NORMALIZING SLURS AND OUT-GROUP SLURS: THE CASE OF REFERENTIAL RESTRICTION[1]

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Slurring pejoratives[2] have generated an increasing interest for many different reasons. The effort put in inquiring into their derogatory force and in coming up with theories that appropriately account for their import, mechanism and impact, has resulted in a number of accounts of slurs with little in common but a couple of points. One of them is the strong association between slurring expressions and their *neutral counterparts*: non-derogatory[3] co-referring expressions.

It is widely accepted that neutral counterparts of slurs provide them with correct application criteria. Some authors go even further and claim that neutral counterparts are also co-referential with their associated slurs: supporters of this view assume that the difference between the N-word and 'African-American' does not have an impact on the truth conditions of the sentences in which they appear. Call these the *Application Neutral Counterpart Thesis*

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[1] This paper has benefitted from work and discussion carried out in two reading groups on slurring terms: the Philosophy of Language and Linguistics Reading Group in SADAF (Buenos Aires) and the Slurs Reading Group in Western University. I am therefore thankful to all the participants in both: Eleonora Orlando, Andrés Saab, Ramiro Caso, Nicolás Lo Guercio, Alfonso Losada, Federico Jaimes, Rob Stainton, Chang Liu, Jiangtian Li and Mike Korngut. I also thank the anonymous referee for this journal.

[2] Warning: throughout this paper I will be using slurring expressions. It should go without saying that in no way I endorse the attitudes, beliefs or perspectives associated to their use, nor the way they depict the people targeted by them. They will only be mentioned for the purpose of the work.

[3] More precisely, neutral counterparts are *relatively less* derogatory than their associated slurs. The phenomenon of the potential derogatory force of neutral counterparts can be observed in the historical evolution of slurs. An apparently neutral expression referring to a marginalized out-group can be gradually tainted by the contempt that the community of speakers hold against it until it becomes an unaccepted way of referring to them: a slur. Consider the differences in derogatory connotation between a paradigmatic slur like the N-word, a former neutral counterpart for the same class, now tainted ('black') and the current politically correct neutral counterpart, 'African-Americans' or 'African-descendants'.

1

(ANCT) and the *Referential Neutral Counterpart Thesis* (RNCT)[4] respectively:

> **ANCT**: For every slurring expression *e* there is an (actual or potential) neutral counterpart NC_e such that NC_e's correct application criteria are identical to *e*'s correct application criteria.

> **RNCT**: For every slurring expression *e* there is an (actual or potential) neutral counterpart NC_e such that the class of individuals referred to by NC_e's (call it $\{NC_e\}$) is identical to the class of individuals referred to by *e*.

Notice that RNCT can be formulated in several ways, each resting on a different conception of the nature of the truth conditional contribution of slurs and neutral counterparts. Hence, *e* can contribute an extension or set of individuals ($\{NC_e\}$), or a property P, or an intension. For each case, RNCT assumes that the corresponding slur contributes the exact same set, property or intension to the truth conditions of the sentences in which it occurs. For the sake of brevity, I will keep articulating RNCT in terms of sets and extensions, but the reader should feel free to choose whichever option pleases her more; nothing in this paper hinges on that choice.

There seems to be universal agreement on ANCT: the thesis successfully predicts that calling someone outside the referential class {NCe} an 'e' counts as a failure in linguistic or epistemic competence—with the exception of metaphorical uses of slurs: the speaker does not seem to know what 'e' means or she mistakenly believes that the target belongs to {NCe}. Moreover, ANCT is neutral regarding the truth-conditional contribution of slurs.[5] In turn, RNCT predicts that for every slur and every associated neutral counterpart, both will contribute the same set of individuals to the truth-conditions of the utterance in which they occur. Although

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[4] Philosophers supporting this line of thought oppose to 'semanticist theories' of slurs, according to which these expressions and their neutral counterpart make different contributions to the truth-conditions of the utterances of sentences containing them, which explains the offensiveness of slurs. In turn, those advocating for RNCT explain this offensiveness by appealing to non-semantic devices. The semantic thesis is thus commonly paired with a second one that accounts for slurs' derogatory force in pragmatic terms (by articulating it as a conventional or conversational implicature or as a presupposition) or in expressivistic terms (the use of the slur expresses allegiance to a particular discriminatory perspective or expresses contempt for the referred class). Those supporting semanticist accounts or denying truth- aptness to utterances containing slurs (Hom 2008, 2010, 2012), (Hom & May 2013, forthcoming), Richard (2008) wouldn't agree with either. I will leave these options aside and focus only in the defense of the first thesis from a particular problem.

[5] That is, it provides a conception of *correct application* that does not amount to truth-conditional identity.

RNCT is not universally accepted,[6] it is certainly the go-to semantics of slurring expressions for those advocating for pragmatic or expressivistic approaches to slurs' derogatory force.[7] Finally, there are some reasons for supporting semantic approaches to slurs that defend RNCT, that I will only mention here[8]: first, their main alternative, semanticist approaches,[9] deny RNCT by claiming that slurs and neutral counterparts contribute differently to the truth conditions of sentences containing them: slurs refer to the empty set, since they mean (roughly) something along the lines of 'individual with a property R that, because of it, is ascribed with property S, making him/her worthy of being subjected to institutionalized practices of discrimination of type D' (where R is an objective neutral property indicating membership to $\{NC_e\}$, S is a socially sanctioned (often stereotypical) property usually ascribed to members of $\{NC_e\}$, and D is the set of externally determined practices of discrimination directed at holders of R, warranted by the belief that they also hold S). This approach has raised several problems: from anti-intuitive results in substitutional contexts, to difficulties in finding a proper paraphrastic equivalent that grasps adequately the meaning of slurs.[10] Second, RNCT appears as a good tool for providing slurs with a truth-conditional contribution that (i) explains our intuitions on the truth values of utterances of sentences containing them, including intuitions against the nullity or truth-conditional void of slurs, and (ii) it is not cognitively demanding for speakers.

However, in some cases slurs can be used to refer only to a subset of $\{NC_e\}$ (recall Chris Rock's quip 'I love black people, but I hate niggers').[11] For some slurs it is even problematic to find an adequate co-referential neutral counterpart entirely. I will call this

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[6] A semanticist approach like Hom's, accepts that being a member of $\{NC_e\}$ is a necessary condition for the correct application of "e" to an individual, but it denies that both make the same truth-conditional contribution.

[7] For each approach, see: presuppositionalism: (Schlenker 2007); conventional implicatures: (Whiting 2013), (Williamson 2013); conversational implicatures: (Nunberg in press); expressionism: (Jeshion 2013a, 2013b), (Hornsby 2001); perspectivalism: (Camp 2013); tabooed words: (Anderson & Lepore 2013a, 2013b).

[8] A thorough defense of RNCT would demand an entire paper on the topic. The reader can track, if interested, all the arguments provided by authors in note 7 above against semanticists approaches: a nice paper for this is Copp and Sennet (2015). In this paper I will present a potential problem for defenders of RNCT and a plausible answer, as a tool for those who want to keep slurs and neutral correlates as close as possible.

[9] Hom (2008, 2010, 2012), and Hom and May (in press, 2013) defend the *Null Extensionality* thesis instead of RNCT, presented briefly above.

[10] Sennet and Copp (2015).

[11] Referential restriction is also noted by Kennedy (2002) in the voice of Big Mamma, who claims to despise 'niggers' but is actually referring to a subset of {African-Americans}.

3

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phenomenon *referential restriction* in order to emphasize the difference in reference between the slur and its associated neutral counterpart. A brief observation in passing: of course, instances of referential restriction can occur whenever the right counterpart has not been found yet, or in cases where there is no *actual* neutral counterpart available (even though the slur does refer to a set of individuals potentially definable in neutral terms). However, RNCT considers the relation between actual *or potential* neutral counterpart candidates for a given slur: even if it is not available yet, or the wrong choice of neutral candidate has been made, were the potential or correct candidate to be found, the slur would be co-referential with it. And, although the relation between slurs and counterparts is complex, it is hard to imagine a case in which there is not even a *potential* candidate for neutral counterpart.

There are two alternative explanations for restricted reference that should be addressed before going any further[12]: first, slurs could be considered as context-sensitive expressions, with the expected contextual reference variation: as in the case of indexicals, they could have a stable meaning (*character*) determining a different truth-conditional contribution for each context of utterance. Second, and relatedly, co-referentiality could obtain between *uses* of slurs' and neutral counterparts, therefore making the slur itself not co-referential to any other term in particular if not in use. Both options allow restricted reference on particular occasions, by making slurs flexible enough.

Both options are good alternatives; they are even compatible with the solution offered in this paper to the problem of restrictive reference in particular uses of a certain type of slurs (demographic, outgroup slurs), in which a term of this type is used to refer to a subset of a larger class. However, these alternatives fail to explain two points: first, an explanation is owed for the fact that even in these cases, the standard, typical use of this type of slurs is strongly linked to particular neutral counterparts, which makes referentially restrictive uses a deviation.[13] Second, when it comes to gendered (normalizing) slurs, there is no context nor use in which the slur is co-referential with the associated neutral counterpart; the pervasiveness of this referential restriction should be also explained.[14]

Referential restriction, thus, poses a problem to those claiming that the truth-conditional content of utterances of sentences containing a slur is identical to the truth-conditional content of utterances of

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[12] I thank the anonymous referee for the suggestion.

[13] I would accept as valid a possible answer pointing out to a *privileged* use on which the slur in question is co-referential with its conventionally associated counterpart. This does not address, however, the problem of referential restriction of normalizing slurs.

[14] An utterance of 'All women are sluts'—where the slur and the neutral counterpart are used as co-referential—sounds odd, prompting the audience to demand justification or to signal clear cases of women that are not 'sluts'.

4

sentences containing the associated neutral counterpart: not only *may* slurs refer to a narrower class, some kinds of slurs *always* refer to a subset of that class. This phenomenon threatens RNCT, and in some cases, it may also affect ANCT.

This paper offers a possible answer to the problem posed by referential restriction to RNCT. The answer will allow me to establish a distinction that will be of use for those studying derogatory language: that between *out-group* and *normalizing* slurs.[15] I start by offering, in Section 1, a general characterization of slurs and presenting the phenomenon of referential restriction, which seems to go against what is predicted by ANCT and RNCT. In Section 2 I revise a proposal that, based on this phenomenon, argues in favor of severing completely the link between neutral counterparts and slurs. In order to restore this link, I distinguish in Section 3 between two types of slurs, which allows me to differentiate the phenomenon of reference restriction in some *uses*, from the phenomenon of reference restriction in *meaning*. While the first case is compatible with ANCT and RNCT, and therefore does not menace the link between neutral counterparts and slurs, the second one requires a bit of work: I will claim that modifications to ANCT and RNCT are required (just for the case of this type of slur) in order to maintain the link between them and their alleged neutral counterparts.

1. Slurs, neutral counterparts and referential restriction

Slurring expressions are used to refer to groups in a derogatory way, reducing their members to mere holders of a given feature (ethnicity, race, religion, gender, etc.) that is disparaged by the community using the slur. In the literature on the topic, 'slur' stands for a particular class of pejoratives or derogatory expressions with the following characteristics[16]:

> *Derogatory*: as pejoratives, slurs are typically[17] used with an intention to insult, offend or harm their targets.

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[15] Even though in some cases I will use 'normalizing slurs' and 'gendered slurs' as interchangeable, gendered slurs are just one kind of normalizing slurs. The possibility should be open to include other pejorative group terms not based on gender as normalizing slurs: I am tempted to think that derogatory terms for mental health patients seem like a good fit.

[16] Do not mistake these features with *desiderata* for adequate theories of slurs, that comprise many more—and more complex—features of semantic, pragmatic and socio-psychological behaviour of these terms. Readers can find a desiderata list in Diaz Legaspe, Korngut, Li, Liu and Stainton (unpublished data).

[17] Non-typical uses (slurs as terms of endearment, among others) will not be considered here.

5

Target class: unlike individual pejoratives,[18] directed at individuals in virtue of personal features, slurs are *group* pejoratives: they target people in virtue of their membership to a particular class. Most commonly, slurs target people in virtue of their race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender or sexual orientation.[19]

Far-reaching harm: among pejoratives, slurs have the strongest offensive power. Even if they are aimed at a particular individual, all the members of the targeted group are potentially harmed by their use.[20]

Notice that this characterization of slurs is wide enough to include different kinds of slurs, subjected to different kinds of processes determining their reference.

Most accounts of slurs associate them to neutral counterparts: for some authors, it is the very *availability* of neutral counterparts (plus the fact that the speaker opts for the slur instead) what provides slurs with derogatory power.[21] According to ANCT, slurs and their neutral counterparts share their correct application conditions: neutral counterparts refer to a class of individuals ($\{NC_e\}$) sharing a neutral[22] property P that works as the membership condition for class $\{NC_e\}$. In association to slurs, property P takes up the role of also determining *their* application conditions. ANCT can be articulated negatively or positively:

    (i) *negatively*, it claims that the ascription of *e* to an individual outside $\{NC_e\}$ counts as a linguistic mistake or failure in linguistic competence;

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[18] Some authors (Bach, in press; Jeshion (2013a, 2013b); Hom (2008)) distinguish between *group* and *personal* slurs. In what follows, by *slur* I will mean only group slur, as 'individual slurs' translate in my view to individual pejoratives. Notice also that I am assuming (but not offering any argument for this here) that slurs are different from other class-referential derogatory terms that either started as descriptions and became complex pejorative expressions ("JAP"), or are actually descriptions used to refer derogatorily to a class ("tree hugger").

[19] It could be objected that the features triggering the use of *individual* pejoratives are also common to a class of people—namely, the class of people holding that feature. Thus, being a "jerk" related to the property of being mean to others, and this property is shared by a number of people. This could be corrected by pointing at the fact that slurs aim to target individuals in virtue of their having *objective* (not evaluative) and *non-normative* features: the property of being *mean* is normatively charged in a way that being Latin is not.

[20] Even hearers not in the target group can be potentially harmed by slurs, although in a different way.

[21] Nunberg in press, Camp (2013), Bolinger (2015).

[22] By "neutral" here I mean that holding property P does not justify by itself being subjected to discriminatory practices or being worthy of any kind of mistreat.

6

(ii) *positively*, it claims that e can be correctly applied to *all* members of {NC$_e$}.

Notice that the negative articulation of ANCT is restricted to cases in which there is no epistemic obstacle: a speaker S may call an individual A "kike" under the (false) belief that A is Jewish. This amounts to an epistemic mistake, and clearly it is not a matter of linguistic competence. I will disregard these cases and restrict ANCT to cases where either (i) the target is in fact a member of {NC$_e$} and the speaker using e is aware of this, or (ii) the target is not a member of {NC$_e$}, but the speaker sincerely believes he is.[23]

There are reasons for adopting ANCT. First, the far-reaching harmfulness of slurs usually affects—at least—the members of the class determined by the associated neutral counterparts.[24] This phenomenon can be explained easily by the fact that both terms apply to the same class of people. Second, the application identity between slurs and neutral counterparts also singles out the community entitled to protest and reclaim the slur: it is predominantly individuals in the class referred to by the neutral counterpart who are first-hand entitled to use the associated slur with a new, non-pejorative sense, precisely because these slurs apply to them.[25]

Although there is no agreement on the truth-conditional contribution made by slurs, some authors are willing to accept RNCT along with ANCT. According to this thesis, slurs and their neutral counterparts are co-referential, and as a result, (1) and (2) express the same truth-conditions (even though they vary in derogatory force):

(1) This building is full of *kikes*.
(2) This building is full of *Jews*.

Those willing to accept RNCT as the correct truth-conditional account for slurs face the problem raised by cases in which slurs display a reference more restricted than that of the associated neutral counterpart.

Three possible outcomes are to be expected: either these cases are exceptional and do not affect RNCT; or the truth-conditional

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[23] I thank the anonymous referee who pointed this problem to me.

[24] Note, though, that (i) there can be thick-skinned members of {NC$_e$}not actually offended by the use of the slur, and (ii) people outside {NC$_e$} can be offended by it too if they abhor the discriminatory practices usually linked to slurs. The claim above should be understood as an entitlement matter: members of {NC$_e$} are intuitively entitled first-hand, unlike non-members, to feel offended, even if they don't.

[25] Once members of {NC$_e$} start circulating reclaimed uses of slurs, they may signal non-members permission to use it in this way, but this does not happen in all cases. Take 'gay' and 'queer' as examples of permissive reclaimed uses, and the N-word as an example of a non-permissive reclaimed use.

7

semantics branches to account for these cases in an alternative way; or the very existence of these cases is used to prove that RNCT is wrong and in support of a different account of slurs' truth-conditional content. In what follows, I will focus on an enlightening version of the latter: Ashwell[26] appeals to cases of restricted reference to deny that being related to a neutral counterpart is essential for an expression to count as a slur, and offers instead a unifying account of slurs that explains restricted reference. I will claim that although Ashwell gets some things right, she confuses two different phenomena that yield referential restriction as a result, offering one unifying account of slurs where there should be two. Moreover, I will argue that both phenomena can be dealt with without jettisoning RNCT altogether. The difference is fruitful, for it indicates the existence of two different types of slurs: while some of them derogate individuals in virtue of their membership to a particular class, others derogate them in virtue of holding a particular property *besides* the one determining class membership.

An observation made by an anonymous referee helps clarifying the point further: he or she claims that uses of substantive nouns with contextually restricted reference (relative to another usually co-referential expression) do not affect ANCT nor RNCT: consider 'student' and 'individual enrolled in an educational institution' (or a more appropriate co-referential expression you may find). In most cases, utterances of 'Students have to report to the office' do not demand the presence of *every student in the world* in the office; 'students' refer here to a sub-class of {individuals enrolled in an educational institution}. This referentially restricted use of 'student' does not affect the fact that both expressions are, first, correctly applied to members of the same set[27] and, second, co-referential. Why should we worry, then, about the fact that slurs can be used with a restricted reference?

The point is fair, and it helps emphasizing my aim in this paper: some theories of slurs (those supporting RNCT) expect co-referentiality from slurs and their neutral counterparts. As the referee points out, this is perfectly compatible with—and not threatened by—contextual referential restriction. I will argue that, indeed, there is one kind of slurs (*out-group* slurs) that can be used with a contextually restricted reference, without putting ANCT nor RNCT into question. However, when it comes to a different kind of slurs (*normalizing* slurs), referential restriction is not optional nor contextual: these slurs *always* have a more restrictive reference than their alleged neutral counterparts. This leads some authors either to sever the connection between slurs and neutral counterparts altogether or to argue that gendered,

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[26] Ashwell (2016).

[27] And to them only: calling 'student' someone that is not enrolled in an educational institution, except metaphorically, is a linguistic (or epistemic) mistake.

'normalizing' pejoratives are not technically slurs. My strategy will be to offer modified versions of ANCT and RNCT in order to keep normalized pejoratives within the category of slurs, and in order to maintain some connection between slurs (of any type) and neutral counterparts. As expected, the connection between normalizing slurs and their neutral counterparts will not be as strong, but at least there will be one.

2. Slurs without neutral counterparts

Ashwell claims that it is not essential for slurs to be associated to a neutral counterpart: gendered slurs (like 'bitch' or 'slut') do not seem related to one, and it is not even clear that paradigmatic cases of slurring expressions like the N-word have adequate neutral counterparts either. Her approach is based on a previous understanding of the requisites that a referential class-term has to satisfy in order to count as the neutral counterpart of a given slur:

(i) *offensive neutrality*: the expression should not include derogative nor socially disapproved content.
(ii) *normative neutrality*: the term should not be normative nor include normative elements.

Requiring both offensive and normative neutrality can be too demanding: most authors only require offensive neutrality from neutral counterparts. I can only conjecture the reasons why Ashwell posits this stronger demand: class-terms that are offensively neutral but normatively loaded may still carry with them a social weight that locates them in the borderline between slurs and neutral counterparts. Being called 'chink' (slur) is not the same thing as being called 'Chinese' (offensively and normatively neutral term), but being called 'smelly Chinese' (offensively neutral but normatively loaded term) feels closer to the former than to the latter ('smelly' carrying here a normative burden in societies that despise strong body odour).

Ashwell notes that there are no referential class-terms both offensively and normatively neutral that single out exactly the same class of people that is derogated by gendered slurs. Take 'slut' for instance: the intuitive candidate for NC_{SLUT}, 'women', is problematic from the start, since not all members of {women} are adequate candidates for being called 'sluts': among others, nuns, wives with impecable behaviour and toddlers should be excluded. Other attempts to find an appropriate neutral counterpart for 'slut' are equally disappointing: 'women who behave in a sexually dissolute manner', 'women who are inclined to behave in a sexually dissolute manner' and 'promiscuous women', they all violate one or both requisites. According to Ashwell,

9

this phenomenon is not restricted to gendered slurs, for it can be observed too in utterances that involve the use of paradigmatic demographic slurs, like Chris Rock's quip (3), in which a clear divide is traced between the reference of the associated neutral counterpart and the reference of the slur:

(3) I love black people, but I hate niggers.

Both cases seem to point out to a failure in ANCT: the thesis can be applied in its negative articulation (only women get to be correctly called 'sluts' and only Africant-descendants can be called the N-word), but not in its positive articulation (it is not true that *all women* can be correctly called 'slut' and, according to (3), it is not true that *all African-descendants* can be called the N-word). This would not yet amount to a problem for the application of RNCT to the truth-conditional content of these slurs, except for the fact that (3) does not seem truth-conditionally equivalent to (4)—(3) does not seem to express that the speaker is in a love/hate relationship with {African-Americans}—and, in the same way, (5) is not truth-conditionally equivalent to (6):

(4) I love black people, but I hate black people.
(5) Mary is a slut.
(6) Mary is a woman.

Hence, referential restriction of gendered and demographic slurs also seems to affect RNCT.

After discarding arguments offered in favor of a re-classification of 'slut' as a different kind of slur or as a different kind of pejorative, Ashwell concludes that it is not essential for slurs to be associated to neutral counterparts.[28] Instead, she claims that slurs set up questionable norms on how people in a particular class *ought* to act. Calling someone 'nigger' equals to calling him *a black person that acts inappropriately (for what is expected from a black person)*, and calling a woman 'slut' is pointing out at her behaviour as *not appropriated for a woman*. She concludes that the fact that slurs lack proper neutral counterparts suggests that part of their derogative force is rooted in the divide they impose among people, setting up a class whose members share a property that should not attract any attention whatsoever, and imposing norms governing their behaviour.

Ashwell introduces this suggestion at the very end of her paper and does not develop it further. Because of this, her remarks, as stated, are compatible with the approach I aim to present below: we use slurs to derogatorily refer to marginalized groups of people *or* to socially

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[28] Jeshion (2013, 255, n.15) also acknowledges at least one case of a slur not related to a neutral correlate ('gook').

sanction members of a certain class whose behaviour deviates from what is expected from them. Before entering the details, two brief observations: first, I will argue that the unifying approach she proposes does not take into account the difference between *types* of slurs: referential restriction results from two entirely different phenomena associated to two different types of slurs. And even though she is right about the fact that gendered slurs have a normative, normalizing import, that does not seem to be the case for demographic slurs; the derogation associated to them does not seem to be as related to misbehaviour as it is to harsh discrimination. Second, her remarks are compatible with an alternative truth-conditional approach, but one that fails in keeping in place the derogatory force of slurs (yelling 'You are not acting accordingly to what we expect from black folks!' will most likely result in a heated discussion about the oughts and don'ts for black people's behaviour, but it is certainly not as derogatory as yelling the N-word). They can also be compatible with a use-theoretic approach according to which calling someone a slur amounts to discriminating against her. Be it as it may, she jettisons the role of neutral counterparts altogether. My proposal, in turn, respects the fact that slurs are referential devices strongly linked to associated neutral counterparts, although in a different way for each type of slur.

3. Different types of slurs

As said above, a potential strategy for facing cases of restricted reference of slurs is to argue that they are either instances of non-literal uses of slurs or to argue that slurs with restricted reference are not really slurs. The first strategy addresses uses of slurs like the N-word in (3): it is undeniable that these expressions are indeed slurs, and hence the restriction of their truth-conditional content in these cases must be due to a figurative, not literal use. The second strategy addresses derogatory expressions that *always* target specific subclasses of their associated $\{NC_e\}$'s, like gendered slurs,[29] which are denied the label 'slur' on the basis of their restricted reference. The first strategy gets it right that there is something going on with the way paradigmatic slurs like that in (3) are *used*. The second strategy, in turn, fails to see that gendered pejoratives exhibit all the features of slurs presented above: they are directed at individuals in virtue of their membership to a class, and members of it can be offended by their use even if they are not the targeted individual. The differences between gendered pejoratives and non-gendered, demographic slurs

[29] Better: like *most* gendered slurs. Only few exceptions seem to target a whole class defined by gender and not only a subset: the C-word is one of these exceptional cases.

11

are not enough to ban the formers from the set of slurs, since both types of expressions discriminate a whole class of people in virtue of a feature that in itself ought not to mark people as worthy of contempt.[30] However, this second strategy correctly grasps the fact that there is a difference between gendered and demographic slurs. In what follows I will put some flesh on both observations.

Utterances of (3) and (5) exhibit two pretty different phenomena that result in a referential restriction of the expression compared to the neutral counterpart associated to it:

> *Uses with restricted reference*: cases like (3), in which *e,* whose reference is {NC$_e$}, is *used* by the speaker to refer to a subset of {NC$_e$}.

> *Meanings with restricted reference*: cases like (5), in which *e*'s reference is *always* a subset of {NC$_e$}.

In (3), the slur, co-referential with 'black people', is used *in this particular case* to signal reference to a subset of {NC$_e$}. Chris Rock's quip makes sense only insofar there is a difference in reference between {black people} and {niggers}. Being African-American himself, his remark aims to note that—at least—not all black people should be called the N-word nor should be classified as such. The rest of the stand-up routine to which the sentence belongs makes it explicit some of the alleged features ascribed to 'niggers' that black people lack: they, but not black people, are depicted as sloths, hostile, ignorant and a general threat to society and property. In (5), similarly, the slur is only correctly applied to women. However, the slur is never co-referential with 'women': uses of 'slut' always aim to shame or derogate women that behave in a certain way or seem disposed to act in a certain way (concretely, having or being disposed to have many sexual partners).

As mentioned, both slurs are associated to their neutral counterparts through the negative articulation of ANCT. But while slurs like the N-word allow uses in which the positive articulation of ANCT and RNCT also holds, this does not happen with 'slut'.

This raises two related questions: the *referential question* demands to point out what the truth-conditional contributions of slurs are in cases of *uses* with referential restriction and in cases of *meanings* with referential restriction. The answer to this question relies in part on the answer given to a previous *determination question*: how can we determine the subset referred to in both cases of referential restriction? In what follows I address this second question, emphasizing the influence that socio-political constructs like stereotypes and social

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[30] There is also political import in labelling gendered pejoratives as *slurs*: it equates the discrimination of individuals on the basis of their gender or sexual preference as unjust as the discrimination suffered by individuals because of their religion, ethnicity, nationality or race.

12

constructions of gender have in determining the referential class for referentially-restricted uses or truth-conditional meanings of slurs respectively. A difference should emerge: while it is possible to provide a characterization of what determines the restricted reference of slurs like 'slut' that is stable across uses, it is not possible to provide something of the sort for referentially restricted uses of slurs like the N-word in (3); any competent speaker of English would agree with the fact that 'slut' is used to refer to women that behave in a certain way or that seem prone to behave in a certain way. However, speakers that make a restricted use of the N-word are at risk of failing to agree in what subset of {black people} they are talking about. Again, this difference is due in part to the role stereotypes and social constructs of gender play in determining the referential subset in each case.

Here is my proposal: usage of gendered—and similar—slurs whose reference seems to be always a subset of a neutral class plays, in most cases, a *normalizing* role: derogation via this type of slurs works by pointing to a particular behaviour, behavioural pattern or apparent disposition to behave in a certain way that deviates from what is socially expected from members of the neutral class, with the dual intention of shaming and socially sanctioning the target. In turn, demographic slurs that usually target a neutral class can be occasionally used to refer to a subset of it—most likely, but not exclusively, by members of the target class—for establishing a distinction among members of the neutral class and to refer derogatorily to those that more closely resemble the stereotype associated to discriminatory practices upon them. Incomplete and biased grasping of the stereotype leads to the creation of idiolects or sociolects that deviate from the regular truth-conditional contribution of these slurs.

Normalizing Slurs and the Social Construction of Gender

Consider the utterance of (5): typically,[31] these 'normalizing' slurs are derogatory of individuals of a particular gender[32] or sexual orientation, but they only target the members of that class that exhibit a certain property: a certain behaviour or disposition to behave in a certain way. Let's call this property *P-behaviour*.

P-behaviour may be exhibited by every member in the same society that condemns it, disregarding the gender: the particular P-behaviour linked to being called 'slut', for example, is exhibited by both males

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[31] Contrasted to non-typical utterances: for example (5) or a male version of (5) ('John is a slut') can both be used—in certain contexts—to derogate an individual outside {women} that even so exhibits P-behaviour.

[32] When I use 'gender', I am referring to the gender assigned at birth. Transgendered people, especially before transition, are unfortunately still subjected to the norms that govern the gender they were assigned at birth and because of that, are over-exposed to normalizing slurs.

13

and females of every possible sexual orientation. P-behaviour associated to the exacerbation of feminine manners is also observed in females and males of any sexual orientation. However, exhibition of P-behaviour, and even suspicion of the disposition to P-behave, are only censored in some of these groups: a heterosexual woman, for instance, can act her femininity as much as she wants, but a male cannot at risk of being called a 'sissy'. A male of any sexual preference can have as many sexual partners as he wants, but a heterosexual female cannot, at risk of being called a 'slut'. Note that P-behaviour, by itself, is a *neutral* property not justifying discrimination or social sanction, but when the individual exhibiting it belongs to a certain gender, the community will impose a sanction. Part of the discriminatory practices directed at gender classes involves using derogatory terms coined refer to individuals of that gender that P-behave: *normalizing* slurs.[33]

The fact that P-behaviour is only sanctioned in individuals of a particular gender and not in all members of a society results from the way gender is socially constructed. As Haslanger[34] points out, the social construction of gender is a complex process that launches from gendered bodies and yields a normative interpretation that assigns them with physical features: having female genitals is associated, for example, to lacking physical strength and being capable of giving birth. This interpretation of the gendered body, in turn, gives raise to a social expectance of what these bodies *can* and *cannot* do: it is assumed, for example, that women cannot partake in works that require lifting weight, and women are also expected to become mothers. A particular set of norms ensues that governs gendered behaviour in different dimensions: work, family, social life. These sets of norms are internalized and reinforced by every member of society, including those in the gender class, by means of narrative and sanction of deviation. Therefore, some behaviours that are not even noticeable in members of other genders are singled out as deviations and are negatively marked as worthy of contempt. The P-behaviour thus becomes a deviation from the expected pattern of conduct imposed (and

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[33] There is a problem with setting the referential set of gendered slurs as the intersection of the gender set and that of individuals with the property of actual or suspected P-behaviour: there is no objective way of stating what this P-behaviour is. First, different cultures at different moments sanction or approve different P-behaviours for different genders. Second, and more importantly, for each P-behaviour, there will be as many articulations as members of the society. How many sexual partners should a woman have to be considered "promiscuous"? The answer will depend on a lot of factors that change for each individual, hence making the stable reference of "slut" pretty inestable. Remember that we are here offering an answer to the determination problem: what determines the reference of "slut" is then stable, although the actual reference may vary contextually. A referee has pointed out, in this regard, that gendered slurs have a stable character in a Kaplanian sense. This is a plausible way out.

[34] Haslanger (2012).

14

internalized) on members of a certain gender. Because P-behaviour is not even singled out in the behaviour of members of other genders and it is negatively laden for members of the targeted gender, it is difficult to characterize it in a neutral, purely descriptive way: the P-behaviour associated to being called 'slut' can only be articulated in a way that conveys social sanction directed at women.

Normalizing slurs, then, are derogative ways of referring to individuals of a given gender that exhibit a particular P-behaviour—or a disposition to it—that is a deviation from the norms regulating the behaviour of members of that gender. As a result, their reference is always restricted compared to that of the associated neutral counterpart. This may lead to wonder, as Ashwell does, if normalizing slurs are associated to neutral counterparts at all. My claim is that they are. Recall that neutral counterparts are supposed to play a double role regarding slurs: to provide them with correct application criteria and, for some authors, to share their truth-conditional contribution. This amounts to three different conditions that a referential class-term has to satisfy in order to count as the neutral counterpart of a given slur:

Negative ANCT: for any slur e there is a NC_e such that every member of $\{NC_e\}$ can be correctly called an 'e'.[35]

This condition is clearly satisfied: only women can be correctly called 'sluts', at the risk of committing a linguistic mistake in the use of the slur.

Positive ANCT: for every e there is a NC_e such that every member of $\{NC_e\}$ can be called a "e".

Although this condition is not satisfied, a modified version of it is:

Positive ANCT*: for every e there is a NC_e such that every member of $\{NC_e\}$ *could potentially* be called a 'e'.

One might wonder if it is really true that every member of $\{NC_e\}$ can potentially be called 'e' when e is a normalizing slur; standardized failures for this condition can be imagined easily (could someone be called an e provided that that person cannot meet the P-behaviour?). I assume here that every member of a given gender can be potentially called an e: given a rejection of determinism and/or pre-ordered fate, every member of a gender faces the possibility of P-behaviour. Add to this the fact that P-behaviour adapts to different situations: in the case of sexual promiscuity, for example, individuals without a sexual partner (because of confinement, because of social circumstances), or lacking genitals (because of a mutilation or a physical malformation) or the ability to move, can all P-behave in ways appropriate for each case -and of course, the P-behaviour will be different when adapted to

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[35] With the exception of metaphorical uses of e that mark that, because the target P-behaves, he/she is comparable to a member of $\{NC_e\}$.

15

extreme cases: thus, a recluse can be singled out as sexually promiscuous just because she fantasizes with a different person every day (in the same way in which girls with no sexual experience sometimes are 'slut-shamed' solely in virtue of their fleeting proto-sexual desires), and a person with physical impediments can be accused of being sexually promiscuous disregarding the way in which she acts her sexuality. The same thing can be applied to other kinds of P-behaviour.[36] Rare exceptions could occur: women unable to P-behave in any of these adapted ways would be left out of the set of women who can be called 'slut'. Gendered slurs aim at normalizing, preventing members of the targeted gender to P-behave: an individual that cannot P-behave in any way is left out of the reprimand. But this is also to be expected for demographic slurs, whose aim is to discriminate: individuals of mixed races could be left out of the reach of the slur. Hence, even though not all women *now* can be called 'sluts', they could if they P-behaved (within their possibilities and means) and thus they are potential candidates to be called 'sluts'.

RNCT: for every e there is a NC_e such that $\{NC_e\}$ is identical to the class of individuals referred to by e.

Again, RNCT does not hold for normalizing slurs, for they refer to a restricted subset of $\{NC_e\}$. However, being a member of this class is part of the truth-conditions expressed by sentences with occurrences of the slur:

Restricted RNCT: Whenever 'o is an e' is true, 'o is a NC_e' is also true.

Being a member of a particular gender is then part of the referential contribution of the slur.

Considered altogether, these observations amount to supporting the idea that normalizing slurs do have an associated neutral counterpart, even though they are not co-referential. Instead, normalizing slurs' reference includes $\{NC_e\}$. Add to this the fact that the members of the class$\{NC_e\}$ are entitled first-hand to protest and appropriate the term.

Neutral counterparts associated with slurs determine the group entitled to protest first-hand the use of the slur as a referential term for them. Now, the referential restriction of gendered slurs leaves us wondering why members of the targeted gender that do not P-behave should protest the use of the word: if 'slut' only refers to women who P-behave, women who do not should not be affected by its use. But in real life even women with the most impeccable behaviour should protest when some other woman is called a 'slut'. This reaction—when one is not the intended target of the normalizing slur—is the result of the combination of linguistic competence and a deep understanding of gender as a social construct. Together, they determine a

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[36] This question was raised by an anonymous referee, to which I am very grateful.

reception of the slur such that the speaker knows that whenever a woman is called 'slut', a normative system is being enforced—and reinforced—on *all women*, forbidding them to P-behave.[37] Of course, many members of the target class choose not to take the slur personally, to let it pass without questioning it and, occasionally, they even agree on using it in a non-reclaimed way: many uses of normalizing slurs are voiced by people *in* the targeted gender. Lacking the appropriate understanding of how society dictates norms regulating gender behaviour may miss the fact that such a reinforcement is going on, and lead to a failure to feel offended. But, sadly, these norms are internalized and accepted as a given by many members of the targeted gender, and also, even some of those aware of them may consider morally correct to benefit from the existence of these norms.

Out-group Slurs and Stereotypes

Contrary to normalizing slurs, demographic slurs are uncontroversially related to neutral counterparts both by sharing correct application conditions and by co-referring, according to supporters of RNCT. It is only on certain uses that a referential restriction appears. In the cases considered here, the speaker may use the slur with a restricted reference most likely with the purpose of blocking the correct application of it to the whole neutral class. I will claim that, in these cases, the speaker is not using the actual slur but a different version of it, part of her own idiolect (or sociolect), which may result in raising the expected difficulties in successful communication. I will also claim that stereotypes associated to the social representation of the target class in discriminatory communities play a role here in determining the restricted reference. Both claims are closely related.

Linguistic expressions whose main purpose is to derogate an entire class of people based on demographic features (nationality, ethnicity,

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[37] Notice that this has an interesting consequence: if women are entitled to feel offended when any female is pointed at for deviating from the norm, it follows that *any* utterance reinforcing the imposed system of norms should be considered equally offensive: that is, (2) should be read as offensive as (1):

   (1)   So you are a nurse? That's great, women make such great nurses!
   (2)   She is such a slut!

In both cases, the normalizing construct of femininity is acting in full force, either by assigning positive features to women (nurturing, naturally caring) or by pointing at a deviation. Failure to notice the offensiveness in (2) is due to the internalization of the norm: the same goes to positive takes on catcalls, 'flattering' remarks on women's appearance or assumptions of 'feminine' skills ('Congratulations to your wife for the fabulous dinner!'), all of which appear disguised—both in utterances and reception—as straightforward compliments.

17

religion, race) are part of complex social discriminatory perspectives and practices. More often than not, discriminatory frameworks comprise stereotypical representations of the targeted class. And even if stereotypes do not bear any semantic role in determining the truth-conditional contribution of the associated slur, they might occasionally. According to Pickering,[38] stereotypes are always and by definition *inaccurate mis*representations, for the social group they portrait is represented homogeneously: certain patterns of behaviour, features or propensities are isolated and taken out of context to be assigned to all the members of the stereotyped group. As a result, the public perception of members of it is reduced to a bundle of features that are thought of as natural and given. This simplified depiction of the members of the class reinforces and revalidates relations of power and domination of the in- upon the out-group and, as happens with gender as a social construct, it can be internalized by members of the stereotyped class.

Insofar as stereotypes are public representations, they are available to all the members of a society, including those in the stereotyped group. But, because they consist in disorganized bundles of features, and because they change historically alongside the political relations between the in- and the out-group, their grasp might be incomplete and idiosyncratic.[39] It may happen, synchronically and diachronically, that if a stereotype attributes features F_1, F_2 and F_3 to an out-group, someone may grasp just F_1 and F_2, and some other, just F_2 and F_3. As a result, even if there may be only one stereotype dictating the perception of an out-group, differential grasps of it yield different stereotypical images in different individuals or communities.

Referentially restricted uses of demographic slurs respond to the interest the speaker may have in confronting discrimination upon members of $\{NC_e\}$ and, at the same time, in derogating those who instantiate more closely the features comprised by her grasp of the related stereotypical representation of the class. Leaving motivations aside, the result of this double intent is a truth-conditional move in which the neutral counterpart regains exclusive reference to $\{NC_e\}$, while the slur's reference is restricted to those in that class that also instantiate stereotypical properties (call them S-properties). Hence,

(3) I love black people, but I hate niggers.

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[38] Pickering (2001).

[39] Take the N-word as an example: the discrimination began with slavery, which is why the stereotype may have underscored features related with work in its origins ("lazy", "unreliable", "thief"). The liberation of slaves and their incorporation to society could have generated fear and guilt in their former masters, justified by the construal of a perception of members of this collective as "violent" and "hostile". The old work-related features and the new everyday living-related features coexist, but their prominence may vary.

18

is true whenever 'black people' refers to $\{NC_e\}$ and the N-word refers to members of $\{NC_e\}$ holding S-properties.[40] Since the S-properties grasped may differ from speaker to speaker, the use of the slur becomes idiosyncratic. In this regard, notice that Rock's quip forces the audience to look for a meaning of 'nigger' that is different than the usual one.[41]

The fact that stereotypes can be grasped differently by different people/communities gives rise to shortcircuits in communication. Imagine a conversation between Big Mamma[42] and her grandson, where she admonishes him not to be like 'those niggers'. In reaction, the grandson takes good care in avoiding being hostile and acting always politely, but at the same time fails to get a job and does nothing all day. Big Mamma may reprimand her grandson for being just like 'those niggers', which is precisely what he was trying to avoid. Unlike normalizing slurs, whose restricted reference is the same for every speaker, referentially restricted usage of out-group slurs creates new idiolects or sociolects that branch from the original slur.

This also affects the entitlement of members of $\{NC_e\}$ to protest the use of the slur. Regular uses of it entitle them first-hand to react against that term as a referential expression for them, but in the face of restricted cases, this entitlement may vary: those aware of the fact that the slur is now an idiolect or sociolect may oscillate between not protesting the term at all (since they understand it refers only to the members of $\{NC_e\}$ exhibiting S-properties) and protesting anyway (since, as it happens with 'slut' and {women}, it is infuriating that a subclass of $\{NC_e\}$ is derogatively referred thus). Whenever the term is used by any other speaker, it will be interpreted with its usual reference.[43]

4. Final Remarks

My aim in this paper has been twofold: on the one hand, I aimed to provide an explanation of the phenomena of referential restriction of slurs that is overall consistent with RNCT while granting that in certain cases some slurs will be used to refer to a subset of what RNCT

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[40] The fact that the reference of the neutral counterpart in (3) can also be constructed as restricted (to members of $\{NC_e\}$ that lack S-properties) seem more a pragmatic than a semantic phenomenon. The same effect can be obtained from a sentence with a similar structure and no slurs nor referential change: 'I love human beings, but I hate loud speakers'.

[41] This way of marking an idiosyncratic or a merely different use of the slur can be found in other examples. In some cases this mark registers a change in the truth-conditional contributions of each term, in others it merely marks a difference in other respect: consider 'I am not a driver, I am a *chauffeur*' or 'This is not a pub, it is a wine bar'.

[42] Kennedy (2002).

[43] Notice that Chris Rock allegedly retired the quip—and the whole routine—from his repertoire because it licensed non-African-Americans to repeat the slur, which was automatically interpreted with its regular reference.

19

generally predicts. In this way, I hope to have contributed with an argument claiming that slurs are referentially related to neutral counterparts, even though for a particular type of slurs this means just to include the correlate's reference as part of its truth-conditional contribution. The second aim, on the other hand, was to distinguish between two types of slurring expressions by appealing to the way their reference is determined and to their different kinds of truth-conditional contributions. Thus, normalizing slurs' truth-conditional contribution is determined by the way the society in which they are used normatively constructs gender, while demographic, out-group slurs' truth-conditional contribution can occasionally be restricted in relation to the way the speaker grasps the stereotypical representation of the target class. The former type of slurs is *always* used to refer to a more restricted class than that of their associated neutral counterparts; the latter type can *sometimes* be used to refer to an idiosyncratically determined subset of their regular referential class.

It should be evident by now that both aims cannot be obtained seamlessly. A perfect defense of RNCT in the face of cases of restricted reference should claim that $\{NC_e\}$ is *always* the referential class for slurs of all types. The distinction I am proposing, instead, only grants that for one particular type of slurs, out-group slurs, that may give raise to deviant versions, idiolects and sociolects, whose reference is restricted. My approach to gendered and other normalizing slurs violates the desiderata for a perfect defense of RNCT, for in this cases, utterances containing these slurs are always—and not just occasionally—made true or false by members of a restricted subset of the expected referential class: those who *also* have the property of P-behaving. I have suggested that, to account for these cases, RNCT should be articulated in a different way: we cannot expect NC's and *e* to be co-referential in these cases, at the risk of obtaining a theory that over-extends the intuitive meaning of 'slut', 'faggot' or 'sissy'. But we can at least expect to reinforce the link that almost all accounts of slurs establish between them and neutral counterparts by softening the referential requirement: because normalizing slurs are unquestionably directed at a particular class of people, we could at least expect for this class to be part of the truth-conditional contribution of these terms, along with the P-behaviour property. And even with the abandonment of RNCT as stated at the beginning of the paper for this other softer version, the resulting account gets entirely right our intuition on what makes (5) true or false and its difference from (6).

Notice that throughout this paper nothing has been said abut the *meaning* of slurs, which I take it to be more complex than just their truth-conditional import.[44] There are many reasons why 'woman' and 'slut' are not synonymous, or better, why speakers are not doing the same thing when they use each word to refer to an individual of a

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[44] See Diaz Legaspe, Korngut, Li, Liu and Stainton (unpublished data).

certain class. As noted above in passing, calling someone 'a woman' or 'a slut' are utterly different actions, and calling someone 'slut' is by no means the same thing as calling her 'a woman that P-behaves'. Add to this the fact that a speaker who referred to all women by the term 'slut', or that interchanged both terms in all contexts, would be either accused of lack of linguistic competence or be asked for reasons. I reject then that slurs *mean* the same thing as their natural counterparts. However, sentences like (5) and (6) are made true or false by closely related wordy events: in order for (5) to be true, (6) has to be true as well, but not viceversa, since the P-behaviour could be absent—the same thing applies to out-group slurs: under a broad sense of *meaning*, they don't mean the same thing as their neutral counterparts, but they are definitely made true or false by the same facts.

Slurs of every type are linguistic devices, tools that we use to refer to a certain group of people in a derogatory, insulting way. This perspective relates them closely to neutral counterparts, either actual or potential, with less or no derogatory power: these are a way of referring to those same individuals in a non-derogatory way. Neutral counterparts also have the role of singling out those who are first-hand entitled to protest the use of slurs, to reclaim and appropriate the term. Usage data and linguistic intuitions (e.g. the intuition that someone referring to an African-descendant with 'kike' would be committing a linguistic mistake and would not be merely bigoted, whereas someone referring to a Jewish person with 'kike' would be definitely bigoted and not committing any linguistic mistake) support the existence of a strong link between slurs and neutral counterparts. Keeping these remarks in sight, the relation between slurs and gendered, normalizing slurs should be retained and considered as essential as that between out-group slurs and their neutral counterparts.

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