The Spectrum of Particularistic Insults

Víctor Carranza-Pinedo
Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy
École Normale Supérieure de Paris, France
victor.carranza@uni-muenster.de

Abstract
Particularistic Insults (PIs) are expressions that denigrate individuals based on their personal attributes, including but not limited to behavioral patterns, personality traits, and physical appearance. The content of PIs exhibits variation concerning several factors, namely, (i) their degree of descriptiveness, (ii) the intensity of their emotional impact, (iii) the potential for their use in positive or negative contexts, and (iv) their syntactic function. This diversity has yet to be satisfactorily explained by extant theories. To solve this issue, I posit that PIs are indexically linked to emotional qualities such as ‘negative valence, high arousal, neutral dominance’ instead of discrete emotional categories such as ‘contempt’ or ‘anger’. Then, I operationalize this hypothesis through a probabilistic model of emotional signaling. In this new model, called ‘Affective Meaning Games’, PIs are associated with indexical fields that encode the affective qualities they tend to co-occur with, but are ultimately interpreted against background assumptions about the speaker’s emotions towards the target. Using this framework, I further elaborate on the role of indexical fields in distinguishing PIs from slurs. Specifically, I argue that PIs and slurs don’t differ in terms of their specific targets (i.e., individuals vs. groups), but rather in the degree of dominance they signal.

Keywords: Particularistic Insults · Slurs · Emotions · Signaling Games · Expressivity

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1 Introduction

Expressions that cause harm are ubiquitous in natural languages. Among them, Particularistic Insults (PIs) stand as those that denigrate, mock, or belittle individuals based on their attributes, such as their behaviors (‘crook’, ‘brat’), personality traits (‘wimp’, ‘cooky’), cognitive abilities (‘retard’, ‘dummy’), physical appearance (‘hunchback’, ‘bean pole’), occupation (‘pig’, ‘bean counter’), disorders (‘crackhead’, ‘junkie’). Unlike slurs, which target people based on their ascription to a relevant social category (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, or religion), PIs are typically directed towards individuals as individuals (Jeshion, 2020; Domaneschi 2020).

The personal attributes used for derogation appear to vary across cultures and periods. However, as per the conceptualization of Goffman (1963), we can classify them into three groups: blemishes of individual character, abominations of the body, and tribal stigma. Based on these stigmas, PIs single out and devaluate individuals who are deemed to deviate from social norms, sometimes triggering effects that go beyond the realm of casual conflict. For instance, PIs that target one’s physical appearance or occupation can induce psychological distress and decrease self-stem (Frost 2011), while those targeting cognitive abilities or behavioral disorders may be internalized by targets, causing them to confirm the initial, unjustified expectation (Major and O’Brian, 2005).

There is a great interest in the semantics and pragmatics of derogatory expressions. However, analyses of PIs remain relatively scarce. According to Potts (2004)’s multidimensional view, PIs encode speaker’s heightened emotional states in a separate meaning dimension. In turn, according to Blakemore (2011)’s procedural view, PIs activate inferential processes to retrieve representations of the speaker’s emotions (e.g., ‘anger’ or ‘disdain’) depending on contextual factors. Lastly, Beller (2013) argues for an evaluative approach, in which utterances containing PIs are true relative to a judge parameter, similar to expressions such as ‘ugly’ or ‘boring’. Even though these views have provided important insights to understand the derogatory effects of PIs, they have often overlooked two of their main characteristics: their variability and fuzziness.

On the one hand, PIs’ exhibit variation regarding several factors, namely, (i) their degree of descriptiveness, as PIs include thin expressions like ‘bastard’ and thick ones like ‘wimp’; (ii) their intensity, as PIs include mild insults like ‘dumb’ and strong ones like ‘son-of-a-bitch’; (iii) their valence, as some PIs may occasionally display positive rather than negative affect (e.g., ‘Hey, bastard, I missed you!’); and (iv) their syntactic function, as PIs have different effects depending on, e.g., whether they occur as

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1 In the linguistic literature, PIs appear in discussions of gradability (e.g., Bolinger, 1972; Morzycki, 2009) and epithets like ‘that F John’ (where F is typically a PI) (e.g., Jackendoff, 1972; Umbach, 2001; Schlenker, 2005). It is worth noting that Particularistic Insults (a term coined by Saka, 2007) have been also called ‘pejoratives’, ‘epithets’, ‘derogatory expressions’, etc.
predicates (e.g., ‘John is a bastard’) or modifiers (e.g., ‘That bastard John is from Italy’).

On the other hand, certain expressions that single out individual behaviors (e.g., ‘bitch’), cognitive abilities (e.g., ‘retard’), or physical appearance (e.g., ‘fatso’) can be grouped together with slurs, which are verbal tools for oppression (Ashwell, 2016; Cousens, 2020; Diaz-Legaspe, 2020). For example, while ‘bitch’ is used to derogate women who are perceived as aggressive or unreasonable and, in doing so, reinforces gender norms that dehumanize women. Conversely, some expressions that target social groups, such as ‘limey’ or ‘cracker’, are commonly classified as PIs because they are derogatory but not intended to dehumanize members of the targeted group and hence lack the ‘moral or political tenor’ that characterizes slurs such as ‘spic’ (Nunberg, 2018).

To solve these issues, I propose that PIs signal the affective qualities ‘negative valence, high arousal, neutral dominance’ instead of discrete emotional states such as ‘anger’ or ‘disdain’. Then, to understand PIs’ variability, I operationalize this hypothesis through a probabilistic model of emotional signaling inspired by Heather Burnett’s work on identity construction (2017, 2019). In this new model, called Affective Meaning Games (AMGs), expressions are associated with indexical fields that encode the emotional qualities they normally co-occur with, but are ultimately interpreted against background assumptions about the speaker’s affective stance towards the target. Using this framework, I further elaborate on the role of indexical fields in distinguishing PIs from slurs. Specifically, I argue that PIs and slurs don’t differ in terms of their specific targets (i.e., personal traits vs. social categories), but rather in the degree of dominance that they index. In this way, the model proposed in this paper not only sheds light on PIs’ variability and fuzziness but, furthermore, provides a window for exploring pragmatic reasoning within an independently motivated psychological understanding of emotional states.

2 The empirical landscape

2.1 Thin vs. Thick

PIs like ‘bastard’ or ‘wimp’ are typically negatively valenced, i.e., assess their individuals targets as being bad as individuals. Since Williams (2006), valenced expressions (and concepts) are divided into ‘thin’ and ‘thick’. On the one hand, thin predicates assess the object of predication as good or bad, yet they don’t specify in which way the object is good or bad. For example, qualifying a carnival as impermissible qualifies it as bad but doesn’t indicate in virtue of which property it is bad. Thick terms, on the other hand, assess the object of predication as good or bad and, additionally, specify the way in which it is good or bad. Qualifying a carnival as lewd, for example, qualifies it negatively in virtue of being sexually explicit.
Does the thin-thick distinction also apply to PIs? PIs such as ‘bastard’, ‘asshole’, or ‘jerk’ (also called ‘all-purpose pejoratives’) express the speaker’s negative evaluations about an individual but are ‘too lean’ to indicate the descriptive dimension along which the target is so evaluated (Jeshion, 2020). In contrast, PIs such as ‘wimp’, ‘crook’, or ‘nutter’ express the speaker’s negative evaluations and, in addition, indicate the descriptive basis of such reaction—roughly speaking, being fearful, dishonest, or eccentric, respectively. Therefore, even though all PIs typically express negative evaluations, we can distinguish them in thin and thick.

However, notice that the thin-thick distinction doesn’t apply to all PIs in the same way. On the one hand, some PIs can have thin or thick interpretations depending on the utterance context. For example, in particular situations, the use of ‘stupid’ may merely express the speaker’s negative evaluation of the target. In others, however, it may also describe it as unintelligent or naive. The former interpretation can be clearly observed in cases where ‘stupid’ applies to an object which can’t be described as (un)intelligent, as in ‘I don’t like this stupid weather’, and the latter in cases where it can, as in ‘The stupid student failed the exam’. Thus, PIs’ thickness may vary depending on contextual factors such as the object of the predication.

On the other hand, various PIs acquire their evaluative effect based on metaphoric associations with things that may be considered negative. Examples include genealogy terms (‘bastard’, ‘son-of-a-bitch’), body parts (‘asshole’, ‘dick’), animals (‘chicken’, ‘cockroach’), etc. With repeated usage and circulation, some of these associations, eventually become conventional. When the association is highly conventionalized, a PI can be clearly classified as thin or thick. For example, derogatory uses of ‘chicken’ incorporate a stable description, namely being fearful, and are thus classified as thick. However, when such associations are still fluid, the application is less straightforward. For example, derogatory uses of ‘cockroach’ may be interpreted as thin (i.e., as expressing a negative evaluation) or thick (i.e., as additionally indicating that the target is unattractive) depending on the context.

2.2 Soft vs. Strong

PIs can express negative states that vary in their degree of strength (e.g., anger vs. rage). Variation in strength can be observed across terms describing (i) dissimilar or (ii) similar personal traits. The first type of variation is illustrated by terms such as ‘minger’ and ‘wuss’, which describe individuals as unattractive and fearful, respectively. Although both are derogatory, the latter typically expresses a stronger attitude. The second type of variation is exemplified by terms like ‘fruitcake’ and ‘psycho’. Although both describe individuals as erratic or mentally unstable, the latter expresses a stronger attitude (Ipsos, 2016).

What factor accounts for this variation in intensity? One possibility is that it arises because different PIs are associated with different registers. In essence, by using a more
risky or colloquial term such as ‘psycho’, the speaker would deviate further from
politeness standards than if he used ‘fruitcake’ in order to signal a more intense
emotion. However, a register-based explanation falls short in those contexts where the
register is informal. For example, during a hostile confrontation, PIs may not violate
expectation of formality but can still express attitudes of various intensities.

A more promising option is to consider that variation arises because different PIs
incorporate various degrees of arousal. Janschewitz (2008)’s study found that, on
average, taboo words such as ‘bastard’ and evaluative words such as ‘rude’ don’t differ
much with respect to their valence ratings, namely, how negative they are. Instead, the
study found that the former typically yield higher arousal ratings than the latter, thus
showing that the ‘strong emotionality’ of vulgar terms comes from arousal rather than
valence (Jay, 2000). Thus, if PIs’ strength is linked to the arousal they express, we can
expect variations in strength to be directly correlated with variations in arousal.

2.3 Positive vs. Negative

In typical circumstances, the use of PIs, exemplified in (1), conveys a hostile attitude
towards the addressee:

(1) Hey, {dumbass, silly, bum}, what are you doing?

However, in certain situations, such as when the speaker provides various cues that
they are well intended (e.g., intonation, gestures, previous actions, etc.) the same
utterance can also be interpreted as friendly, playful, and nonface threatening.

How can we explain this switch in valence? It may be argued that PIs are ambiguous
between negative and positive interpretations. Indeed, listeners need to reason about
the speaker’s intentions and other contextual cues to recover the affective message of
a PI. However, ambiguity does not explain why positive interpretations only arise in
certain situations, such as when the speaker and listener are close acquaintances, or the
context is highly informal.

An alternative explanation is to consider that positive interpretations involve a type of
simulation. Since this notion covers different abilities, we can understand the proposal
in at least two ways. First, according to the ‘irony’ approach, positive uses of PIs arise
when the speaker makes manifest that they want to convey a message that is the
opposite of what they literally said. For example, by saying ‘What a terrible cake!’ after
devouring it can be interpreted as expressing that it is tasty. Yet, positive uses of (1)
don’t convey the opposite of what they literally say. In positive uses of ‘bum’, for
example, the speaker does not necessarily express that the speaker is hardworking.

A second, more plausible option, is to understand positive uses of PIs as a structured
form of simulation known as ‘mock aggression’. Mock aggression is an activity
analogous to serious aggression, but which lacks its harmful effects such as triggering offense or hostility. Instead, mock aggression has been observed to enhance affiliation and social skills (Smith and Boulton, 1990). Given that it risks slipping into serious aggression, it typically happens in conjunction with other cues that signal the lack of harmful intent such as positive facial expression (Driver and Gottman, 2004) and among individuals that have developed a ‘script’ or ‘insider knowledge’ for such interactions (Ballard et al., 2003). Thus, positive uses of (1) can be understood as a verbal form of mock aggression, where PIs are neutralized without losing their derisory descriptive association.

2.4 PIs vs. Epithets

I end this exposition by comparing PIs with epithets, as they have been typically analyzed in conjunction in the semantic and pragmatic literature. Even though PIs are often referred to as ‘epithets’, ‘epithet’ can refer to two distinct phenomena (c.f. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023):

A. a characterizing word or phrase accompanying or occurring in place of the name of a person or thing.
B. a disparaging or abusive word or phrase.

Definition A picks up expressions such as ‘Alexander the Great’, ‘Earvin Magic Johnson’, ‘Obummer’, etc. This definition is thus closer to the one corresponding to nicknames, which modify or replace a standard name without necessarily being negatively valenced or derogatory. In contrast, definition B picks up particularistic insults such as ‘bastard’ and slurs such as ‘Wop’, regardless of whether they accompany or replace the name of a person or thing.

In discussing the syntactic and semantic features of PIs, researchers have primarily focused on constructions where a PI occurs as an adnominal modifier or replaces a noun (e.g., Potts, 2004). These constructions (henceforth ‘A+B constructions’) involves the use of a disparaging word that accompanies or replaces a given name, as in (2-3):

(2) That {bastard, jerk, asshole} John got promoted.
(3) The {bastard, jerk, asshole} got promoted.

However, focusing on A+B constructions risks obscuring the properties of a PI that derive from its lexical meaning from those are contingent on the syntactic environment in which they occur. For example, A+B constructions has led some to argue that PIs exclusively convey the speaker’s emotions, and thus lack any truth-conditional impact. Since PIs that occur as modifiers can be omitted without altering the utterance’s truth-conditions, they would lack truth-conditional content:

(4) That {bastard, jerk, asshole} John got promoted.
That John got promoted.

However, despite their strong preference for truth-conditionally irrelevant interpretations, PIs can also be semantically relevant. In particular, PIs restrict the denotation of the sister head in contexts where they (i) answer the current Question Under Discussion or (ii) introduce rhetorical information (Martin, 2014). In (5), ‘jerk’ picks up one among Alex ex-boyfriends to answer the QUD, and thus can’t be omitted without altering the host utterance’s truth-conditions (and grammaticality). In (5b), ‘bastard’ picks up a subset of the contacts to explain why they were eliminated, and thus can’t be omitted as well:

(5)  A: Which one of Alex’s ex-boyfriends did you see?  
     B: The jerk one.  
(6)  Alex eliminated all her bastard contacts from Facebook.  
     → Alex eliminated those contacts because they were bastards.

Therefore, to understand the contribution of PIs, we must analyze their behavior in different syntactic positions. Failure to do so risks conflating the semantic contribution of a PI with the contextual factors that make it truth-conditionally relevant or not. In this regard, Cepollaro, Domaneschi and Stojanovic (2021) demonstrate that PIs in adnominal and predicative position are sensible to contextual information in different ways.

3 Previous accounts

3.1 The expressive view

In his unpublished manuscript ‘The meaning of ouch and oops’, Kaplan argues that thin and thick PIs contribute different types of content. Whereas thin PIs such as ‘bastard’ contribute expressive content, displaying only speaker’s emotions, thick PIs such as ‘wimp’ are ‘descriptive of properties that are generally seen as personal failings’ (p. 25). In this framework, ‘bastard’ denotes the set of contexts in which its use is felicitous (namely, the contexts where the speaker c_s is upset at the target), whereas ‘wimp’ denotes the set of worlds in which the property denoted is true (the interpretations functions t and e distinguish truth-conditional from expressive content, see Gutzmann, 2015):

(7)  \[ \text{[bastard(x)]}^e : \{ c : c_s \text{ is upset at } x \text{ in } c_w \} \]
(8)  \[ \text{[wimp(x)]}^t : \{ w : x \text{ is fearful in } w \} \]

This semantic distinction has influenced subsequent expressive treatments of PIs. According to Potts (2004), thin PIs like ‘bastard’ are ‘descriptively ineffable’ and therefore only convey the speaker’s attitudes. When asked about their meaning, individuals would tend to illustrate the contexts where the use of ‘bastard’ is felicitous.
instead of providing a conceptual definition. Moreover, as examples like (4) illustrate, PIs occurring as adnominal modifiers can be omitted without altering the host utterance’s truth-conditions.

To capture these properties, Potts (2004) models PIs as denoting functions that take a descriptive argument (e.g., ‘John’) and return (i) the same descriptive argument unmodified and (ii) an expressive proposition of the form ‘the speaker feels upset towards John’. In proof-style notation, the DP ‘that bastard John’ can be analyzed as follows (the bullet ‘•’ isolates the descriptive and expressive contributions of the PI at the same line of the proof, and $\text{bad}(x)$ is a function that says, roughly, ‘the speaker is in a heightened emotional state regarding x’):

\[
(9) \quad \text{that bastard John} = \frac{\text{bastard} \cdot \text{John}}{\text{John} \cdot e \cdot \text{bad}(\text{John})} \cdot e
\]

However, even if thin and thick PIs ought to receive radically different treatments, the expressive account only applies to thin PIs that receive non-restrictive interpretations. Yet, as observed in Section 2.4, PIs are not exclusively non-restrictive. When thin PIs provide rhetorically relevant information or address the current QUD, they contribute truth-conditional content along with the speaker’s emotions.

3.2 The procedural view

According to Blakemore (2011), PIs like ‘bastard’ don’t encode conceptual representations, but ‘procedures for retrieving representations of emotional states’ (p. 3543). In other terms, the procedural view claims that PIs activate inferential processes about the speaker’s emotions based on a wide array of contextual factors, such as the speaker’s identity, their relation towards the target of the expression, their facial expression, etc. Thus, in contrast to the expressive view, this view highlights PIs’ cognitive effects and processing efforts.

Following Potts (2004), Blakemore (2011) argues that PIs like ‘bastard’ are descriptively ineffable. However, Geurts (2007) observes that even descriptive terms such as ‘green’ or ‘languid’ can be hard to define in conceptual terms, so ineffability is not sufficient to distinguish expressive from descriptive denotations. To address this issue, Blakemore (2011) distinguishes between two types of ineffability. On the one hand, expressions such as ‘languid’ encode concepts but can be pragmatically enriched, thus explaining why they may be hard to paraphrase. On the other, expressions like ‘bastard’ only encode procedures for retrieving representations, rendering them genuinely ineffable.

The procedural view acknowledges the high variability of affective interpretations that PIs can receive, namely, their differences in intensity and valence. However, two issues remain. First, the study by Hyatt et al. (2019) presents extensive evidence that
individuals do associate descriptive properties with those they consider stereotypical assholes or dicks. Namely, personality traits that score low on agreeableness, such as being arrogant, distrustful, selfish, or manipulative (see also Domaneschi, 2020).

The second is that, under this framework, it remains unclear which are the cognitive mechanisms interpreters use to infer the speaker’s emotional states based on her use of PIs and, additionally, how different factors can influence such inferential process in context. In Section 5, I will show that an approach that highlights variability and processing efforts is capable of a formal development.

3.3 The evaluative view

Beller (2013) observes that thin PIs nouns such as ‘jerk’ are evaluative, gradable and behavior-dependent. Evaluative expressions such as ‘ugly’ are typically considered to trigger ‘faultless disagreements’. That is, exchanges like that illustrated in (10) where there doesn’t seem to be any objective way of telling who is right (Köbel, 2004). In (11), we observe that ‘jerk’ also gives rise to that type of situation, thus showing its evaluative character:

(10) A: John is ugly.
B: No, he isn’t.
(11) A: John is a jerk.
B: No, he isn’t.

PIs’ gradability is evidenced by the fact that they allow size adjectives like ‘big’ or ‘gigantic’. The utterance in (12), for example, conveys that John is more jerk than the standard. In turn, PIs’ behavior-dependence is illustrated by the fact that PIs are infelicitous with continuations that negate that the target of the insult displays the behavior denoted by it, as (13) illustrates:

(12) John is a big jerk.
(13) #John is a jerk, although he doesn’t act like a jerk at all.

To encode PIs’ evaluativity, Beller (2013) employs a relativist framework (Lasersohn, 2005). Under that approach, statements containing an evaluative predicate are true relative to a judge parameter $j$, namely, an agent whose preferences dictates whether the judgment is true or false. Furthermore, Beller introduces a degree argument $d$ to capture PIs’ gradability and a time interval $i$ (which requires that a particular behavior be displayed at $i$) to capture their behavior-dependence. A’s utterance in (11) would thus be translated as follows:

(14) $\llbracket$ John is a jerk$\rrbracket_j^i = 1$ iff John is a jerk at $i$ to degree $d$ and $d$ is above threshold for $j$. 
In this way, Beller’s model accounts for the intuition that, in (11), the truth-value of what A asserts is true with respect to his standards but false with respect to B’s.

However, by considering evaluativity, gradability and behavior-dependence alone, we can identify at least three more types of PI nouns. The first comprises terms like ‘wimp’ or ‘chicken’ which are gradable (15), behavior-dependent (16), but not straightforwardly evaluative. In (17), ‘wimp’ triggers a discussion that is more factual than, say, whether John is ugly.

(15) John is a gigantic wimp.
(16) #John is a wimp although he doesn’t act like one.
(17) A: John is a wimp.
    B: No, he isn’t.

The second is composed by nouns like ‘nerd’ or ‘geek’ which are gradable (18), but not behavior-dependent (‘geek’ doesn’t require the target to manifest a geek-like behavior, cf. 19) or evaluative (whether someone is a geek depends on whether they are knowledgeable about a particular subject, cf. 20):

(18) John is a gigantic geek.
(19) John is a geek, although he doesn’t act like one.
(20) A: John is a geek.
    B: No, he isn’t.

The third one is composed by those terms like ‘crook’ or ‘pig’, which don’t allow size adjectives (unless they are interpreted literally, e.g., as indicating that the subject is physically large, cf. 21), are not behavior-dependent (22), and are not evaluative (23):

(21) ?John is gigantic crook.
(22) John is a crook, although he doesn’t act like one.
(23) A: John is a crook.
    B: No, he is not.

In sum, Beller’s account of PIs concentrates on a specific type of thin PI noun. In the second half of the paper, I argue that, if we want to explain in a compact way how PIs display the speaker’s derogatory attitudes, we have to look beyond their semantic features.²

² Another perspective on PIs is presented by Hom (2012), who proposes that PIs denote normative properties derived from relevant social institutions. For instance, ‘fucker’ would refer to individuals who engage in sexual behavior considered ‘impermissible’, and this allows the terms to be used metaphorically as an insult to devaluate or harm someone via conversational mechanisms. However, unlike conversational implicatures, the derogation conveyed by PIs appears difficult to cancel: ‘You are a fucker, but I am not upset with you – you are someone who
In the preceding section, we observed that PIs don’t map a specific grammatical category. Assuming that evaluativity is to be captured by a judge parameter $j$, gradability by a degree $d$, and behavior-dependence by a time interval $i$, I present the following lexical entries for the analyzed expressions:

\begin{align*}
(24) \quad [\text{jerk}] &= \lambda d.\lambda x.\lambda i. \text{jerk}'(x) \text{ at } i \text{ to degree } d \land d \text{ is above threshold for } j.
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
(25) \quad [\text{wimp}] &= \lambda d.\lambda x.\lambda i. \text{wimp}'(x) \text{ at } i \text{ to degree } d \land d \text{ is above threshold.}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
(26) \quad [\text{geek}] &= \lambda d.\lambda x. \text{geek}'(x) \text{ to degree } d \land d \text{ is above threshold.}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
(27) \quad [\text{crook}] &= \lambda x. \text{crook}'(x).
\end{align*}

This grammatical multiplicity allows us to explain the differences in thickness discussed in Section 2.1. Thin PIs like ‘jerk’ are distinguished from thicker PIs like ‘wimp’ because the former requires a collection of various criteria relevant to a contextual judge to be met in order to satisfy its denotation (e.g., being dishonest, selfish, etc.) whereas the latter only requires the individual to be fearful. In turn, PIs like ‘wimp’ differ from thicker PIs like ‘crook’ because the property denoted by the former is associated with a scale that allows borderline cases (e.g., ‘how fearful should one in order to be a wimp?’) whereas the latter doesn’t.

However, this multiplicity also rises skepticism about the feasibility of a unified theory of PIs. Making things even more complicated, the class of PIs also includes adjectives (e.g., ‘stupid’, ‘big-eared’), verbs (e.g., ‘to fuck up’, ‘to screw’) and even adverbs (e.g., ‘shoddily’, ‘stupidly’) (Hom, 2012; Gutzmann and McCready, 2016). Since the prospects for a uniform semantic treatment of PIs are very low, how can we explain what unifies them, namely, their derogatory character?

Two alternatives arise. The first is to abandon the quest for a unified theory of the derogatory effects of PIs: whereas some PIs like ‘jerk’ express negative evaluations in virtue of its encoded meaning, others like ‘wimp’ express them in virtue of pragmatic mechanisms. In support of this idea, we could note that almost any neutral expression can easily ‘become’ insults when certain conditions are met. Yet, if pragmatic mechanisms are necessary, then it becomes unclear why we need to also appeal to semantics at all.

The other alternative is to propose a unified pragmatic account. Following Blakemore (2011), we can claim that all PIs trigger procedures to retrieve speaker’s emotions. However, while promising, this idea needs to be translated into a formal theory whose predictions and assumptions can be tested. Additionally, the theory should explain how 'has impermissible sex' don’t seem to override the implication that the speaker is upset at the addressee.
contextual factors modulate PI’s interpretation. In what follows, I propose such a theory.

5 The proposal

The following proposal is structured in two parts. In the first, I employ the PAD theory of emotions to characterize the content expressed by PIs. In the second, I translate these observations into a probabilistic theory of emotion signaling, Affective Meaning Games.

5.1 PIs and the PAD dimensions

PIs express attitudes like anger, hostility, or rage. How can we characterize such states? According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974), affective states can be described using three orthogonal, continuous, and bi-polar dimensions: pleasure, arousal, and dominance. These are defined as follows:

- **PLEASURE**: refers to the evaluative component and ranges from negatively valenced affective states (e.g., sadness) to positively valenced ones (e.g., joy).
- **AROUSAL**: refers to the physiological component and ranges from low mental alertness (e.g., boredom) to high mental alertness (e.g., excitement).
- **DOMINANCE**: refers to the relational component and ranges from the sensation of feeling controlled or submissive (e.g., frustration) to the sensation of feeling in control or powerful (e.g., anger).

Dominance pertains to the degree to which an agent feels behaviorally constrained with respect to a particular stimulus, based on perceived qualities like physical strength, social status, hostility, etc. (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Oosterhof and Todorov, 2008). Intuitively, the level of dominance experienced is inversely proportional to the level of dominance perceived in the stimulus. For example, when provoked by stimuli perceived as less dominant (e.g., an individual of lower status), offenses are more likely to elicit anger than frustration (and vice-versa).

These dimensions are considered to describe the whole range of felt bodily responses that underlie our emotional experiences.\(^3\) With this being said, how can the content of PIs be characterized using the PAD dimensions?

- PIs typically express the speaker’s negative appraisal of individuals. For example, when the speaker utters ‘John is a wimp’, the listener is likely to infer that they evaluate John negatively or tends to feel displeasure with respect to him.

\(^3\) There is no consensus about which dimensions constitute the core ingredients of emotions. According to Schachter (1964), we only need arousal; for Russell and Barrett (1999), we only need arousal and pleasure. However, for our present purposes, that is, describe the affective states expressed by PIs, we can remain neutral about whether a dimension is primitive or ancillary.
- PIs are typically associated with high arousal. Like other highly colloquial expressions such as ‘fucking’ or ‘shitty’, PIs are typically used in situations where the speaker experiences strong rather than mild emotions.

- PIs don’t necessarily express that the speaker regards themself as dominant with respect to the target. By uttering, e.g., ‘My boss is a jerk’, the speaker does not necessarily convey that their boss is low in worth qua person, or beneath others in a social hierarchy.

Thus, even though PIs belong to different grammatical categories (nouns, adjectives, etc.), they are unified by the fact that they typically express negative valence, high arousal, and neutral dominance. With that being said, what explains PIs derogatory effect? Following Jay (2000), we can assume that PIs’ derogatory character arises from the blend of a negative evaluation with a high degree of arousal. That is, PIs inherent intensity makes them suitable tools to denigrate, mock or belittle individual behaviors, traits, appearance, etc.

Now, it may be assumed that negative evaluations strongly correlate with the expression of high dominance, leading some to argue that PIs should be classified as indexing high dominance. However, even though negative evaluations may provide the basis for expressing dominance, both dimensions remain dissociated. It is possible to express hostility without regarding the target as lower status (e.g., by ignoring them altogether), just as it is possible to express that an individual is beneath others while evaluating them positively (e.g., by using statements like ‘Chinks are really hardworking’). As scholars studying slurs have noted, racist ideologies can be built on positive stereotypes (Camp 2013).

5.2 Affective Meaning Games

How can we operationalize emotions in a theory of meaning? Drawing on Heather Burnett’s research on identity construction (Burnett, 2017, 2019), I postulate a structure ⟨Q, ⟩, where ‘Q’ denotes a set of relevant affective qualities (e.g., positive pleasure or '[P+]') and ‘ ’ encodes relations of mutual exclusivity between them (e.g., that individuals cannot experience a [P–] and [P+] state at the same time). As noted earlier, PIs don’t correlate with a specific degree of dominance, so this dimension is omitted:

(28)  \( Q = \{[P+], [P–], [A–], [A+]\} \)

a. \([P+] > [P–]\)

b. \([A–] > [A+]\)

Building on ⟨Q, ⟩, we derive four distinct types of affective states \( \alpha \), such as the [P+, A+] state, labeled AFFILIATION, the [P–, A+] state, labeled HOSTILITY, etc. Importantly, these labels assemble different discrete emotional categories. For instance, HOSTILITY represents [P–, D+] states in general (e.g., rage, anger, etc.), and not only hostility:
Affective states $\alpha \in \text{AFF}$:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFF</th>
<th>CORDIALITY</th>
<th>AFFILIATION</th>
<th>DISDAIN</th>
<th>HOSTILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\alpha$</td>
<td>[$P+, A-$]</td>
<td>[$P+, A+$]</td>
<td>[$P-, A-$]</td>
<td>[$P-, A+$]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then, I posit that for a given PI ‘F’, there is a non-derogatory alternative ‘F*’ that denotes a similar behavioral, psychological, physical, occupational trait. For example, we assume that ‘bastard’ and ‘disagreeable’ are such alternatives, as ‘bastard’ describes a personality type that qualifies as low in agreeableness (Hyatt et al., 2019). Note that the model doesn’t require F and F* to be fully co-referential or etymologically related, but only that they are salient lexical choices within a conversational interaction.

How can we characterize the link between the alternatives F/F* and the affective states $\alpha \in \text{AFF}$ that they have the potential to express? Since the interpretation of PIs varies across contexts, I assume that the link between F/F* and affective states is ‘indexical’ rather than conventional, that is, grounded on the statistical correlation between the use of F/F* and a variety of affective qualities, any of which may be activated in a particular context (Silverstein, 1976; Eckert, 2008). The set of affective qualities that an expression indexes constitutes its ‘indexical field’.

Specifically, I posit that slurs exhibit a stronger correlation with [$P-, A+$] states, following the discussion in Section 5.1. To capture these regularities, I assign to F a probability distribution $\text{Pr}(F|\alpha)$, which represents the likelihood of uttering F given an affective state $\alpha$ (Henderson and McCready, 2019). Notably, the non-derogatory alternative F* is associated with the distribution $\text{Pr}(F^*|\alpha) = 1 - \text{Pr}(F|\alpha)$:

Indexical field of F and F*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFF</th>
<th>CORDIALITY</th>
<th>AFFILIATION</th>
<th>DISDAIN</th>
<th>HOSTILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\text{Pr}(F</td>
<td>\alpha)$</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\text{Pr}(F^*</td>
<td>\alpha)$</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then, I assume that PIs are interpreted based on the listeners’ L prior beliefs regarding the speakers’ S affective stance toward the target of the insult. Based on Burnett (2017, 2019), I represent L’s prior beliefs as a probability distribution $\text{Pr}(\alpha)$, which denotes the probability that S feels an affective state $\alpha$ towards the individual target. In situations where L has no prior expectations about S’s emotional stance towards the target, we represent $\text{Pr}(\alpha)$ as a uniform distribution over affective states:

L’s prior beliefs about S’s affective stance $\alpha$:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFF</th>
<th>CORDIALITY</th>
<th>AFFILIATION</th>
<th>DISDAIN</th>
<th>HOSTILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\text{Pr}(\alpha)$</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In other contexts, L’s prior beliefs about S will be influenced by multiple factors, such as S’s perceivable mood, her personal relationship with the target, previous actions, etc. (Blakemore, 2011). For example, as we saw in our discussion of mock aggression (Section 2.3), if speaker and target are close acquaintances, then interpreters can assume that the speaker experiences [P+] states towards him. While these assumptions may be later proven incorrect, they guide expectations regarding how other are disposed to feel.

Finally, once the speaker S utters a PI directed at an individual, L updates her prior beliefs by conditioning \( \Pr(\alpha) \) on F’s affective meaning, \( \Pr(F|\alpha) \). In other terms, the interpretation process involves (i) combining the likelihood of F signaling an affective state \( \alpha \) with L’s prior beliefs about S’s affective stance toward the target, and then (ii) readjusting the outcome measure with a normalizing constant, i.e., the sum of these terms calculated for all affective states \( \alpha \in \text{AFF} \):

\[
(32) \quad \Pr(\alpha|F) = \frac{\Pr(\alpha) \times \Pr(F|\alpha)}{\sum_{\alpha \in \text{AFF}} \Pr(\alpha) \times \Pr(F|\alpha)}
\]

In sum, AFM predicts that the affective information expressed by the use of a PI, perceived by a member of the audience, is constrained by the affective relationship −according to that audience member− between the speaker and the individual that is the target of the insult. In other terms, reasoning about S’s potential emotions towards the target has the potential alter the weight of the various affective states \( \alpha \in \text{AFF} \), thus giving rise to different interpretations of a PI.

6 Applications
6.1 The Variation Problem
6.1.1 Variation in intensity

In Section 2.2., we observed variations in the strength of PIs (e.g., ‘psycho’ vs. ‘fruitcake’). Within the AMG framework, this divergence stems from the indexical nature of PIs’ link with the PAD dimensions. Indexicality is grounded in the correlation of a particular sign and a state, arising from causality or other form of spatio-temporal contiguity (Peirce, 1955). As PIs are repeatedly used, they acquire different indexical fields reflecting the states they more commonly co-occur with. Thus, uses of PIs like ‘psycho’ may have been caused by higher degrees of arousal compared to others like ‘fruitcake’, leading to our perception of them as stronger.

However, disparities in intensity can also be perceived across contexts of utterance. For example, the interpretation of ‘bastard’ in (33) can drastically change in intensity when uttered in a neutral or an aggressive interaction:

\[
(33) \quad \text{Hey, bastard, what are you doing?}
\]
In the ‘neutral’ scenario, the speaker S and target L don’t know each other, so L doesn’t possess particular expectations about S’s affective stance towards him. Consequently, we plug the uniform distribution in (31) and the indexical field associated with terms like ‘bastard’ (30) in the formula in (32). This results in L forming the believe that S is more likely expressing HOSTILITY towards him (cf. the fourth row):

(34) Neutral scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFF</th>
<th>CORDIALITY</th>
<th>AFFILIATION</th>
<th>DISDAIN</th>
<th>HOSTILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α)</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(bastard</td>
<td>α)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α)·Pr(bastard</td>
<td>α)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α</td>
<td>bastard)</td>
<td>0.181</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the ‘aggressive’ scenario, S and L don’t know each other, but there are discernible cues that indicate S’s high arousal, such as louder voice, faster speech rate, high pitch, etc. In such situation, L anticipates S to act more energetically towards surrounding stimuli. Accordingly, we plug a distribution that favors [A+] states and the probabilistic indexical field of ‘bastard’ in the formula in (32). This time, L’s posterior beliefs also lean towards HOSTILITY, but with a higher probability compared than in (34):

(35) Aggressive scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFF</th>
<th>CORDIALITY</th>
<th>AFFILIATION</th>
<th>DISDAIN</th>
<th>HOSTILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(bastard</td>
<td>α)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α)·Pr(bastard</td>
<td>α)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α</td>
<td>bastard)</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>0.267</td>
<td>0.214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, by comparing the outcomes of the inferential processes illustrated in (34-35), we can observe how PI’s such as ‘bastard’ can have a more or less pronounced impact on the audience depending on contextual factors. Despite being associated with a particular indexical field, PI’s’ effect on the audience is not stable but rather modulated by perceivable affective cues.

6.1.2 Variation in valence

In Section 2.3., we observed that some PI’s can switch valence in certain utterance contexts, thus expressing (and eliciting) positive rather than negative states. For example, in a scenario where S and L are close friends, L is likely to assume that S tends to feel positively states towards him. Thus, we plug a distribution that favors [P+] states, and the probabilistic indexical field associated with ‘bastard’ in the formula in
As a result, we obtain that, upon uttering (33), L will interpret S as expressing **AFFILIATION**:

(36) **Friendly scenario:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFF</th>
<th>CORDIALITY</th>
<th>AFFILIATION</th>
<th>DISDAIN</th>
<th>HOSTILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α)</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(bastard</td>
<td>α)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α):Pr(bastard</td>
<td>α)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(α</td>
<td>bastard)</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td><strong>0.408</strong></td>
<td>0.122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can conceive positive uses of a PI as a ‘test’ of the speaker’s relationship with the target. If the target takes offense, then the speaker’s presumption of interpersonal closeness is proven erroneous. Otherwise, if the listener interprets the PI as endearing (or at least as warranting endearment), the speaker’s presumption of closeness is confirmed and thus the PI reinforces their relationship. In this cases, the speaker’s use of the PI testifies to his ‘real friendliness’ with the target.  

Due to its risky character, however, verbal mock aggression can easily turn into serious aggression. For example, imagine a scenario where a company uses (37) to advertise a product to its potential customers. To avoid being misinterpreted, the announce needs to add multiple contextual cues indicating the lack of ill intentions, such as a friendly tone of voice or gestures.

(37) **Hey, bastard, you have been such a good friend!**

In this case, to interpret the PI in (37) positively, a presumption of closeness between speaker and target needs to be accommodated. That is, the context must be adjusted in order to make the use of the PI ‘correct play’ (Lewis, 1979). If the listener is willing to accommodate such presumption, the resulting calculation will be similar to that of (36). The company will thus establish a new connection with the consumer, which is then explicitly reinforced with ‘...you have been such a good friend’. Yet, if the listener is unwilling to do it, the calculation will be more similar to that in (34) or (35).

Finally, note that positive uses of PIs are less likely to arise with thick PIs such as ‘wimp’ or ‘stupid’, than with thin PIs such as ‘bastard’ or ‘jerk’. What explains such imbalance? We may tentatively appeal to the fact that thin PIs are imprecise. As we saw in Section 4, many behavioral traits need to be considered in order for an individual

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4 It is worth noting that prior assumptions within interpersonal relations become more fine-grained over time. Upon first encountering someone, perceivers may use templates that describes how emotions are expressed through sensorimotor cues (e.g., facial expressions). However, these probabilities will become idiosyncratic to specific targets as perceivers get to know them (Zaki 2013), thus shedding light on why positive uses of PIs occur in more consolidated relationships.
to instantiate the property referred to by terms like ‘bastard’. Thus, in contrast to thick PIs, the negative connotations of thin PIs are easier to ‘bleach’, thus diminishing the likelihood of the target feeling personally attacked.

6.2 The Delimitation Problem

Certain expressions that single out individual behaviors (e.g., ‘bitch’), cognitive abilities (e.g., ‘retard’), or physical appearance (e.g., ‘fatso’) can be grouped together with slurs, which are verbal tools for oppression (Ashwell, 2016; Cousens, 2020; Diaz-Legaspe, 2020). For example, while ‘bitch’ is used to deroge women who are perceived as aggressive or unreasonable and, in doing so, reinforces gender norms that dehumanize women. Conversely, some expressions that target social groups, such as ‘limey’ or ‘cracker’, are commonly classified as PIs because they are derogatory but not intended to dehumanize members of the targeted group and hence lack the ‘moral or political tenor’ that characterizes slurs such as ‘spic’ (Nunberg 2018).

This challenge becomes twofold as we must not only determine the source of slurs’ offensive character but also uncover the reasons why such offensiveness varies (i) across different lexical items and (ii) across different contexts of utterance. Regarding (i), slurs’ variation may arise among expressions that target the same social group (e.g., ‘beaner’ may be considered more offensive than ‘greaser’) or different groups (e.g., ‘chink’ may be considered more offensive than ‘guido’). Regarding (ii), variation may arise in the use of the same expression depending on the identity of the user (e.g., the use of ‘faggot’ within members of the LGTB community is less offensive than when used by outsiders), the manner of its use (e.g., with a contemptuous or friendly intonation), and so forth.

A recent proposal has been put forward that relies on the concept of register, whereby words are allocated to specific categories that indicate the contexts in which they may be considered appropriate, permissible, or taboo. Diaz-Legaspe (2020) contends that while both PIs and slurs are categorized as [+vulgar] and [+slang], the latter additionally fall under the [+derogatory] rubric. What accounts for this differentiation? Diaz-Legaspe (2020) posits that expressions are [+derogatory] iff they arise from dominance-related practices between groups, thus explaining their offensive character: ‘every term coined by Ss to refer to Gs in the context of an emerging practice of dominance of some kind is bound to be [+derogatory]’ (p. 18).

To explicate the variability of slurs’ interpretations, Diaz-Legaspe (2020) proposes that expressions in the [+derogatory] category are as ‘dynamic’ as the dominance relations in which they are involved: the attenuation or intensification of such relations will be reflected in the interpretation of slurs. However, while this may explain why some expressions become or cease to be slurs as result of historical changes, it is inadequate to comprehend why slurs can be interpreted in vastly divergent ways within the same historical moment.
The present proposal sketches a three-steps account of slurs, beginning with a distinction between slurs and PIs based on their respective indexical fields, followed by an explanation of the offensive character of slurs, and concluding with the exploration of how this account can be integrated into the AMG model to elucidate slurs’ unstable character. As noted in Section 5, PIs index [P−, A+, D±] states. How do slurs relate to the PAD dimensions?

- Slurs typically convey a negative assessment of a specific group. For example, when an individual S utters ‘That building is full of Fs’ (where F is a slur), a listener L is likely to infer that S harbors some sort of displeasure or deems ‘F’s as bad in some respect.
- Slurs, may, but need to, display a heightened degree of arousal. Unlike other colloquial expressions such as ‘fucking’ or ‘shitty’, slurs don’t come across as infelicitous in circumstances where the speaker’s emotional state is mild.
- Lastly, slurs often signal the speaker’s perception of himself as superior to the target group. By uttering sentences like ‘Fs are not allowed here’, the speaker indicates that they view members of the target group as inferior, thereby attempting to allocate themself a dominant status.

Hence, slurs index [P−, A±, D+] states. Now, the offensive nature of slurs cannot be solely explained by negative pleasure, as this is also manifested in PIs. Furthermore, slurs can be used positively (e.g., to express admiration or amusement) while still being offensive, thus rendering pleasure orthogonal to their offensiveness (Nunberg, 2018; Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, 2018). The arousal dimension is likewise irrelevant, as it only accounts for the expression’s degree of intensity (see Section 2.2).

High dominance, on the other hand, appears to hold significant explanatory power for understanding slurs’ offensiveness. Irrespective of their affective polarity, slurs typically express that some individuals are beneath others, thus serving as tools to create an unjust power imbalance between the speaker and the target (and, therefore, between the groups to which they may belong). This provides a clear rationale for why slurs are considered offensive: because slurs are linked with high-dominance affective states, their utterance warrants offense to those who find dominance detrimental to society. In other terms, slurring utterances provide moral justification for those who oppose unjust forms of group-based hierarchy to take offense.

How does this proposal account for slurs’ variability? As previously suggested, we can elucidate the variation across lexical items by appealing to the indexical character of the link between a given expression and its associated values on the PAD dimensions (see Section 6.1.1). Over time, with repeated usage and dissemination, slurs gradually come to be associated with different indexical meanings that reflect the PAD values that are habitually correlated with them. As a result, a term like ‘chink’ is more offensive than ‘guido’, or a term like ‘beaner’ is more offensive than ‘greaser’, due to
the greater value of the [D+] states usually accompanying their use, such as hostile behaviors.

Finally, once we incorporate this proposal into the AMG framework, we can gain insight into the variation of slurs across contexts of utterance. Consider, for example, the case of ‘bitch’. In a context where L assumes that S is very likely to experience [D+] states towards women (e.g., because S is a man), L may interpret S’s utterance of ‘bitch’ against a woman as an expression of dominance and thus as morally offensive. Conversely, in a context where L assumes that S isn’t likely to experience [D+] states towards women (e.g., because S is herself a woman), ‘bitch’ can be used to express either positive or negative states but not necessarily high dominance, hence explaining its non-offensive character. In both cases, prior assumptions about S’s affective dispositions can either accentuate or diminish the weight of affective dimensions, thereby generating novel interpretations of slurs.

7 Conclusion

Our study has revealed that extant theories of PIs tend to concentrate on a limited set of expressions to establish general principles, while overlooking complex cases as exceptions. In response, this paper has sought to address this issue by asserting that PIs, despite their grammatical diversity, are unified by their ability to index [P-, A+, D±] states. Furthermore, we have translated this hypothesis into a probabilistic model of affective communication named Affective Meaning Games, which aims to comprehend how verbal and nonverbal cues are integrated during the interpretation of affective signs. By examining how interpreters weigh contextual factors relating to the emotional state of a speaker, we were able to capture the variability of PIs and integrate pragmatic reasoning within an independently motivated psychological understanding of emotional states.

Moreover, our hypothesis that PIs index [P-, A+, D±] states enabled us to differentiate them from slurs, which typically index [P-, A±, D+] states. The indexical association with high dominance states expounds why slurs, but not PIs, generate moral offense. Additionally, the transient nature of indexical links between signs and affective states elucidates why, like PIs, some slurs can be more offensive than others, despite referring to similar or different social groups. Furthermore, once integrated into the framework of Affective Meaning Games, we have shed light on how some PIs can be used to display high dominance in some but not all contexts, depending on contextual factors such as the speaker’s identity.

As we increase our comprehension of the complex mechanisms underpinning the use and interpretation of particularistic insults, it is becoming increasingly clear that these can yield far-reaching psychological and societal consequences. It is, therefore, crucial that we continue to investigate the impact of insults in various settings, ranging from interpersonal physical or online interactions to more extensive political settings.
Through such efforts, we can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of common insults, how they devolve into slurs, and how we can devise more effective strategies to encourage more effective communication in conflicting situations.

Bibliography


