies tied to big pharma and the chemical industry is also problematic.[3]

(3) Another example would be the Dred Scott case, which is where judges, years ago, said that the Constitution allowed slavery because of personal property rights. That's a personal opinion. That's not what the Constitution says.[4]

(4) Yet there's power, wonder-working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.[5]

In (1), the use of 'inner city' arguably summons certain attitudes and stereotypes in hearers with racist leanings. Stein's use of 'big pharma' in (2) functions as a wink to the anti-vaxxer movement.[6] In (3), Bush's opposition to the Dred Scott decision, which in 1857 held that no black person, free or slave, could be a US citizen, implicitly addresses the anti-abortion movement. Finally, Bush's use of 'wonder-working power' in (4) has distinct overtones for the Evangelical community.

Saul (2018) classifies dogwhistles along two dimensions: on the one hand, dog-whistles may be either intentional or unintentional, depending on whether the speaker has the intention to issue the dogwhistle; on the other hand, they may be either overt or covert, depending on whether the dogwhistle is meant to be consciously entertained by the relevant subset of the audience. In this paper, we leave unintentional dogwhistles aside, since their account is derivative from that of intentional ones (see Saul 2018), and we restrict ourselves to intentional dogwhistles, of which (1)–(4) are examples. Within this class, we focus on overt intentional dogwhistles (OIDs), like (2)–(4).

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[1] Although it is usual, in discussing dogwhistles, to talk about speakers sending coded messages to part of the audience, and of dogwhistles as being code words, we eschew code-talk, as it gives the impression that dogwhistles work by way of encoding, whereas we argue that they may be either conventional or non-conventional. Hence, we choose conceal-talk, in order to capture both the implicitness of what is dogwhistled, and the varied means by which dogwhistles work.

[2] From Horwitz and Peffley (2005, pp. 102–103), discussed by Saul (2018).

[3] Jill Stein, interview during a Reddit AMA session, 2016. https://amatranscripts.com/ama/jill_stein_2016-05-11.html. Discussed in Henderson and McCready (2019).

[4] George W. Bush, presidential debate, October 8, 2004. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/debatereferee/debate_1008.html.

[5] George W. Bush, State of the Union speech, 2003. Discussed in Saul (2018).

[6] We should note that the term 'big pharma' signals a broader view which includes an attitude of disapproval towards the lobby of big pharmaceutical companies or the endorsement of "alternative medicine." Often, a general distrust concerning the efficacy of vaccines and an opposition to mandatory vaccination accompanies these commitments, but not necessarily (see, for example, Henderson and McCready, 2019, p. 229). We will use the label 'anti-vaxxer' for this variable and vaguely defined bundle of views.

We should note that, as employed nowadays, 'dogwhistle' is not a term of art, but a blanket term that covers a variegated class of linguistic (and even not merely linguistic) devices that may be used to pass concealed messages to a target sub-audience (as with examples (2)–(4)), or to produce racial priming (as with (1)).[7] We should not expect that class to be theoretically unified in terms of the mechanisms by means of which dogwhistles achieve their goal. And indeed it has been argued that intentional dogwhistles can be performed by means of different linguistic and non-linguistic mechanisms. Saul (2018) has argued that covert intentional dogwhistles (CIDs), of which 'inner city' in (1) is an example, work by priming racial attitudes at an unconscious level, and may be theorized as covert perlocutionary speech acts, insofar as the recognition of the intention behind a CID turns it ineffective in priming racial attitudes. And authors such as Saul (2018), Henderson and McCready (2019) and Khoo (2017) have variously argued that overt intentional dogwhistles (OIDs), or a class roughly identifiable with them, of which (2)–(4) are core examples, work in a different, distinctive way.[8]

In this article, we take it that CIDs work roughly in the way described by Saul (2018). Our main contention is that OIDs like (2)–(4) are complex speech acts that, while explicitly communicating a literal message to a given audience, are intended to elicit, via the expression of a perspective and a positioning message, a relatively indeterminate set of cognitive and non-cognitive states in the targeted subset of the audience. We start by examining OIDs more closely, and we distinguish three features any treatment of OIDs should account for. This is done in Sect. 2.

In Sect. 3, we spell out our account of OIDs, and show how it may account for those features. We identify a concrete strategy for passing concealed messages via the expression of a perspective on the part of the speaker, followed by a positioning message. Further perlocutionary contents are extracted by the targeted sub-audience. We argue that this mechanism may be implemented in one of three ways, depending on whether perspective expression is conventionally conveyed to the OID audience, pragmatically inferred by them, or transmitted by means of perlocutionary inference. Whether an OID functions in one way or another depends on the type and strength of the regular association between expression and perspective, varying from the strongest association (conventional OIDs) to the weakest associations (implicature-based OIDs). Thus, our contention is that OIDs do not function in a unified way, although they share a general structure. In addition, we argue that OIDs in political communication are instances of a more general phenomenon of covert messaging, that need not relate to politics in any way, and we show that the components of OIDs that we identify in (2)–(4) are specifically linked to the structure of political discourse in modern democratic societies.

Finally, in Sect. 4, we discuss the alternative approaches of Tirrell (1999), Henderson and McCready (2019) and Khoo (2017) in order to further clarify our view.

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[7] The main covert intentional dogwhistle discussed in the literature is the racially loaded Willie Horton ad for George H. W. Bush campaign against Michael Dukakis (see Mendelberg 2001).

[8] They differ, of course, as to the mechanisms they posit. Thus, Saul (2018) takes up Camp's (2018) analysis of insinuation as a model for OIDs, Henderson and McCready (2019) appeal to Burnett's (2017, 2019) ideas on Bayesian signaling games, and Khoo (2017) offers an inference-driven account of those same examples.

Before moving on, we would like to pause for a note on our choice of terminology.[9] In the pragmatics literature, the term 'overt' is sometimes used in a way rather different from ours. In Gricean pragmatics, for example, overtness is linked to the structure of communication itself, which requires fully transparent intentions on the part of the speaker (as we will see in Sect. 3.2). And in Relevance Theory, overt communication requires the informative intention of the speaker to be mutually manifest (see Wilson and Sperber, 2006, fn. 5). As we use the term, however, whether a dogwhistle is overt or covert does not depend on whether the dogwhistler makes their intentions transparent or mutually manifest, but on whether the content of the dogwhistle is meant to be consciously entertained by the dogwhistle audience. In fact, on our view some OIDs are entirely perlocutionary, hence they are not overt in the sense Gricean communicative intentions and Wilson and Sperber's informative intentions are said to be overt. Instead, we have decided to follow Saul's use of the term here, thereby indicating that the dogwhistles we are interested in work by appealing to beliefs and attitudes the intended targets are aware of (indeed, they may even take them to be central to their own identities), rather than by priming subconscious attitudes the targets are unaware of (and would possibly reject if made conscious). In making this decision on how to understand the *overt/covert* distinction as applied to dogwhistles, we follow a distinction already present and known in the debate. This, we hope, will simplify and clarify the discussion.

2 Overt intentional dogwhistles

In this section, we take a closer look at OIDs. OIDs have three distinctive features:

1. *Directionality*: OIDs are specifically directed at some subset of the audience. More-over, the speaker intends that only this subset of the audience consciously entertain the covert message of the dogwhistle.
2. *Underdetermination*: what is conveyed by an OID is underdetermined to some extent, in the sense that it is not easy exactly to pinpoint what the dogwhistled message actually is.
3. *Plausible deniability*: if successful, an OID allows the speaker coherently and reasonably to deny having issued any dogwhistle.

Let us illustrate the three points above through example (4). Directionality is achieved in this case through the use of the expression 'wonder-working power.' The majority of the audience (if not all) will immediately recognize this expression as religious, but most will take it either as part of Bush's rhetoric (indeed, religious references seem to be part of almost every US President's rhetoric to some extent), or as a general expression of religiosity. However, Evangelicals may pick up a reference to a hymn well known in the Evangelical Church, marking some contrast with Bush's Episcopalian upbringing.[10] Those picking up this reference may feel specially addressed by it. Hence, by uttering (4), Bush communicated a transparent, conventionally determined

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[9] Thanks are due to an anonymous reviewer for *Synthese* for drawing this point to our attention.

[10] The hymn in question is "There is power in the blood." See https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2003-03-02-0303020289-story.html for an interpretation along these lines.

content to all of his audience, which comprises an at-issue (5a) and a non-at-issue (5b) dimension (in virtue of the nominal appositive nature of 'wonder-working power'):

(5) a. There is power in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.
     b. That power works wonders.

while simultaneously conveying a different message only to a subset of his audience, namely Evangelicals. As for underdetermination, it is not completely clear what the exact concealed content of (4) is. For example, from (4) one may reasonably infer things like:

(6) a. That power is the power of Christ. (Saul, 2018, p. 362)
     b. Bush will advance some Christian-inspired policies while in government.
     c. Bush is a radical Christian.
     d. Bush welcomes Evangelical Christians.

Finally, any dogwhistling performed in uttering (4) is deniable: the message is specially crafted so that Bush may coherently deny having conveyed any additional content.

2.1 CIDs, OIDs and figleaves

We may gain further understanding on the specificity of dogwhistles by contrasting them to another device also deployed in political communication, namely figleaves (Saul, 2017, 2019).[11] Saul focuses on racial figleaves, that is, utterances whose function is to remove or mitigate the racist character of a previous utterance, by casting doubt upon the racism of the speaker herself. Figleaves come in different forms, from the most explicit and ineffective ones, like:

(7) I'm no racist, but…

followed by an explicitly racist utterance, to the more subtle ones, like:

(8) When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best… They [the people they send] are rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.[12]

where 'some, I assume, are good people,' is meant to cast doubt on the xenophobic nature of the speaker, and therefore of the first part of the utterance, by allowing for the possibility of there being "good" immigrants as well as bad ones.

Saul frames the discussion of figleaves in terms of the Norm of Racial Equality (NRE), i.e. the norm that says that one ought not be racist. Racial figleaves are designed to make explicitly racist utterances compatible with the NRE by blocking the inference from an explicitly racist utterance to an attribution of racism to the speaker. If successful, repeated figleaves gradually shift the boundaries of what is permissible to say and do, by changing what is perceived as racist in the first place.[13]

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[11] We are indebted to an anonymous referee for *Synthese* for pointing out the importance of figleaves to the understanding of dogwhistles.

[12] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/.

[13] Figleaves may also be offered for non-racist discriminatory remarks, as in:

It is interesting to pay attention to figleaves in connection to dogwhistles, for dogwhistles may also be deployed in political discourse in order to deal with the restrictions of the NRE. The first thing to notice is that, as Saul acknowledges, with explicitly racist utterances and figleaves, we "are not in the realm of dogwhistles" (Saul, 2017). Thus, by contrasting dogwhistles and figleaves, we may get a better grip on what the point of dogwhistling is. Saul focuses on the distinction between CIDs and figleaves. CIDs operate within the boundaries of the NRE, in the sense that, at the level of explicit content, nothing goes beyond the permissible: CIDs raise to salience preexisting racial attitudes, not in virtue of what is explicitly communicated, but in virtue of some feature or other of the message's vehicle. Thus, CIDs allow the speaker to circumvent the NRE while staying within the bounds of the permissible at the level of the explicit content of an utterance. Figleaves, on the other hand, come into play when an utterance violates the NRE at the level of explicit content, and they aim at lifting the attribution of racism, eventually shifting the boundaries of the permissible.

OIDs are even further removed from figleaves, and the comparison with figleaves and CIDs brings this to the fore: unlike CIDs and figleaves, OIDs do not operate necessarily in the terrain of racism or bigotry: from the point of view of various norms of equality, there is nothing out of bounds, no discrimination performed in being sympathetic to Evangelicals, in dogwhistling oneself as pro or anti-abortion, as against big pharmaceutical companies, or as an anti-vaxxer. Like CIDs, OIDs stay within the bounds of the permissible at the level of explicit content. Unlike CIDs, they may stay within those boundaries even at the level of whatever dogwhistled content there is. Like CIDs, and unlike figleaves, OIDs do not shift the boundaries of the permissible, and are not meant to do so. This is so because OIDs are expressions that allow us to pass concealed messages to a part of the audience we are addressing, without alerting the rest. They are not essentially connected to any form of discrimination, even though, of course, they may be used to pass on discriminatory messages. And they are not necessarily linked to circumventing or shifting the various norms of nondiscrimination that govern our discursive practices. They do have in common with figleaves and CIDs, that they allow the speaker to distance herself from a potentially problematic aspect of her views. But, as we will see, the mechanisms by means of which such distancing is performed are quite different: while figleaves produce the distance by blocking inferences, and CIDs by priming unconscious racial attitudes, OIDs do so by resorting to different linguistic mechanisms that warrant plausible deniability.

3 An account of overt intentional dogwhistles

In this section, we develop our account of OIDs, and show how it may account for their main features: directionality, underdetermination, and plausible deniability. Section

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Footnote 13 continued

> I have nothing against homosexuals, but…

So, we may think of figleaves in general as moves whose function is to cast doubt on the speaker's bigotry, thereby casting doubt upon the discriminatory nature of explicitly discriminatory remarks, thus leading to an eventual change in the boundaries of what is permissible to say and do, in view of certain general norm of non-discrimination.

3.1 spells out the structure we posit to explain the inner workings of OIDs. In Sect. 3.2, we sketch a Gricean theory of communication, required by the discussion that follows. Sections 3.3–3.5 develop the different elements presented in Sect. 3.1. In Sect. 3.3, we tackle perspective signaling and positioning message. In Sect. 3.4, we take a look at conventional, implicature-based and thoroughly perlocutionary OIDs, thus substantiating the contention that OIDs do not function in a unified way, some exploiting specific conventions, some being partly pragmatic, some being thoroughly perlocutionary. As we already remarked, this distinction is based on the strength of the connection between the expression used in performing the OID, and the signaled perspective. In Sect. 3.5, we address perlocutionary contents. This completes our account of the mechanism common to all OIDs, and the differences in implementation. In these subsections, we also argue that the mechanism OIDs employ is not essential to the phenomenon of implicit communication, but derives from the particular structure of political discourse. Section 3.6 properly relates OIDs to the more general phenomenon of implicit communication. Finally, in Sect. 3.7, we show how our view accounts for directionality, underdetermination, and plausible deniability.

3.1 The structure of overt intentional dogwhistling

In issuing an OID, a speaker performs an utterance of an expression *e* directed at an audience *A* whereby (i) she communicates to all the members of *A* an explicit message *m* (determined by the conventional meaning of *e* together with the context of utterance), and in doing so, (ii) she sets off a complex transmission mechanism distinctive of OIDs, whereby she attempts to get through a concealed message to a proper subset of *A*, the intended audience of the OID, or the OID audience, for short. As a first component of this mechanism, the speaker signals that she occupies a certain perspective, understood as a set of beliefs, expectations, non-cognitive attitudes (fears, desires), affective dispositions, practices and habits related to a given issue (politics, religion, art, and so on). The signaling of a perspective gives rise to a positioning message, designed by the speaker to let the OID audience know where the speaker stands *vis-à-vis* their interests. As a second component, OIDs are intended by the speaker to set off, on the part of the OID audience (in virtue of signaling a perspective and issuing a positioning message), a relatively undetermined set of cognitive and non-cognitive attitudes, which comprise, but may not be limited to, beliefs or acceptances arrived at by context-aware inference from the fact that the speaker signaled a certain perspective and issued a positioning message. We call that loosely defined assortment of beliefs/acceptances the *perlocutionary contents* of an OID. The concealed messages intuitively conveyed by OIDs comprise the expressed perspective, the positioning message and the perlocutionary contents.

Let us see how this complex mechanism works in our examples. In (2), the phrase 'big pharma' communicates an explicit content, namely *big pharmaceutical companies* and, on top of that, it signals an anti-vaxxer perspective. The expression of such perspective places Stein in close proximity to the anti-vaxxer movement, thereby generating a positioning message of identification with the anti-vaxxer community. The

targeted OID audience may then infer that the speaker will represent their interests and agenda against mandatory vaccination.

Example (3) follows this same general pattern of perspective expression and positioning message, but it works in a somewhat different way, for it also points to the perspective of the speaker, but in this case there does not seem to be any specific lexical item or phrase doing the work. Indeed, what signals Bush as being opposed to abortion is the *content* of the message, not its vehicle (as in the previous examples). In particular, perspective signaling is done via the allusion (in answering the question "Who would you choose to fill a Supreme Court vacancy?") to the Dred Scott case, often discussed within the anti-abortion movement. An identificatory positioning message is consequently issued. Then, the OID audience may infer from Bush's choice of example that, given the opportunity, he will push for a Justice who is against abortion.

Finally, as we saw in Sect. 2, the use of 'wonder-working power' in (4) has a transparent explicit content, but also characterizes the speaker as somehow linked to the Evangelical church, thus signaling an Evangelical perspective. In virtue of this signaling, a positioning message is put forward. For example, being an Episcopalian Christian, Bush may be positioning himself on the same path as Evangelical Christians, thus showing an alignment of interests. After that, the OID audience may extract further pieces of information by means of contextually-driven inference, like those in (6).

There are several aspects of this proposal that must be filled in. We need to say something concerning (i) what perspectives are, how may we theoretically represent them, how do perspective signaling and positioning messages operate, whether they amount to communication or not; and (ii) how does the OID audience go from expressed perspectives and positioning messages to perlocutionary contents. We do so in the next subsections. In order to address these issues, we have to start with a working theory of communication, to which we turn now.

3.2 Communication and perlocutionary contents

We take it that communication requires transparency of intention, rendered in the form of a distinctive kind of reflexive intentional structure, as first noticed by Grice (1957), and captured by the following definition of *meaning*$_{NN}$:

(9) A speaker S means$_{NN}$ that p with an utterance U if and only if:

1. S intends to induce a belief/intention that p in A,
2. S intends U to be recognized by A as so intended,
3. S intends A to fulfill 1. on the basis of her fulfillment of 2.

This definition has well-known limitations, but we won't delve into them—we focus instead on the fact that it makes explicit the distinctive intentional structure of meaning$_{NN}$.[14] Most importantly, condition 3. assigns intention recognition a central role in communication: in instances of meaning$_{NN}$, the speaker intends the audience's recognition of 1. and 2. to be effective in inducing the relevant belief or intention. In

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[14] In order to overcome these limitations and yet keep a simple formulation, Lepore and Stone (2010) use a reflexive formulation in terms of Lewisian contextual updates (Lewis, 1979). Our proposal could be recast using their definition of speaker meaning as our explication of communication.

other words, meaning$_{NN}$ requires that the speaker does not take it as a foregone conclusion that his utterance will produce the intended result, whether or not his intentions are recognized (see also Lewis 2002, pp. 152–154).

Now, not everything transmitted by an utterance is meant$_{NN}$ by the speaker. Perlocutionary effects serve as an example. As Austin (1962) pointed out, by making an utterance the speaker often brings about some effects that go beyond those conventionally triggered by her locutionary and illocutionary acts. A perlocutionary effect is a kind of causal effect, although one that is brought about by the linguistic functioning of the utterance. Crucially, these effects are not meant$_{NN}$ by the speaker (cfr. Lepore and Stone 2010, p. 6). For example, a speaker might utter 'I am a serial killer' intending for her utterance to produce fear on us. However, the fear she intends to produce is not meant$_{NN}$ by her. For the fear to be meant$_{NN}$, the following three conditions would have to be fulfilled:

1. the speaker intends to produce fear on us,
2. the speaker intends her utterance to be recognized by us as so intended,
3. the speaker intends us to fulfill 1. on the basis of our fulfillment of 2.

However, it is a foregone conclusion that the speaker would manage to produce fear on us, whether conditions 2. and 3. were fulfilled or not; that is, knowing that the person we are talking to is a serial killer would scare us whether we recognize her intentions to scare us or not, since it is not the recognition what causes our fear, but her being a serial killer. Hence, since coordination of communicative intentions does not play a crucial role in the production of our fear, fear is not meant$_{NN}$ by the speaker.[15]

It is crucial to note that a possible perlocutionary effect of an utterance is that of causing the audience to infer certain contents. We call these inferences *perlocutionary inferences*, and the inferred contents *perlocutionary contents*. As other perlocutionary effects, the contents derived via perlocutionary inference are brought about by the utterance in virtue of its linguistic functioning, but they are not meant$_{NN}$ by the speaker, because the required intentional structure is absent. Consider, for example, the following utterance:

(10) If signs of runaway inflation emerge we expect the Fed will be quick to act, but we don't believe we are there yet. For the time being the Fed has plenty of reasons to keep policy accommodative given weak demand and elevated unemployment.

(10) is a technical remark on an economic issue. After hearing the utterance, the audience may plausibly infer that the speaker is an economist. Moreover, the speaker may even have intended that the audience draw this inference. However, this inference is not meant$_{NN}$ by her, it is a perlocutionary effect of the utterance. As with the example of the serial killer above, the crucial point is that the audience would have drawn such inference regardless of any recognition of any intention to convey it, just in virtue of the speaker's use of technical vocabulary and signs of expertise on the subject. In

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[15] This is but a linguistic analogue of Grice's photograph example (Grice, 1957), aimed at showing that intention recognition must play a central response-eliciting role for there to be communication.

other words, the relevant content was not intended to be inferred by the audience *on the basis* of the audience's recognition of the speaker's intentions.[16,17]

3.3 Perspective signaling and positioning message

In this subsection, we focus on the first part of the OIDs' mechanism, that comprising perspective signaling and positioning messages. As indicated before, we understand perspectives in very broad terms as sets of beliefs, expectations, non-cognitive attitudes (fears, desires), affective dispositions, practices and habits related to a given issue (politics, religion, art, etc.) Following an insight by Kaplan (1999), we represent the expression of a perspective by means of an OID as a restriction on contexts of felicitous use, or alternatively as a set of contexts. (2)–(4) above characterize the context of utterance as a context whose agent occupies a particular perspective:

- (2) $\rightarrow$ {c: the speaker of c occupies an anti-vaxxer perspective at c_w at c_t}
- (3) $\rightarrow$ {c: the speaker of c occupies an anti-abortion perspective at c_w at c_t}
- (4) $\rightarrow$ {c: the speaker of c occupies an Evangelical perspective at c_w at c_t}

Perspective signaling is a crucial aspect of OIDs since in signaling a perspective, the speaker identifies the audience to which the OID is directed: in virtue of identifying the perspective that is being signaled, the OID audience may feel covertly addressed by the speaker's otherwise public utterance.

A crucial question concerns the nature of the association indicated by the arrow above. How do those utterances manage to signal a perspective? We contend that examples (2)–(4) instantiate three different mechanisms for signaling the perspective of the speaker: conventional, implicature-based, and perlocutionarily-based signaling, respectively.

Now, on our account, perspective signaling is followed by a positioning message, that is, a positioning of the speaker *vis-à-vis* the OID audience's perspective, interests, etc. So, before moving on to the discussion of how perspectives are signaled, we take a closer look at positioning messages.

Perspective signaling introduces a single relation between speaker and perspective. Positioning messages are designed to make this relation more specific, by letting the OID audience know where exactly the speaker stands, relative to their interests and agenda. This is also a crucial part of an OID's functioning, for the speaker need not share the perspective of the OID audience she is covertly addressing. Thus, positioning messages are a way for the speaker to let the OID audience know that they belong to the same group (a *favorable, identificatory* positioning message), or that at least they are fellow travelers, that in some sense she wants (at least part of) what the OID audience wants, that they are on the same side, in some respects, and so on (a *favorable, non-identificatory* positioning message). We argue below that the positioning message

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[16] This distinguishes perlocutionary inferences form conversational implicatures, where the full Gricean intentional structure is present.

[17] Our point that perlocutionary inferences will take place whether or not the audience recognizes the speaker's intentions should not be confused with the claim that these inferences are mandatory. Unlike some types of conventionally triggered inferences, such as conventional implicatures, perlocutionary inferences are optional and context-driven.

can be transmitted in different ways depending on the kind of mechanism employed to transmit the perspective.

It is worth noting that the accompanying positioning message need not be favorable. Paying attention to the structure of political discourse and political communication may shed some light on the issue. Addressees in political discourse are construed in complex ways. A basic distinction is between three types of construal (cfr. Verón et al. (1987)): the addressee may be construed as a pro-addressee (i.e., as an addressee that shares the beliefs, motivations, and general outlook of the speaker), as a para-addressee (i.e., as an addressee that does not share, or does not share to the same extent, the beliefs, motivations, and general outlook of the speaker but that is, in principle, open to changing her mind), and as a contra-addressee (i.e., as an addressee that is against the beliefs, motivations and/or general outlook of the speaker, and is not open to changing her mind). The positioning message varies according to how the OID audience is construed by the speaker, and how the OID audience construes itself *vis-à-vis* the speaker.

Jill Stein's use of 'big pharma' in (2) seems to elicit an interpretation of the OID along the pro-addressee line. Indeed, the OID audience may come to recognize Stein as a fellow anti-vaxxer that cannot fully, explicitly endorse her views on mandatory vaccination, on pain of alienating a sizable part of her electoral basis. Thus, the OID audience may come to hear a favorable, identificatory positioning message along the lines of: *I'm one of you, even though I can't say it out loud*. The same goes for example (3), *mutatis mutandis*. In the case of (4), on the other hand, Bush seems to be construing Evangelicals as para-addressees, and Evangelicals may feel addressed as such by his use of the phrase 'wonder-working power,' insofar as they will most likely be aware of Bush's Episcopalian faith. So, his positioning message will be interpreted as a favorable, non-identificatory positioning message along the lines of: *I'm with you, even though I'm not one of you*.

This opens the possibility of there being OIDs that construe the OID audience as a contra-addressee, thus eliciting an unfavorable, non-identificatory positioning message of the type: *I'm against you*. This would be the case, for example, of a politician that said something like: "We will push for this Act, and there is no obstacle, no power, no wonder-working power, that may deter us from supporting it." Here, the speaker would be interpreted as dogwhistling Evangelical Christians, or possibly radical Christians in general, and positioning herself against them. In this case, the speaker would be exploiting the regular association between uses of 'wonder-working power' and the signaling of a radical Christian/Evangelical perspective in order to generate a negative positioning message, by embedding the dogwhistle in a context that clearly construes the OID audience as a political adversary.

3.4 Conventional, implicature-based, and thoroughly perlocutionary OIDs

In this subsection, we take up the analysis of (2)–(4), from the viewpoint of the way perspective signaling and positioning message are achieved. In this regard, OIDs follow one of three models of functioning: they may be conventional, they may work by means of conversational implicature, or they may be thoroughly perlocutionary.
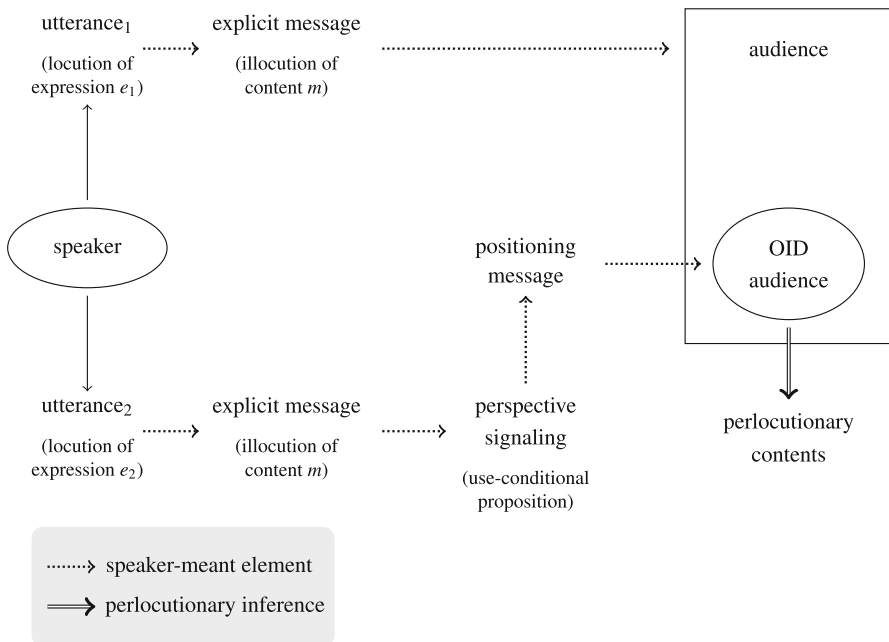
Fig. 1 Conventional OIDs

We capture this distinction in Figs. 1, 2, 3. The general mechanism, common to all types of OIDs, was already summarized at the beginning of 3.1, so we won't repeat it. What changes in the mechanism, from one case to the other, is the extent to which the elements in the functioning of OIDs are speaker-meant (either conventionally or by way of an implicature), and the extent to which they are left as perlocutionary effects brought about in the OID audience.

Figure 1 represents the model for conventional OIDs, of which (2), we contend, is an example. The reason for this representation will become clear in 3.4.1. For the time being, we notice that, in this case, both perspective and positioning message are speaker-meant, for the former is a conventional aspect of the OID, while the latter is pragmatically implicated by the OID. Figure 1 makes explicit the idea that conventional OIDs trade on the possibility of multiple utterances performed by means of the same phatic act (in Austin's (1962) sense).[18] In a sense, the OID audience speaks its own dialect in this case.

Our explanation for (3) is reflected in Fig. 2. In this example, what is speaker-meant comprises the explicit content of the utterance, as well as the perspective and the positioning message issued by Bush. The difference with (2) is not the extent to which the elements of the OID are speaker-meant, but the mechanism by which they are speaker-meant. In this case, both perspective and positioning message are non-conventionally implicated by the speaker.

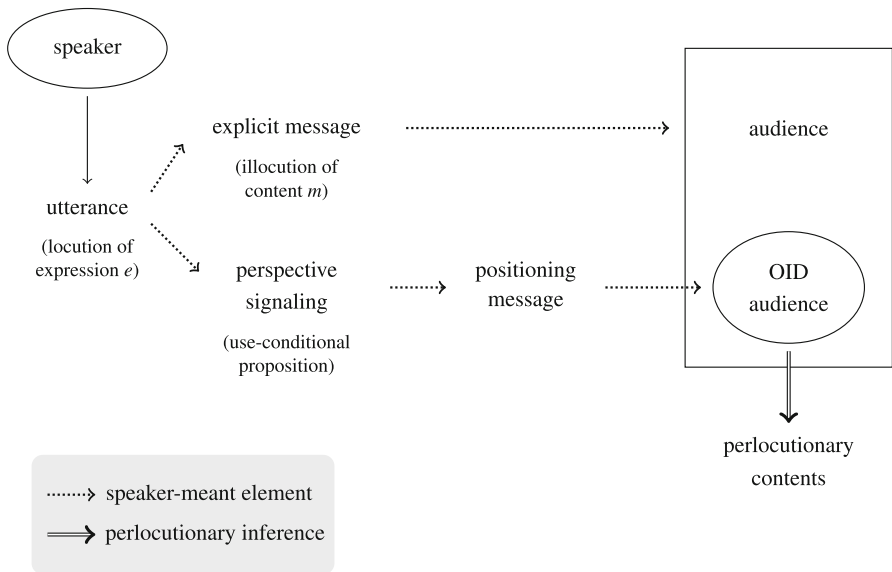[18] Regarding this possibility, see Egan (2009).

Fig. 2 Implicature-based OIDs

Our model explanation for (4) is reflected in Fig. 3. In this example, what is speaker-meant, and thus actually communicated by the speaker (and not merely transmitted by her utterance) reduces to the utterance's explicit content. Here, both perspective and positioning message are transmitted by way of perlocutionary inferences, and thus they are not part of what is properly communicated.

We now turn to a closer examination of the three types of OID we have identified. We start with conventional OIDs in Sect. 3.4.1. Then, we move on to implicature-based OIDs in Sect. 3.4.2. Finally, we address thoroughly perlocutionary OIDs in Sect. 3.4.3. As will become clear in what follows, it is possible to illuminate the nature of the distinction between conventional OIDs, implicature-based OIDs and thoroughly perlocutionary OIDs in terms of the strength and kind of the regular connection between expression and perspective. Thus, OIDs form a gradient: if there is no (or not enough) regularity (as it happens with the reference to the Dred Scott case in (3)), the OID relies on shared background assumptions, knowledge of context, and intention recognition, resulting in an implicature-based functioning. If, in turn, there is a regular association between certain expression and the relevant perspective, but the association is a mere concomitance, hence not part of the conventional meaning of the expressions (as with 'wonder-working power' in (4)), the OID may benefit from such regularity in order to signal the perspective, thereby giving rise to a thoroughly perlocutionary OID—here, there is no need to rely on shared knowledge, context and intention recognition. If the association between a term and a perspective has been so strongly established, within the community to which the OID belongs, that is has become part of what members of that community expect as a way of communicating between them, then the regularity becomes part of its conventional meaning (as in (2)). Then, the term may still be employed for issuing OIDs, but only to the extent that it is
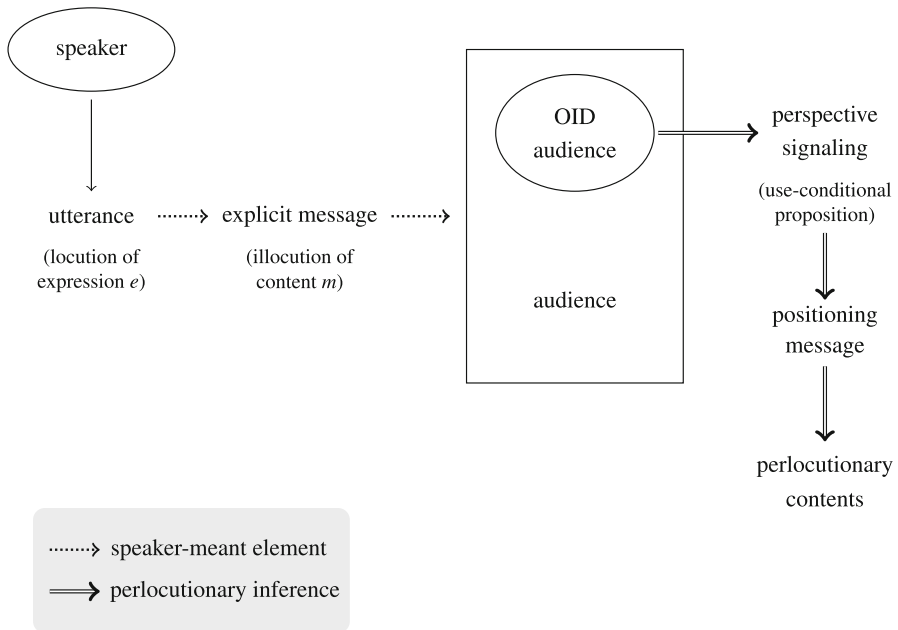
Fig. 3 Thoroughly perlocutionary OIDs

governed by different conventions within different communities of speakers. Finally, if the association between the term and the perspective is conventional and it is completely widespread, the term becomes useless for dogwhistling, since conventional meaning is neither directional nor deniable.

3.4.1 Conventional OIDs

With regard to example (2), our contention is that 'big pharma' signals an anti-vaxxer perspective (in the sense of fn. 6 above) in virtue of its conventional meaning. This is based on the fact that 'big pharma' is not a nonce way of referring to big pharmaceutical companies within the anti-vaxxer community, but a strongly established way of referring to them, customarily used by that community to do so in the context of expressing negative views concerning those companies. Thus, the association between an utterance of the expression and an anti-vaxxer context-type is regular and general enough within the anti-vaxxer community for it to become a conventional feature of 'big pharma' within that community.

If indeed 'big pharma' expresses an anti-vaxxer perspective as a matter of its conventional signification, then it may successfully function as an OID only to the extent that this convention is only known and in force among that subset of the entire population that comprises the anti-vaxxer movement.

At this point, we must bear in mind that although nowadays the term 'big pharma' will be recognized by almost everyone as signaling an anti-vaxxer perspective, it must have had a fairly contained use within the anti-vaxxer community, for it to effectively

function as an OID at some point. Here we face a methodological point concerning theorizing about OIDs in general, namely that we may use only examples of OIDs that have been discovered as such, and whose use as OIDs may have become publicly known (cfr. Witten (2008)). We will assume, for the sake of the argument, that at the time of the example (that is, 2016) the use of 'big pharma' to express an anti-vaxxer perspective was not completely spread out.

If we spell out the conventionality of meaning in terms of Lewis's definition of convention (Lewis, 1975, pp. 5–7), this means that for 'big pharma' to be an OID at all, uses of the expression in question should satisfy Lewis's conditions *but only among those involved in the anti-vaxxer movement, and not among the rest of the population.*[19] That is, the following must be the case:

1. Everyone (or almost everyone) in the anti-vaxxer movement (but not in the rest of the population) uses 'big pharma' to signal an anti-vaxxer perspective,
2. everyone (or almost everyone) in the anti-vaxxer movement (but not in the rest of the population) believes that the others use 'big pharma' in the same way,
3. the belief in 2. gives everyone (or almost everyone) in the anti-vaxxer movement (but not in the rest of the population) a good and decisive reason to use the term to signal the perspective,
4. there is a general preference among anti-vaxxers (but not among the rest of the population) for general conformity to using 'big pharma' to signal an anti-vaxxer perspective, rather than slightly-less-than-general conformity,
5. using 'big pharma' to signal anti-vaxxer perspective is not the only possible regularity meeting the last two conditions, and
6. the various facts listed in conditions 1. to 5. are matters of common (or mutual) knowledge among anti-vaxxers (but not in the rest of the population).

If this obtains, there is a convention governing uses of 'big pharma' to signal an anti-vaxxer perspective within the anti-vaxxer movement, but such convention is not in force among the rest of the audience, for whom the term just refers to big pharmaceutical companies. As a result, the term is ambiguous between two readings:

(11) **big pharma$_1$**

    a. at-issue content: *big pharmaceutical companies*
    b. not-at-issue content: *the speaker occupies an anti-vaxxer perspective*

(12) **big pharma$_2$**

    a. at-issue content: *big pharmaceutical companies*
    b. not-at-issue content: ∅

The same referential convention, namely to use 'big pharma' as a way of referring to big pharmaceutical companies, governs both readings, which is captured by a common at-issue content. The difference between one reading and the other results from the fact that only the former is governed by an additional, expressive convention to the effect that an expressively correct use of 'big pharma' requires a context where the

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[19] We are indebted to a reviewer for *Synthese* for suggesting thinking about this in Lewisian terms.

speaker holds anti-vaxxer views—resulting in the association of the expression with the signaling of an anti-vaxxer perspective, as we saw in Sect. 3.3.

Now, conventional meaning has at least two characteristic traits. First, every competent speaker has access to it. Second, it cannot be denied without contradiction. In other words, conventional meaning is neither directional nor deniable. How could it be possible then to issue an OID by using 'big pharma'? It is possible to the extent that, for the OID audience, both the referential and the perspective-expressive convention (those governing 'big pharma$_1$') are in force, while for the audience at large, only the referential convention (that governing 'big pharma$_2$') is in force. In such context, one can exploit the ambiguity in order to perform, by means of a single token of 'big pharma,' two different, simultaneous utterances, one directed to anti-vaxxers, who will read the utterance as containing 'big pharma$_1$,' hence as expressing an anti-vaxxer perspective, another directed to those in the dark regarding the anti-vaxxer convention, who will interpret the utterance in terms of 'big pharma$_2$,' thus hearing just a plain reference to big pharmaceutical companies. As we will see in Sect. 3.7, we may account for directionality, deniability and underdetermination as applicable to conventional OIDs along this line.

It is worth noting that there are some alternative ways of accounting for the example. Instead of claiming that Stein performed, by means of the same physical action, two distinct utterances, one containing 'big pharma$_1$,' the other containing 'big pharma$_2$,' it is possible to claim that Stein performed just one utterance containing 'big pharma$_1$' and trusted that the general audience, being ignorant about the perspective-expressive convention governing the expression she uttered, would interpret her utterance as containing 'big pharma$_2$.' That is, as simply referring to big pharmaceutical companies, without any expressive additions. Alternatively, one may claim that Stein performed an utterance containing 'big pharma$_2$' and trusted that the OID audience would interpret the utterance in terms of both the referential and the perspective-expressive conventions that govern 'big pharma$_1$,' given Stein's obvious reluctance to pronounce herself in favor of mandatory vaccination. These options warrant a similar explanation of directionality, deniability and underdetermination as the one we will provide in Sect. 3.7, but diverge from the one we have defended above in that they individuate Stein's utterance differently. Whether our own proposal or some of the above-mentioned alternatives is the correct account of (2) depends on the kind of communicative intentions that guided Stein in performing her utterance, something we are in no position to determine. However, whatever the case may be for this particular example, what we have said suffices to establish a crucial point, namely that it is indeed possible, in the right context and with the adequate intentions, to issue an OID by resorting to the conventional meaning of a certain expression.

Henderson and McCready (2019, pp. 225–226) consider a view similar to ours, viz. the view that sub-audiences have different "dialects," but reject it based on two arguments. First, they claim that this kind of view begs the question in favor of a conventionalist account (like that of Stanley, 2015). Our proposal escapes this criticism. We argue that the anti-vaxxer perspective is part of the conventional meaning of 'big pharma' by (i) noting that it satisfies Lewis's conditions for something being a convention, and by (ii) showing how such view provides a plausible explanation of both directionality and deniability in example (2) (Sect. 3.7). This kind of view does

not beg the question in favor of a conventional account of (2). The second argument advanced by Henderson and McCready maintains that if there were two conventions, the expression chosen to issue the OID should also be used when talking to an in-group, because this is how the expression is conventionally used for that part of the audience. However, they claim that "[d]ogwhistles, by definition, are not needed when talking to an in-group and can be disposed of, which wouldn't make sense if the subtext of dogwhistle were part of its conventional meaning for the in-group" (Henderson & McCready, 2019, p. 225). However, Henderson and McCready seem to be missing a distinction at this point: what is not required in talking to someone in the in-group is the act of *dogwhisling* a certain message—the expression by means of which dogwhistling is performed when talking in the presence of members of different out-groups may very well be retained in in-group conversation. The difference is simply that, in that setting, the expression will signal an anti-vaxxer perspective without dogwhistling it. There is no need to deny a conventionalization of perspective signaling in order to explain the use of 'big pharma' when talking to the in-group. We could recast this point in the following way: 'big pharma' is not, *per se*, an OID—rather, only its *use* by Stein in (2) is. Dogwhistling is primarily something speakers (not expressions) do, in the non-trivial sense that the speaker selects the device that better enables her to pass a concealed message to the OID audience without alerting the audience at large. Sometimes, expressions with no particular conventional association with a perspective may be coopted to this end, as we will see in the following paragraphs. Sometimes, however, there are expressions with such conventional associations that may be used to that end, for the existence of those conventions is not known in general outside the community to which the OID audience belongs. This is enough to explain why in-group uses of expressions with a conventional association to a perspective may nonetheless be used for communication within the in-group. We contend that this is the case with 'big pharma.'

3.4.2 Implicature-based OIDs

Example (3) requires a different approach. The utterance signals a perspective, concretely an anti-abortion perspective. However, there is no construction or lexical item in (3) that is responsible for this signaling; intuitively, what flags Bush as anti-abortion is the *content* of the message (concretely, Bush's mentioning of the Dred Scott case), not its vehicle as in the previous examples. But this alone cannot account for perspective-signaling in this case: the inference requires the audience to assess Bush's utterance in the context in which it took place, namely as part of an answer to the question "Who would you choose to fill a Supreme Court vacancy?" To see the point, notice that in a different context, say, a question concerning the history of racism in the US, a sincere use of (3) would hardly be taken as signaling an anti-abortion perspective, even by the target audience. This sensitivity to the question under discussion brings to light a crucial point: the inference to an anti-abortion perspective is driven by considerations of relevance. Concretely, we propose that the audience's inference that Bush holds an anti-abortion perspective is an implicature driven by the Maxim of Relevance, given the question being addressed, and the background assumptions concerning hot topics in a presidential debate—like abortion. In particular, the implicature in question seems

to be a standard implicature, i.e. an implicature based on the common assumption that the speaker observes the conversational maxims (cfr. Levinson, 1983, ch. 3).

Let us see how the example works. Bush started his answer by pointing out that he would choose a Justice that put personal opinions aside and enforced the constitution. Then, he brought up the Dred Scott case (where this did not happen) as an example of the kind of Justice he would not pick. Now, as it is known, in a Gricean framework implicatures are calculated against a background of contextual assumptions. In particular, relevance is judged against this background. Crucially, in example (3), different subsets of the audience interpret Bush's utterance against a different set of background assumptions. It is probably common knowledge between Bush and those in the dogwhistle audience that the Dred Scott case is related to race equality, but also that the case is usually discussed in relation to abortion. Against this background, Bush's mentioning of the Dred Scott case plus the assumption that he aimed at being maximally relevant with respect to the question under discussion will plausibly lead the OID audience, via standard Gricean reasoning, to infer that Bush is signaling an anti-abortion perspective. By contrast, the relation with the topic of abortion is not common knowledge between Bush and interpreters outside the target audience, only the relation to the topic of racial injustice is. Hence, for the general audience the inference to an anti-abortion perspective is out of reach. Instead, they will access only the at-issue content, namely that Bush would choose a Justice that does not let her personal opinions interfere with her interpretation of the Constitution. Admittedly, Bush's answer is not very informative (it is just part of the common ground that a Justice should do that). However, the expectations of relevance that are in force in this kind of conversational setting are usually lower than the expectations of relevance in force in other situations, since audiences are accustomed to politicians providing very broad, general answers during electoral campaigns, all the more if the topic is controversial. Hence, the general audience will interpret Bush as not being fully cooperative, and not necessarily as flouting a conversational maxim in order to pragmatically implicate further contents.

It is worth noting that our account of (3) in terms of a deniable implicature evokes Saul's (2018) view on the matter. Although she focuses on the analysis of CIDs, Saul briefly discusses OIDs (she mentions examples (3) and (4)), and proposes Camp's (2018) analysis of insinuation as a workable theory (though it was not originally intended as such). Our account of the Dred Scott example goes in line with both Saul's and Camp's accounts. However, although Camp's view may be a correct account of insinuation, and may be used to cast light into the functioning of some OIDs, if we are correct, it is not suitable as a general account of this phenomenon, since OIDs like (2) work by exploiting conventional meaning in a non-standard way, while examples like (4) work, as we will see next, by means of perlocutionary inference.[20]

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[20] As an aside, Saul's particular account of the Dred Scott example as a case of conversational implicature where the speaker seeks to *flout* a conversational maxim (see Saul, 2018, p. 363) does not work, for as we will see in Sect. 3.7, it is crucial for the success of the OID that its naive interpretation makes more or less sense, in the context, for the general audience.

3.4.3 Thoroughly perlocutionary OIDs

Let us move on to (4). In this case, the association with an Evangelical perspective is not part of the conventional meaning of 'wonder-working power.' To see the point, note that the first of Lewis's conditions for conventionality is not satisfied, for although 'wonder-working power' is in fact regularly used by Evangelicals, it is not regularly used *as a way of signaling an Evangelical perspective*, that is, there is no regularity in the Evangelical community to the effect that 'wonder-working power' expresses an Evangelical perspective. Instead, the expression is regularly used because it is part of a popular hymn sung during reunions or ceremonies (see fn. 10). Hence, there is no convention in force in the Evangelical community to such effect. We may say that there is a *correlation* between being Evangelical and regularly using (or at least being familiar with) the expression 'wonder-working power,' in the same way in which there is a correlation between being a philosopher and using (or at least being familiar with) technical philosophical vocabulary like 'analytic/synthetic,' although those terms do not conventionally encode the information that the speaker is a philosopher. Hence, although the sub-audience that is familiar with the term 'wonder-working power' may recognize the expression and feel specially addressed by its use, they will not grasp the relevant perspective in virtue of their *semantic* competence.

Since the perspective here is not part of conventional meaning, the mechanism by means of which it is conveyed must be non-semantic in nature.[21] One obvious option would then be to treat the expression of the perspective as a pragmatic inference, as with the Dred Scott case. However, this will not work, because the full intentional structure of communication discussed in Sect. 3.2 is not required for the inference to take place. On the contrary, mere knowledge that the expression is commonly used by Evangelicals suffices for the OID audience to infer that Bush is close to an Evangelical perspective, whether they recognize Bush's intention or not. In other words, it is a foregone conclusion that the knowledgeable part of the audience will infer that Bush is close to an Evangelical perspective. In support of this claim, note that a knowledgeable member of the audience would probably draw the same inference even if she believed that the speaker had no particular perspective-related intention. Imagine, for example, an in-group use of 'wonder-working power' by an Evangelical, received by an eavesdropper or a casual by-stander. Although in such a case the speaker has no specific intention of conveying a perspective to anyone—she is just singing a hymn popular within his religious group—a hearer acquainted with the relevant facts would be in position to infer that the speaker occupies an Evangelical perspective.

Thus, our proposed account of (4) goes as follows. Since 'wonder-working power' occurs in a widespread hymn within the Evangelical church, there is a strong correlation between uses of this construction and certain context-types, namely those in which the speaker is Evangelical. As a result, a use of the expression functions, for those familiar with the above-mentioned regularity, as a reliable (although defeasible)

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[21] We assume here, following the Fregean semantic tradition, that semantics comprehends only conventional dimensions of meaning.

indicator of the presence of the latter.[22] Thus, a use of 'wonder-working power' may lead those in the know to infer that the speaker is close to the Evangelical church.

If this is on the right track, the inference of a perspective in (4) is not a case of communication in the sense defined in 3.2. In this case, knowledge of the correlation between uses of the expression and the corresponding perspective seems to be part of a broader communicative competence that, as linguists have pointed out, vastly outruns syntactic and semantic competence.[23] In a sense, inferring closeness to an Evangelical perspective from the use of 'wonder-working power' is not different from (actually, it is the same as) recognizing a catchy phrase in the lyrics of a popular song, and inferring things about the speaker on that basis. Words and phrases are not imbued with new semantic meanings or meaning-constituting semantic properties merely by being used in song lyrics, and citing lyrics need not amount in any way to an attempt to communicate a perspective—though it may very well signal one nonetheless. Hence, we conclude that in (4) the perspective is not communicated but transmitted through a *perlocutionary inference*, i.e. as a causal effect brought about by the utterance in virtue of its linguistic functioning.

3.5 Perlocutionary contents

Thus far, we have dealt with perspective signaling and positioning message. Now we turn to the second stage of the mechanism by means of which OIDs get their messages across: in addition to the expression of a perspective and a positioning message, and on the basis of these, OIDs are intended by the speaker to set off, on the OID audience, a relatively indeterminate set of cognitive and non-cognitive effects, that we denominate *perlocutionary contents*.

Crucially, unlike the expression of a perspective and a positioning message, per-locutionary contents are *never* speaker-meant. Admittedly, the speaker has a general intention to set off some such indeterminate set of perlocutionary contents, but whether the OID audience actually goes through any such inference is independent of any recognition of any speaker's intention to that effect. Going back to (4), Bush may have intended that part of his audience infer that he would advance policies that are in accordance with Evangelical views. But he did not intend to transmit this content *on the basis of the audience's recognition of his communicative intentions* (condition 3. of meaning$_{NN}$). Instead, he used the construction 'wonder-working power,' and hoped that this would bring about certain inferences or associations in the target audience. Undoubtedly, his strategy was guided by reasonable hypotheses concerning the beliefs and desires of the audience. However, perlocutionary effects are highly dependent on the audience-context (unshared beliefs, non-cognitive attitudes, emotional dispositions, cognitive biases, psychological inclinations, practical interests, among other things), so although Bush may have intended that the OID audience infer certain perlocutionary contents, and although he may have been in a position to make very

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[22] In addition to observed patterns of use, the association between the perspective and the construction may be underpinned by the belief that the expression is used by speakers who hold the perspective.

[23] Part, for example, of the unspecified class of *procédés accessoires* that Benveniste (1980) identifies in his discussion of the formal apparatus of enunciation.

reasonable hypotheses concerning which parts of the audience would make them and which would not, this was ultimately not under his control.[24]

This is a good place to address a worry about the specificity of our account. Thus far, we have accepted Saul (2018)'s account of CIDs in terms of covert perlocutionary acts, and we have put forward an account of OIDs that draws heavily on perlocutionary effects and perlocutionarily inferred contents. What is the difference between both types of dogwhistles? The most notorious difference is the role that intention recognition plays in each case. When the intention behind a CID is recognized, the CID ceases to have effect, at least on those who consciously reject the unconscious attitudes the CID aims to prime. That is, intentions have to remain hidden for CIDs to work at all. With OIDs, the role of intention recognition is entirely different: in implicature-based OIDs, intention recognition is central to an OID achieving its desired effect, in the sense that perspective signaling and positioning message heavily rely on the recognition of the speaker's intentions; and in thouroughly perlocutionary OIDs, intention recognition, while it plays no role in any stage, does not hinder the OID's functioning. This difference points towards an important difference in the mechanisms that underlie both types of dogwhistles: while CIDs work by priming attitudes of which agents are unaware, OIDs aim at the audience's explicit reception of the dogwhistle. Thus, CIDs and OIDs achieve their effects by bringing about different perlocutionary effects in quite different ways. CIDs attempt to give unconscious attitudes enough prominence so that they bear on issues they would not bear on otherwise, such as voting tendencies. OIDs do not prime unconscious attitudes, but they seek to cause the OID audience consciously to draw inferences in a context-aware way. If this inferential behavior has further, non-cognitive effects, these are also achieved at a consciously accessible level.

3.6 OIDs and implicit communication

As we remarked in the introduction, OIDs in political communication are instances of a more general phenomenon that need not relate to politics in any way. On the one hand, arguably the perspective-positioning message strategy we described above can be put to use for non-political purposes. This is presumably the case of Subaru's commercial slogan "It's not a choice, it's the way we're built," which referred to the fact that all Subaru's cars have all-wheel drive, but it was actually pitched at the gay community, constructing them either as para-addressee or pro-addressee (Fear 2007, p. 4).[25] On the other hand, perspective expression and positioning message are features of OIDs not necessarily present in the more general phenomenon of covert messaging. Neither is intending for perlocutionary contents to be inferred by the target audience. Cases where no perspective is expressed, yet perlocutionary contents are present, are provided by what Boyd and Marwick (2011) call social steganography. Paradig-

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[24] A comparison with non-doxastic effects like fear my be instructive. A horror film may be intended by its creators to elicit fear in the audience. They may have sound hypotheses concerning how best to achieve this effect, and may expect part of the potential audience to experience fear in watching the film. All of this notwithstanding, whether the audience feels fear or not, does not depend on any recognition of any intention to induce fear by means of the film.

[25] See also https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2000/07/04/gay-consumers-in-the-drivers-seat/a5770b47-f5ab-4579-b3de-fe5334448d0a/.

matic cases of social steganography are provided by covert communication in social media, where users deliberately post messages specially crafted to be interpreted by different audiences in different ways.[26] Cases where a perspective is signaled, yet no perlocutionary inferencing is intended by the speaker, may be provided, e.g. by (past and present-day) crypto-Christians trying to signal one another, and by anti-semites attempting to signal one another by deploying the signaling device of triple parentheses. None of these examples take the form of political dogwhistles, yet they exhibit some or all of the features of overt dogwhistling, namely directionality, deniability and underdetermination.

This, of course, is not new, as Witten (2008), and Saul (2018) after her, have pointed out that OIDs are specializations of a more general phenomenon, that of covert messaging. What is novel in our account is that the distinctive way in which OIDs achieve their goal in political communication (*via* perspective signaling and positioning message) can be explanatorily derived from the way addressees are constructed in political discourse, as developed in Sect. 3.3.

3.7 Directionality, underdetermination and deniability

In this section, we show how the view we presented above may account for directionality, underdetermination and deniability.

Let us start with directionality. In example (2), directionality is obtained straightforwardly, because different parts of the audience disambiguate the utterance differently, and only some of them, those who interpret the utterance as in 'big pharma$_1$,' access the anti-vaxxer perspective. The positioning message that accompanies the perspective, in turn, is pragmatically inferred on the basis of context by standard Gricean mechanisms. Why is this so? Firstly, notice that the positioning message cannot be a conventionally imparted aspect of the utterance. Indeed, positioning messages are classified in three broad groups: identificatory, favorable non-identificatory, and unfavorable non-identificatory. Although Stein may sensibly be taken to be flagging herself as an anti-vaxxer, another conversational setting could make it clear that she is addressing the anti-vaxxer movement as a para-addressee, sharing their mistrust of big pharmaceutical companies, but not necessarily their views concerning vaccination in general. This could not happen if the positioning message was a conventional feature of the expression in question. Secondly, insofar as 'big pharma' conventionally signals a perspective, the presumption that such a signaling is speaker-meant arises in the OID audience. As a result, the OID audience will attribute to the speaker an intention to position herself in such-and-such way relative to that perspective.

In example (3), both the anti-abortion perspective and the identificatory positioning message are pragmatically implicated. Now, conversational implicatures depend upon a background of contextual assumptions shared between speaker and hearer. The

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[26] Boyd describes the case of Carmen, a teenager wanting to get through to her friends, via Facebook, the message that she was not feeling well (due to having broken up with her boyfriend), without her mother noticing (thus avoiding a potential overreaction on her part). She decided to post the lyrics from Monty Python's "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life," an innocent enough post by her mother's lights, yet capable of alerting Carmen's friends that something was wrong. The example is available at https://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2010/08/23/social-steganography-learning-to-hide-in-plain-sight.html.

crucial contextual assumption for deriving the implicature that Bush occupies an anti-abortion perspective was that the Dred Scott case is frequently discussed within the anti-abortion movement. But only part of the audience shared this contextual assumption with Bush. This accounts for the fact that only part of the audience was able to derive the implicature.[27]

Finally, in examples like (4) the perspective and its corresponding positioning message are transmitted via perlocutionary inference. Perlocutionary effects heavily depend upon the audience-context. More specifically, in these examples the relevant perlocutionary inferences require the audience to have some kind of cultural competence, i.e. to be familiar with the regular association between the construction 'wonder-working power' and certain perspective. Directionality is explained by the fact that only part of the audience possesses this kind of competence.

The previous considerations explain directionality of perspective signaling and positioning message. These comprise only a part of an OID's concealed message, the other part being perlocutionary contents. Directionality regarding perlocutionary contents is explained straightforwardly because in the examples under discussion their derivation depends directly upon the derivation of a perspective.

Our view also explains deniability. Following Mazzarella (2021, p. 6), we take denials to be "discourse moves that consist of denying having had the intention to communicate some implicit content that the addressee inferred and attributed to the speaker as part of her intended meaning." Typically, denials involve not only the retraction of the transmitted content but also the provision of an alternative interpretation. In the same line as Camp (2018, pp. 47–49), Mazzarella maintains that the possibility of denying a given implicit content lies on the difference between the contextual assumptions that are mutually obvious for both speaker and audience, which were exploited to convey the implicit content, and those that the speaker is willing to acknowledge as mutually obvious. On this view, denials consist in attempts to reconstruct the context of interpretation, that is, attempts by the speaker to bring to salience or exclude previously held mutual contextual assumptions in order to favor a new interpretation of the utterance.

In this regard, we should note, with Witten (2008), that the communicative situation in which OIDs arise already comprises two different sets of contextual assumptions, or common grounds, that are readily accessible, for the purposes of deniability: the common ground or assumptions the speaker shares with the larger audience (CG_A), and the common ground or shared assumptions that presumably unify the OID audience (CG_{OID}).[28] An OID trades on the existence, or presumption of existence, of shared assumptions within the OID audience in order to pass concealed messages to them. The transparent message of an OID, on the other hand, requires a different set

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[27] Witten (2008) has a very interesting account of how the common ground of the different communities of practice that may constitute an OID audience may be exploited by the speaker in order to issue an OID directed at them. We find her explanation in consonance with our view of this kind of OID. We differ in that directionality for other kinds of OIDs cannot be explained in this way.

[28] As Witten (2008) suggests, the OID audience is usually a strongly unified group, in terms of assumptions, interests, etc. Most of the time, they will belong to a determinate community of practice. This is usually enough to presuppose a set of common and shared assumptions among the members of the OID, in virtue of belonging to such a group.

of assumptions on the part of the larger audience, relative to which the transparent content of the OID can be felicitously interpreted, but relative to which the concealed message goes unnoticed. The speaker may deny having issued any OID simply by stating that she was relying on CG_A, rather than on CG_{OID}.

Examples (2) and (3) are deniable in the previous sense. In (2), the speaker trusts that the different sets of contextual assumptions held by the OID audience and the general audience will lead them to disambiguate the utterance differently, one in terms of 'big pharma$_1$,' the other in terms of 'big pharma$_2$.' Deniability is possible because in an appropriate context, the speaker may allege that she intended to exploit the set of contextual assumptions that favored an interpretation of the utterance in terms of 'big pharma$_2$,' that is, she can claim she was conforming only to the uncontroversial, referential convention. And to be sure, the context was appropriate in (2), since (i) it was not a context where the anti-vaxxer convention (as in 'big pharma$_1$') was clearly in force (as it would be the case if the term had been used in an anti-vaxxer Facebook group) and (ii) Stein's remarks preceding her utterance served to cast doubt on whether she really was an anti-vaxxer. Likewise, in (3) Bush relies on two different sets of contextual assumptions in order to pass different messages to different parts of the audience. Concretely, he manages to pass an anti-abortion perspective and identificatory message to the OID audience by relying on an implicit, mutually known assumption regarding the Dred Scott case. Again, deniability is possible because Bush can claim that the shared context was not the one the hearer supposed it was, and push for a context reconstruction that favors a different interpretation, by drawing upon the assumptions shared by, and with, the larger audience.

Contents transmitted through perlocutionary inference, such as the expression of a perspective and its corresponding positioning message in examples like (4) and perlocutionary contents in general, are also deniable, basically because they are not *speaker-meant*, i.e. they do not result from coordination of intentions and conversational goals between speaker and hearer at any level, but emerge as a causal effect of the utterance, not entirely under the control of the speaker. As a result, perlocutionary inferences go on the hearer's account, and are therefore deniable by the speaker.

We must also distinguish between *plausible* and merely *possible* deniability.[29] As we said, denials are attempts to reconstruct the context of interpretation, but not any reconstruction is acceptable. According to Mazzarella, the degree of plausibility of a given denial is a function of its relevance; very roughly put, for a denial to be plausible, the intended reconstruction of the utterance must satisfy contextual standards of relevance.[30] Hence, for an OID to be *plausibly* deniable, the intended reconstruction of the utterance must be conversationally appropriate in the context, i.e. it must be possible for the interpreter to reconstruct the utterance while preserving the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative. Whether this condition is satisfied depends, of course, on the communicative context: which sets of shared assumptions are available or easily

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[29] Thanks to two anonymous reviewers for *Synthese* for raising this issue.

[30] Mazzarella understands relevance in terms of Relevance Theory, so the plausibility of a denial depends, on her view, on the cognitive effort needed to process the new set of contextual assumptions *vis-à-vis* the effort needed to process the old one, and the cognitive effects of the reconstruction of the utterance *vis-à-vis* the cognitive effects of the original one. However, in principle the same idea could be reformulated in terms of a classical Gricean framework, as we do below.

accessible for the denial to work (typically, those corresponding to the OID audience and to the larger audience), how competent the speaker is in dogwhistling (i.e., how much sense does the transparent message make, or the alternative interpretation being proposed, relative to alternative, contextually accessible sets of shared assumptions, like that of the larger audience), and crucially, how stringent are our standards for plausible deniability.

Finally, the view accounts for underdetermination. As stated above, the mechanism we proposed for OIDs involves the transmission of a set of perlocutionary contents. And as we saw, perlocutionary contents are highly dependent upon audience-context, hence they may vary from individual to individual depending on the their (unshared) beliefs, emotions, cognitive biases, practical interests, and so on. Although these features might be sufficiently similar across some groups of individuals, they are not exactly the same in all of them, so we can expect similar inferences, but not exactly the same ones, in every hearer, in every context. That being said, it is worth noting that our view is still compatible with perlocutionary contents being highly determined in some specific contexts. The speaker may in some cases expect to set off a particular set of inferences, and she may even succeed at this, if the context suffices to narrow down the possibilities. However, this is not due to the determined nature of perlocutionary contents, but to the specific features of the conversational context.

4 Discussion

In the previous section, we identified the main components of OIDs, namely a perspective, a positioning message and further perlocutionary contents, as well the linguistic mechanisms whereby they are transmitted. In this section, we will discuss three alternative approaches by Tirrell (1999), Henderson and McCready (2019) and Khoo (2017) in order to further clarify our view. This discussion will show that our approach differs from extant ones, either in terms of better empirical adequacy, or in terms of better conceptual adequacy.

4.1 Inferentialism

To start with, it is interesting to compare our analysis of OIDs with another theory that places inferences at the core of the semantic (or semantico-pragmatic) enterprise, namely inferentialism.[31] Particularly instructive is the comparison with Tirrell's (1999) inferentialist account of slurs, for it may help in casting light upon the nature of the perlocutionary inferences we posit.

According to inferentialism, the meaning of an expression is determined by its inferential role, that is, its potential to serve both as premise and conclusion in inference. In Tirrell's brand of inferentialism (of distinctively Brandomian flavor), these patterns of inference are governed by referential, assertional and expressive commitments, which take the form of entitlements and responsibilities: in saying something, the speaker presents herself as entitled to use a sentence, and licenses its use by oth-

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[31] We are indebted to an anonymous reviewer for *Synthese*, for pressing us on this issue.

ers as premise in further inferences, while taking responsibility for identifying the objects of discourse (referential commitment), justifying or vindicating her claim if challenged (assertional commitment) and motivating the viability and value of the relevant way of talking (expressive commitment).

Tirrell characterizes slurs as expressions that work by means of reductive classification, and have distinctive perlocutionary effects, insofar as they are, or give rise to, "angry put-downs that attempt to reduce the person to one real or imagined feature of who they are" (Tirrell, 1999, p. 43). The inferentialist framework is then put to work, to answer two questions:

- How the semantics of slurs contributes to their perlocutionary effects.
- How those perlocutionary effects contribute to the very meanings of the terms.

Tirrell advocates the view that a slur's assertional commitments determine what is usually called its semantic content, and that this content "cannot be separated from the pragmatic history and the force of the term" (Tirrell, 1999, p. 49), that is, it cannot be separated from the social, psychological and economic practices that underpin the use of a slur.

We understand the first question as a synchronic descriptive (semantic or semantico-pragmatic) question as to how semantic content contributes to perlocutionary effects in the case of slurs, and the second question as a diachronic, foundational or metasemantic issue as to the way in which slurs gain their semantic content and their derogatory dimension in virtue of their use history (e.g. about how the N-word ended up being derogatory in virtue of its association with the long history of racism and slavery in the US), and how those dimensions may change in virtue of changes in social practices (there is also a descriptive reading of the question, as to how a particular slur may actually change in those dimensions).

There is much that is interesting in Tirrell's inferentialist account of slurs, both at the semantic and the political level. Let us stick to the semantic level, in order to see what the differences between our account of OIDs and Tirrell's account of slurs might be. Even at the semantic level, we take it that only the first question is relevant, as the second one pertains to the issue of how content is determined, and how it may change, and we may safely abstract from such metasemantic issues in providing a theory of how dogwhistle interpretation works, insofar as we are concerned with this descriptive question, not with foundational issues concerning word meaning.

Most importantly, at this descriptive semantic level, one of Tirrell's main points is that, although the assertional and expressive commitments associated with slurs are closely connected with their pragmatic history, they are semantic in nature. Hence, these commitments cannot be cancelled by an individual speaker, even if she has no intention to evoke such a history. Tirrell grants that some speakers, in some occasions, may be able to detach the slur from its assertional and expressive commitments, as in reclaimed uses, but she contends that (i) since this requires a change in commitments, it implies a change in meaning, (ii) it is an achievement of the whole linguistic community, not of isolated language users, and (iii) it takes a considerable amount of time for this kind of detachment to take place.

Tirrell's account serves to mark several differences between slurs and expressions used to perform OIDs, like 'wonder-working power' and 'big pharma.' Like the former,

the latter are also connected with social and cultural practices, and these connections invite some inferences in the audience. However, unlike slurs, the inferences transmitted by uses of 'wonder-working power' and 'big pharma' are deniable: in using (2) or (4), the speaker does not *license*, in the inferentialist sense of the term, any inference, and she does not undertake responsibility for justifying the dogwhistled content. All to the contrary, the speaker counts on being able to deny having transmitted it. This relates to an important difference between slurs and OIDs: while slurs give raise to interventions in the public space, directed at a target group in order to publicly enforce the position of the dominant group, OIDs are meant to remain outside the public sphere, they are ways of passing concealed messages to a certain group, without general acknowledgment of those messages by the community at large.

It is clear then that slurs and words like 'wonder-working power' and 'big pharma' work differently. Plausibly, the difference lies in the connection between the word and the relevant social and cultural practices, which is much weaker and less widespread in the latter. As Tirrell claims, the social and cultural practices underpinning slurs have already crystallized in the meaning of the word, as a matter of public, community-wide knowledge. By contrast, the association between expressions like 'wonder-working power' or 'big pharma' and the relevant social and cultural practices, although regular and familiar for a significant part of the linguistic community, has not yet solidifed as part of the word's meaning for the community at large. As we have argued, in the case of 'wonder-working power,' they have not crystallized at all, not even within the community to which the OID audience belongs. And, in the case of 'big pharma,' the crystallization has taken place only within the anti-vaxxer community, and not outside of it (at least at the time of the example, as we have assumed for the sake of argument). As a consequence, the kind of inferences triggered by both kinds of expressions, as well as the commitments assumed by the speakers in each case, are rather different in nature. Any use of a slur commits the speaker to the viability and value of using such expressions, and any member of the audience that is a competent user of the language is in position to draw such inferences. This is confirmed by the fact that it is not possible to perform an OID by means of a slur: such speech act would lack both directionality and deniability. By contrast, perfectly competent speakers of English may ignore that 'wonder-working power' is regularly associated with certain perspective, thus lacking the cultural competence required to draw the relevant inferences; and speakers in a different linguistic community may ignore the specific conventions governing 'big pharma' within the anti-vaxxer movement, thus lacking the resources to interpret (2) as expressing an anti-vaxxer perspective. This is why, unlike slurs, speakers may use these expressions to successfully perform OIDs.

4.2 Perspectives in OIDs

Henderson and McCready (2019) offer a purely pragmatic account of dogwhistling according to which dogwhistles come in two different types. In Type I dogwhistles, the utterance conveys an explicit message to all of the audience, while implicitly transmitting a message about the speaker's identity, a persona, to a targeted sub-audience. They model this phenomenon using Bayesian signaling games as developed

in Burnett ([2017], [2019]).[32] In Type II dogwhistles, the hearer recovers the speaker's persona and then uses it to determine *what is said* by the utterance, by means of a pragmatic process of free enrichment.

Examples of Type I dogwhistles are, according to Henderson and McCready, dogwhistles like 'big pharma' and 'wonder-working power.' An example of a Type II dogwhistle is 'inner city,' as used in:

(13)   We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work.[33]

Or, for that matter:

(14)   If we keep on this path, if we reelect Barack Obama, the America we leave our kids and grand kids won't look like the America we were blessed to grow up in. The American Dream will be in hock. The shining city on the hill will start to look like an inner-city wreck.[34]

This raises the issue how actually to characterize the disagreement between Henderson and McCready's account of dogwhistles and ours, for their classification of dogwhistles seems to be incompatible with ours, given that they place 'inner city' together with examples (2)–(4), whereas we set it apart, on account of being a CID. Are we addressing the same phenomenon?

The first thing to notice is that there need be no incompatibility between both classifications. For CIDs seem to be short-lived: the gist of a CID is to go unnoticed by its intended addressees, and the way to fight CIDs, as Saul ([2019]) points out, is to out them, to expose them as devices of racial priming. If, once they cease to be covert, speakers continue to use them, they become OIDs, that is, concealed yet somewhat direct expressions, for those in the know, of the speaker's perspective. Arguably, 'inner city' may be a case in point: it used to work as a CID (see Horwitz and Peffley, [2005]; White, [2007]) but open discussion of its racial load forced it into functioning as an OID. Hence, our classification of 'inner city' as a CID need not be incompatible with an analysis like that of Henderson and McCready ([2019]).

Now, even if we were placing 'inner city' in incompatible parts of the classification, there is still a substantive disagreement in terms of the correct analysis of examples (2)–(4). Let us start by noticing that our view does have some points of contact with Henderson and McCready's approach—in particular, both they and we identify a component of dogwhistling that carries information about some relevant aspect of the speaker's social identity, what we called a perspective, and what they call a persona. However, there is one important difference between the two approaches: Henderson

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[32]   Roughly put, within this framework messages have, in addition to their standard denotational meaning, a social meaning which signals a set of possible personae. Thus, in choosing a given message the speaker aims at restricting the possible personae the hearer can assign to her when interpreting the utterance. Speaker and listener choose their message and interpretation with the goal of maximizing the expected utility of the utterance, which is calculated by taking into account both the amount of information conveyed about the speaker's persona and the affective values assigned to the personae consistent with the message.

[33]   Paul Ryan, interview in Bill Bennett's Morning in America, March 12, 2014.

[34]   In Trump ([2011], p. 4). Discussed by Khoo ([2017]).

and McCready take no position regarding the mechanisms whereby information about personae is transmitted, except for arguing against a conventional approach like that of Stanley (2015).[35,36] By contrast, our view contemplates three concrete mechanisms for perspective expression: conventional signaling, perlocutionary inference, and conversational implicature. Hence, our view covers more ground than theirs, and it is in this sense stronger: we are committed both to the idea that overt intentional dogwhistling is not a uniform phenomenon, and to the claim that not all overtly intentionally dogwhistled contents are actually communicated (in the sense of being speaker-meant).

There are two additional noteworthy differences between Henderson and McCready's view and our proposal. First, they recognize only one kind of general relation speakers may bear to personae, that of *flagging* oneself as, e.g. an Evangelical or an anti-vaxxer. In contradistinction, we posit a threefold construction of the relation between the speaker and the perspective she signals, based on the construction of the OID audience as a pro, para or contra-addressee of the political communication, and we derive this from a more general theory of the structure political communication and political discourse have in modern, multiparty democratic systems. As a consequence, perspective expression may come in three different varieties, and generate three different types of positioning messages: perspective possession and full identification messages (of the *I am one of you* kind), perspective endorsement/approval and partial identification messages (of the *I am a fellow traveler* kind), and perspective rejection and adversarial identification messages (of the *I am against you* kind).

The second difference concerns the place of perspective expression as part of the phenomenon of implicit communication. We deem perspective expression, not an essential component of implicit communication, but the result of the specialization of a more general mechanism of covert messaging in the context of political discourse. Henderson and McCready, in turn, seem to think that dogwhistling is a specialization of the phenomenon of using information about the speaker in order to recover her intended meaning in cases like those of ambiguity, underspecification, and semantic enrichment (cfr. Henderson and McCready, 2019, p. 242), although in a non-cooperative setting. Thus, whereas we identify deniable implicit communication as the basic phenomenon, of which political dogwhistling is just an instance, they seem to believe that the basic phenomenon is that of signaling speaker's information as a way of conveying additional content, with dogwhistling being just a special case. Overall, we believe that our view is in better standing as a general account of overt intentional dogwhistling, since it provides a more fine-grained understanding of the use of perspectives (or personae) in strategic covert messaging, and has broader empirical coverage, since as we saw in 3.6, not every case of covert messaging exploits information concerning the speaker's identity. Moreover, by focusing on OIDs from the viewpoint of the more general phenomenon of covert messaging, we are able to recognize variety in the mechanisms

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[35] As discussed in Sect. 3.4.1, our view differs from Henderson and McCready's in that they reject a 'two dialects' view as the one we proposed to account for (2).

[36] It is worth noting that (Burnett, 2019, Sec. 2) explicitly treats inferences triggered by socially meaningful expressions as some kind of conversational implicature. Henderson and McCready adopt Burnett's view, but since they are not explicit about this particular feature of the framework, we assume that their view is just silent on the topic. If they fully adopted Burnett's views, their approach would be incompatible with ours, since we treat some OIDs in terms of perlocutionary inferences, and some as conventional.

of transmission, while at the same time providing for a unified treatment of OIDs in terms of their distinctive discursive functioning.

Finally, we should note that Henderson and McCready seem to offer no principled characterization of the distinction between Type I and Type II dogwhistles, in the sense that the distinction seems to be entirely descriptive: no criterion is provided in terms of which dogwhistles may be predicted to go into one category or the other. However, as we showed in Sect. 3.4, on our account it is possible to illuminate the nature of the distinction between conventional OIDs, implicature-based OIDs and thoroughly perlocutionary OIDs in terms of the strength and kind of the regular connection between expression and perspective.

4.3 Inference-driven effects

The last account we want to consider is Khoo (2017). Khoo offers an inference-driven account of dogwhistles according to which the speaker intends dogwhistles to induce the target audience inferentially to arrive at certain beliefs on the basis of her preexisting beliefs. According to Khoo, the contents of those inferred beliefs are not part of what is asserted by the speaker in using a dogwhistle, nor need they be contents the speaker communicates by way of a conversational implicature (though they may be).[37]

More precisely, Khoo holds that dogwhistles operate according to the following pattern: first, the speaker uses a dogwhistle d in performing a statement of the form x is d; then, the addressee infers a content of the form x is r on the basis of a pre-existing belief of the type if $something$ is d, $then$ it is r. All the speaker asserts, and all she is committed to, is the explicit statement x is d. The dogwhistled content, x is r, has not been explicitly communicated, maybe not even communicated at all, in the sense that the inference from the use of a dogwhistle to such 'coded' content essentially depends on pre-existing, background beliefs the addressee has.

Khoo's model has some points of contact with our proposal. First, dogwhistles are accounted for in terms of context-driven inferences essentially dependent on audience-context, in the sense that they crucially depend on pre-existing beliefs held by the audience. Second, as a consequence, such context-driven inferences may be largely outside the control of the speaker. However, it should be noted that Khoo's proposal is somewhat undeveloped, whereas we are offering a detailed explanation of how OIDs function, which draws on notions such as perspective expression, positioning messages, and triggers for perlocutionarily inferred contents. Moreover, by placing this explanation of OIDs against the background of the communicative structure of political discourse (in particular, addressee construction), we provide a more explanatory theory of how OIDs actually work.

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[37] Actually, Khoo draws a parallel between the beliefs arrived at by the target audience and the beliefs arrived at by an addressee by noticing, e.g. that the speaker has a particular accent. There is some ambivalence in this characterization, for this parallelism seems to deprive dogwhistles of any intentionality whatsoever, insofar as there is no intentionality in speaking with an accent.

5 Conclusion

Dogwhistles are not a uniform linguistic category. In this paper, we focused on a particular class of dogwhistles, overt intentional dogwhistles (Saul, (2018)), and we offered an account according to which political OIDs have a distinctive general pattern of functioning based on two moments: a first moment of perspective expression and positioning messaging, and a second moment of perlocutionary inferencing by the OID audience. We also argued that OIDs vary in the extent to which the covert elements present in their functioning are speaker-meant and thus actually communicated by the speaker, and we contended that this variation depends on how strong the association between the expression employed and the relevant perspective is. OIDs function according to one of three models, depending on whether perspective expression is conventional, implicature-based, or perlocutionarily triggered, with the mechanisms that convey positioning messages varying accordingly. Common to all models is the fact that contents extracted by the OID audience *via* context-driven inference, which we termed *perlocutionary contents*, are never speaker-meant—rather, they are perlocutionary effects sought but not communicated by the speaker. We argued that this proposal captures the distinctive features of OIDs, namely directionality, underdetermination and deniability. The main conceptual-explanatory virtue of our account is that it not only captures the distinctive functioning of OIDs, but that it does so by taking into account their distinctive role in political communication.

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