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# Pejorative Thought/Talk:

## Harm Speech, Power, and Silencing

This Reading Group combines issues in philosophy of language with some questions from ethics and meta-ethics, feminist philosophy, and more generally political and social philosophy. We shall focus on topics such as:

- A. *slur words and hate speech*;
- B. *sexist language, power and silencing*;
- C. *generics, bias and stereotyping*.

The objective is to think of these topics through the workings of language—in particular what sorts of words and practices count as speech, and what sorts of communicative acts enable and license acts of oppression towards members of particular social groups. The aim is to discuss some of this literature, and its philosophical background.

Questions in philosophy of language concern:

- (a) the role of attitude-expression in a theory of meaning: similarities and dissimilarities between moral and thick terms on the one hand, and pejoratives and slurs on the other
- (b) what kind of speech-acts are performed with slurring acts, sexist speech and generic speech;
- (c) what role do such speech play in oppression and what does this tell us about the nature of meaning, and where such words and practices fall with respect to the semantics/pragmatics distinction
- (d) how such forms of speech contribute to imposing and reinforcing imbalanced power relations
- (e) how “silencing” operates towards members of targeted groups by virtue of their membership of relatively powerless groups.

## Suggestive reading list

### (A) "slur words" and "hate speech"

Readings will be concerned with how slurs or racial epithets should be treated by a philosopher of language—how these words differ from other derogatives such as pejoratives, swearwords, or insulting uses of neutral counterparts. We'll think about these uses in the context of a discussion of how the behavior of these words might bear on questions about hate speech, what kinds of speech-acts one performs in using these words, and more generally whether their offensiveness is a matter of meaning or not, and if so what kind of meaning it is and how it relates to truth.

Robin Jeshion (ms). Slurs, Dehumanization, and the Expression of Contempt. *The Wedberg Lectures*

Liz Camp (ms). The Semantics of Slurs: A Dual Speech-Act Analysis.

Mark Richard 2008. Epithets and Attitudes. *When Truth Gives Out*. OUP, 12-41.

Geoff Nunberg (ms.) The Social Life of Slurs.

Kent Bach (ms.) Bloated words.

R. J. Bolinger. 2015. The pragmatics of slurs. *Nous*, 1-24

Michelle Mason (2003). Contempt as a moral attitude. *Ethics* 113: 234-272.

Mark Schroeder 2014. The Truth in Hybrid Semantics. In G Fletcher & M Ridge (ed.) *Having It Both Ways: Hybrid Theories and Modern Metaethics*.

Ryan Hay, 2011. Hybrid Expressivism and the Analogy between Pejoratives and Moral Language. *European Journal of Philosophy*.

### (B) sexist speech, power, and silencing

Readings will be concerned to make connections between different themes, and link these ideas to questions about speech, "silencing" and power, and how these issues can be addressed by speech act theory.

- Rae Langton, Sally Haslanger and Luvell Anderson, 2012. "Language and Race", in *Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, eds. Gillian Russell and Delia Graff Fara (Routledge).  
[https://www.academia.edu/3386978/2012\\_Language\\_and\\_Race](https://www.academia.edu/3386978/2012_Language_and_Race)
- Rae Langton, 2009. Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts (Philosophy & Public Affairs). Reprinted in Langton. *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification*.

- Jennifer Hornsby “Disempowered Speech”. *Philosophical Topics*, 23 (2): 127–147. [Feminist Perspectives on Language, Knowledge and Reality, ed. Sally Haslanger.]
- Ishani Maitra, 2012. “Subordinating Speech”. Now printed in *Speech & Harm: Controversies Over Free Speech* (Oxford University Press).
- Rae Langton: Hate speech and the epistemology of justice. Forth. in *Criminal Law and Philosophy*. {or The Authority of Hate Speech}
- Mari Mikkola (2011). Illocution, silencing, and the act of refusal. *PPQ* 92, 415-437.
- Angela Grünberg (2014) Saying and Doing: Speech Actions, Speech Acts and Related Events. *EJP* 22 (2), 173–199.
- Rebecca Kukla, ‘Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice’
- Miranda Fricker, “Powerlessness and Social Interpretation”, *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 2006, 96-108.  
Available at: <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/episteme/v003/3.1fricker.html>

### (C) Generics, Bias & Stereotyping

Readings will be concerned with so-called implicit bias and stereotyping and aim to look at psychological and sociolinguistic perspectives on the use of language. We shall look at generic sentences, and consider whether these and other uses of language might perpetuate bias or stereotyping. We’ll consider what questions philosophers of language ask, and the sorts of answers they give.

- Sally McConnell-Ginet “Gender, Sexuality, and meaning: an overview”.  
Extracts from Ch1 of *Gender, Sexuality, and Meaning: Linguistic Practice and Politics* (Oxford University Press 2011).
- Tamar Gendler (forth) “On The Epistemic Costs of Implicit Racism” Forth. *Philosophical Studies*.
- Blum, L. (2004). ‘Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis’, *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 33, No. 3: 251-290.  
<http://philpapers.org/archive/LAWSAS-2.pdf>
- Schwitzgebel, E. (2010). ‘Acting Contrary to Our Professed Beliefs or The Gulf Between Occurrent Judgment and Dispositional Belief’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 91, No. 4: 531–553.
- Kelly, D. & Roedder, E. (2008). ‘Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias’, *Philosophy Compass*, Vol. 3, No. 3: 522-540.