Thick Terms and Secondary Contents

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Abstract

In recent literature many theorists, including Eklund (2011), endorse or express sympathy towards the view that the evaluative content of thick terms is not asserted with utterances of sentences containing them but rather part of their secondary content. In this article we discuss a number of features of thick terms which speak against this view. We further argue that these features are not shared by another, recently much-discussed, class of hybrid evaluative terms, so-called slurs, and that the evaluative contents of these might thus very well be secondary.

Introduction

As has often been observed in the literature, utterances of sentences that contain terms like "lewd", "generous", or "cowardly" are somehow both evaluative and descriptive. Take, for instance, an utterance of a sentence like "Sarah's behaviour is generous". Such an utterance conveys both a descriptive as well as an evaluative content, very roughly: that Sarah exhibits a certain behaviour (i.e. that she is willing to spend money for others) and that the pertinent behaviour is good in some way. Similarly, an utterance of a sentence like "My brother's behaviour is cowardly" conveys both a descriptive as well as an evaluative content, very roughly: that my brother exhibits a certain behaviour (i.e. that he is reluctant to take risks) and that the pertinent behaviour is bad in some way. Terms like "lewd", "generous", or "cowardly" are called *thick terms*: In contrast to evaluative terms like "good" and "wrong", they are ones that have a "significant descriptive content" (Eklund 2011: 25). For instance, an utterance of "Sarah's behaviour is generous" gives us a grasp of what the descriptive features of the evaluated behaviour are while an utterance of "Sarah's behaviour is good" does not.

Thick terms are of great interest both to metaethicists and philosophers of language. One question that has played a prominent role in the literature is the so-called *location question*, i.e. the question where the evaluative component of thick terms should be located. In his paper *What are Thick Concepts?* Matti Eklund raises a puzzle for a *primary content view* of thick terms.[1] According to such a view, the evaluative component of thick terms is part of the primary, truth-conditional, content of sentences containing them. Eklund argues that such a view cannot

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[1] See Eklund (2011).

accommodate a significant feature of thick terms: that their use can be objectionable even in embedded contexts. While Eklund does not commit to an alternative account, he expresses sympathy towards a *secondary content view*, according to which the evaluative component of thick terms is part of the secondary, non-truth conditional, content of sentences containing them (Eklund 2011: 34). More specific versions of such a view have been developed in the subsequent literature and in the meantime secondary content views belong to the most serious contenders to answer the location question.

The aim of the present paper is to take a closer look at secondary content views as well as the linguistic data that have been provided in favour of such views. We will argue that closer examination reveals that the linguistic data connected to thick terms do not speak in favour of such views and that we should thus answer the location question in a different way. In order to do so, we will proceed as follows: In section 1 we will introduce specific versions of a secondary content view that have been suggested in the literature. In section 2 we will consider what many authors (like Eklund) consider to be the strongest evidence for such views: the behaviour of so-called *objectionable* thick terms in embedded contexts. We will argue that *both* secondary as well as primary content views can explain the pertinent embedding behaviour. In section 3 we will consider features of thick terms that present difficulties for specific versions of a secondary content view and in section 4 we will present some new linguistic evidence that speaks against either version of such a view.

Secondary Content Views

Secondary content views say that sentences that contain thick terms semantically encode two kinds of content, a primary content that is asserted as well as a secondary content that is not asserted. The primary content is taken to be descriptive while the secondary content is taken to be evaluative. Basically, there are two ways to spell out such a view. According to *a presuppositional view of thick terms*, a sentence like

(1) Sarah is generous.

triggers a semantic presupposition just like a sentence like (2) does:

(2) The president of the USA is a democrat.

Sentence (2) contains the definite description "the president of the USA" and, thus, triggers the semantic presupposition that there is a unique president of the USA (Strawson 1950). Similarly, one might say, a thick term like "generous" is an expression that triggers a certain semantic presupposition. Such a view is defended by Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016). They argue that a sentence like (1) has a certain descriptive content—roughly: that Sarah is willing to give to others without expectation of compensation—and additionally triggers an evaluative semantic presupposition—roughly: that being willing to give to others without expectation of compensation is good in some way.

Alternatively, one might uphold *a conventional implicature view of thick terms*. According to such a view, a sentence like (1) triggers a conventional implicature just like a sentence like (3) does:

(3) Paula—the least likely to pass the exam—passed it.

Sentence (3) contains the aside "the least likely to pass the exam" and, thus, triggers the conventional implicature that Paula was the least likely to pass the exam (Potts 2005). Similarly, one might say, a thick term like "generous" triggers a certain conventional implicature. For instance, one might say that a sentence like (1) has a certain descriptive content— roughly: that Sarah is willing to give to others without expectation of compensation—and additionally triggers an evaluative conventional implicature— roughly: that being willing to give to others without expectation of compensation is good in some way. While such a view hasn't been explicitly argued for in the literature on thick terms, it is at least tentatively suggested by Zakkou (2021: 425). Similarly, Eklund (2011) appears to be sympathetic to such a view even though he does not commit to it either. He points out that at least in certain respects thick terms function relevantly similar to racial epithets and that a plausible view that can account for the pertinent features claims that "[w]hat is wrong with [utterances containing epithets] does not lie in what is said, but in what is conveyed through how it is said" (Eklund 2011: 34). A natural way to reconstruct the pertinent view is to say that thick terms as well as racial epithets trigger an evaluative conventional implicature.[2]

In the following sections we will take a closer look at secondary content views. Firstly, we will consider what many authors consider to be strong evidence for such views: the embedding behaviour of so-called *objectionable* thick terms. However, we will argue that *both* secondary content as well as primary content views can account for the pertinent behaviour. Secondly, we will examine each version of a secondary content view in further detail and argue that either of them conflicts with hallmark features of thick terms. Finally, we will present some new linguistic data that present trouble for either version of such a view.

The Embedding Behaviour of Thick Terms

In his paper *What Are Thick Terms?* Eklund presents a strong piece of evidence for a secondary content view of thick terms.[3] This piece of evidence comes from an observation about the embedding behaviour of so-called *objectionable* thick terms. He writes:[4]

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[2]A conventional implicature view of racial epithets is defended in Williamson (2009), Whiting (2013), as well as McCready (2010). Note that some people (e.g. Bach (1999)) would say that the content of asides (like the one in sentence (3)) belong to what is said and, thus, do not fall under Eklund's description. If one agrees with them, one could take an example with a conventional implicature trigger like "even" instead to illustrate the view Eklund alludes to.

[3]Further discussion of the pertinent feature can be found in Kyle (2013: 13ff.), Väyrynen (2013: 60ff.), Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016: 465ff.) and Cepollaro (2020: 12ff.), for instance.

[4]Eklund focuses on thick concepts rather than on thick terms. However, the pertinent difference does not matter for present purposes.

> Some thick concepts are, somehow, *objectionable.* Somehow these concepts presuppose or embody values that ought not really to be endorsed. Gibbard (1992) mentions *lewd* as an example: he does not agree on the—prudish—view of sexuality which underlies the employment of this concept. Graham Priest (1997) in effect argues that *sexually perverted* is an objectionable thick concept, whose usage presupposes that sexual behaviour which does not fulfill a supposed natural purpose is thereby worthy of condemnation. While the examples can reasonably be doubted, I do not think that the general phenomenon of objectionable thick concepts can be. (Eklund 2011: 30)

As Eklund points out, some thick terms are objectionable in the sense that their use conveys an objectionable evaluative content. For instance, uses of the expression "lewd" convey (very roughly) that sexually overt behaviour is bad in some way. If one objects to the pertinent evaluation, one will consider uses of the term to be objectionable. Of course, what exactly counts as an objectionable thick term is a matter of debate since it eventually depends on what values one does or does not endorse. For the sake of simplicity, we will follow Gibbard here and assume that "lewd" is an objectionable thick term.

Eklund now makes the following observation about the embedding behaviour of objectionable thick terms:

> If C is an objectionable thick concept, then its use is objectionable not only when it is claimed of someone or something that it is C: its use is objectionable in the same way when it occurs in embedded sentences. If I find "lewd" objectionable I will find an ordinary utterance of "Mick isn't lewd" as problematic as I will find an utterance of "Mick is lewd". (Eklund 2011: 34)

As Eklund points out, if a thick term is objectionable, then its use is objectionable even when it appears in an embedded sentence. Consider, for instance, the following sentences that embed the sentence "Mick is lewd":

(4) Mick is not lewd, he is a pretty shy guy.

(5) If Mick is lewd, he might not be the best guest for a formal dinner party.

(6) Perhaps Mick is lewd.

If one finds an utterance of "Mick is lewd" to be objectionable, one will find utterances of (4) to (6) to be objectionable as well.[5]

Many authors—including Eklund—think that this observation speaks against a primary content view of thick terms and in favour of a secondary content view. As already pointed out, a primary content view

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[5]Note that the pertinent feature—that the evaluative content conveyed by thick terms is present even in embedded contexts—is not only a feature of objectionable thick terms; it is rather a feature of thick terms in general (see Väyrynen (2009: 449) for pertinent discussion). However, objectionable thick terms are especially suitable to illustrate the pertinent feature.

upholds that the evaluative content conveyed by thick terms is part of the primary content of sentences containing them (Kyle 2013, 2020). The most straightforward version of such a view (which is also the one discussed by Eklund) supposes that thick terms encode "a descriptive and a normative condition and [are, thus,] true of an object exactly when both conditions are satisfied" (Eklund 2011: 35). In line with such a view, one might propose that a sentence like "Mick is lewd" has the same meaning as the following sentence, for instance:[6]

(7) Mick is sexually overt and therefore bad in some way.

However, if this is the correct analysis of the sentence, then it is unclear why utterances of sentences like

(4) Mick is not lewd, he is a pretty shy guy.

are objectionable to a "lewd"-objector. After all, in uttering sentence (4) one denies that Mick has the property denoted by "lewd". Similarly, it is unclear why utterances of

(5) If Mick is lewd, he might not be the best guest for a formal dinner party.

or

(6) Perhaps Mick is lewd.

are objectionable to a "lewd"-objector: Again, if one utters these sentences, one does not commit to the view that Mick has the pertinent property. Accordingly, the embedding behaviour of objectionable thick terms appears rather puzzling if one upholds a primary content view.

In contrast, a secondary content view provides a straightforward explanation of the observation at hand. As it is commonly assumed in the literature, secondary contents project out of negated, conditionalised, as well as modalised contexts (Potts 2005; Beaver and Geurts 2013). Consider, for instance, the following sentences that embed a sentence that contains a trigger for a presupposition or a conventional implicature respectively:

(7) The president of the USA is not a democrat.

(8) If the president of the USA is not a democrat, expenses for military are high.

(9) Perhaps the president of the USA is a democrat.

(10) Paula—the least likely to pass the exam—did not pass it.

(11) If Paula—the least likely to pass the exam—passed it, we can all celebrate tonight.

(12) Perhaps Paula—the least likely to pass the exam—passed it.

Just like utterances of the unembedded versions of the sentences—i.e. of sentence (2) and sentence (3) respectively—utterances of sentences (7) to (9) and (10) to (12) convey that there is a unique president of the USA

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[6]Note that Kyle (2013) himself leaves it open what exactly the primary content of sentences containing thick terms is and, thus, it is unclear whether he upholds the view that Eklund discusses.

or that Paula is the least likely to pass the exam respectively. Therefore, secondary content views can give a neat explanation of the observation at hand: Utterances of sentences that embed the sentence "Mick is lewd" are objectionable to a "lewd"-objector since secondary contents project out of the pertinent environments and, thus, the utterances still convey the objectionable evaluative content.[7]

While we agree that secondary content views can nicely explain the pertinent observation, we object to the claim that primary content views are not able to do so. A proponent of a primary content view might present a *pragmatic* explanation. For instance, Kyle (2013: 17ff.) says the following: Utterances of (5) conversationally implicate that it is epistemically possible that Mick is lewd, i.e. that he shows overt sexual behaviour and is therefore bad in some way. If you are a "lewd"-objector, you should object to such utterances since you will rule it out that anyone is bad in some way for the pertinent reason. Kyle does not explain how the implicature arises but we might appeal to the Gricean maxim of quantity: If you know that Mick does *not* have the pertinent property, you could say something more informative: that he doesn't have it. Since you utter the conditional instead, you indicate that you consider it to be epistemically possible that he has it. We can extend such an explanation to utterances of (4) and (6).[8] Such utterances carry an even stronger implicature: that there are people who are bad in some way due to showing sexually explicit behaviour.[9] Again, this implicature arises due to the maxim of quantity: If you think that there are no such people, an utterance of "There are no lewd people" would be more informative than an utterance of (4). Since you utter (4) instead, you indicate that you deny that Mick has the property in question since you think that Mick does not exhibit the pertinent descriptive behaviour and not since you object to the evaluation of the behaviour. Similarly, if you utter (6), you consider whether Mick *in particular* has the pertinent property; however, if you were simply concerned with the question of whether there are people who are bad in some way for the pertinent reason, it would be more informative to say "Perhaps there are lewd people". Since you don't say this, you make clear that you only consider whether Mick exhibits the pertinent descriptive behaviour.

Hence, not only secondary content views can account for the embedding behaviour of objectionable thick terms. Therefore, the pertinent behaviour does not provide conclusive evidence for such a view. Further, each version of a secondary content view conflicts with hallmark features of thick terms. Or so we will argue in the following section.

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[7]See e.g. Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016: 12ff.) and Cepollaro (2020: 465ff.).

[8]Note that this is not the explanation that Kyle gives, he only considers utterances like (4) and appeals to the phenomenon of negative strengthening to account for them. However, we think that a uniform explanation that only relies on Grice's maxim of quantity is preferable.

[9]See also Hom and May (2013: 310) for such a pragmatic explanation with respect to the projection behaviour of slurs. Their explanation is criticised in Cepollaro and Thommen (2019). However, the criticism essentially depends on a specific feature of slurs (that there are also slurs for fictional objects) and does not apply to the case of thick terms.

Difficulties for Secondary Content Views

A major difficulty for a conventional implicature view of thick terms comes from Grice (1989)'s observation that conventional implicatures are *detachable*. That is, for any expression that triggers a conventional implicature there is an easily identifiable counterpart expression that has the same primary content and that does not trigger the pertinent implicature. Consider, for instance, the following sentence pairs:

(13) Even Mick came yesterday.

(14) Mick came yesterday.

(15) It's snowing, thus, it is cold.

(16) It's snowing and it is cold.

(17) Paula—the least likely to pass the exam—passed it.

(18) Paula passed the exam.

Some hybrid evaluative terms exhibit this hallmark feature as well. Take, for instance, racial epithets or—more generally—so-called *slurs* that are often treated as belonging to the same class as thick terms (Cepollaro and Stojanovic 2016). Such expressions have easily identifiable counterpart expressions that do not carry the pertinent evaluative content. For instance, the only difference between (20) and (21) appears to be that (20) conveys contempt for Germans while (21) does not:

(20) Krauts are always in a bad mood.

(21) Germans are always in a bad mood.

In contrast, thick terms do not exhibit this hallmark feature of conventional implicatures: In the best case we can find some sort of rough paraphrase of their descriptive component (like in the case of "generous" or "lewd"); however, often not even a rough paraphrase is available. For instance, it appears pretty unclear what exactly the descriptive content of expressions like "noble", "heroic", or "rude" could be. The fact that we cannot easily identify a primary content that is free of the evaluative content has also been noted in the metaethical literature though it has been described within a different terminological framework (Väyrynen 2013: 11ff.): Authors like McDowell (1979), Williams (1985), and Dancy (1996) have argued that it is impossible to *disentangle* the evaluative and the descriptive content of thick terms. If this is correct—and it seems to us that it is at least for a wide class of thick terms—then a conventional implicature view is not a plausible account of thick terms even though it may be one of other kinds of hybrid evaluative terms (like slurs).[10]

The non-detachability feature of thicks terms makes a presuppositional view more attractive than a conventional implicature view since presuppositions are not generally detachable. Consider, for instance, the following sentences:

(22) The president of the USA is a democrat.

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[10]See Väyrynen (2013: 103) for related discussion concerning this difficulty for a conventional implicature view of thick terms.

(23) Susan will regret that she didn't invite Paula to her birthday party.

(24) Before Henry came to the dinner, he went to the grocery store.

There does not seem to be an easily identifiable counterpart expression available that has the same primary content as the sentences above and that does not give rise to the presupposition that there is a unique president of the USA, that Paula wasn't invited to Susan's birthday party, or that Henry came to the dinner respectively. Accordingly, the non-detachability feature of thick terms does not present trouble for a presuppositional view.[11]

However, a presuppositional view gives rise to difficulties of its own: The evaluative content conveyed by thick terms behaves in important respects differently from presupposed content. Firstly, we can felicitously conditionalise on presupposed content. Consider, for illustration:

(25) If there is a unique president of the USA, then the president of the USA is a democrat.

(26) If Paula wasn't invited to Susan's birthday party, Susan will regret it.

(27) If Henry came to the dinner, he went to the grocery store before.

As Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016: 478) themselves note, the same does not apply to the evaluative content conveyed by thick terms. For instance, utterances of the following sentence do not appear to be felicitous:

(28) # If sexual overt behaviour is bad in some way, then Mick is lewd.

In reply to this difficulty, Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016: 479) point out that gender pronouns like "she" or "he" trigger a semantic presupposition as well, namely that the object of reference is female or male respectively (Heim and Kratzer 1998: 245). Further, they argue that we cannot conditionalise on the pertinent content either by relying on an example given in Sudo (2012: 32):

(29) # If John is female, she is popular amongst boys.[12]

Accordingly, they say, the pertinent feature is not one that holds in general for presupposed content and we should thus not be concerned by the observation that the evaluative content conveyed by thicks terms does not exhibit it either.

However, firstly, we doubt that sentence (29) shows that presupposed content can behave differently in the pertinent respect since there is an important difference between (25) to (27) and (29): In contrast to the antecedents of (25) to (27), the antecedent of (29) indicates that the presupposition of the consequence—i.e. that the object of reference is female—is false since it contains a clearly male surname. Since this divergence is presumably the reason why (29) appears infelicitous in contrast to (25) to (27), we should rather focus on example sentences that do not exhibit this feature. Consider, for instance, conditional (30) whose antecedent

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[11]Surprisingly, Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016) do not emphasise this advantage of a presuppositional view. To the contrary, they connect their view with the controversial assumption that the descriptive and the evaluative content of thick terms can be disentangled.

[12]Sudo (2012: 32) himself uses the counterfactual version of the conditional.

contains a name that can be used both for females and males and that thus does not indicate that the presupposition induced by "she" is false:

(30) If Carmen is female, she is the only female person in our advisory board.

Conditional (30) appears to be just as felicitous as (25) to (27). Hence, there is an independent explanation for the infelicity of (29) which makes it questionable that (29) shows that gender presuppositions behave differently than normal presuppositions.

Further, even if it is correct that gender presuppositions behave differently in certain respects,[13] it is questionable whether this is of any help for proponents of a presuppositional view. Usually, the (alleged) differences are explained by assuming that gender pronouns give rise to special *indexical* presuppositions—and that they do so since pronouns like "she" or "he" are rigid designators (Yanovich 2010: 275). Accordingly, Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016)'s reply could only be convincing if the presuppositions (allegedly) triggered by thick terms were indexical presuppositions as well. However, it is not clear why this should be the case and they do not present any argument for this view.

Secondly, there is another respect in which thick terms differ from standard examples of presupposition triggers. As Strawson (1950) has famously pointed out, one cannot make a truth-evaluable claim with an utterance that suffers from presupposition failure. He writes the following about statements like "The king of France is bald", which carry the false presupposition that there is a unique king of France:

> Would you say 'That's untrue'? I think it's quite certain that you wouldn't. But suppose [someone] went on to ask you whether you thought that what he had just said was true, or was false; whether you agreed or disagreed with what he had just said. I think you would be inclined, with some hesitation, to say that you didn't do either: that the question of whether his statement was true or false simply didn't arise, because there was no such person as the king of France (Strawson 1950: 12).

That is, if a sentence suffers from presupposition failure, the assertive enterprise is wrecked. But this is not the case with respect to thick terms: If the evaluative content conveyed with thick terms is false, it seems plausible that one can still make a truth-evaluable claim with utterances of sentences that contain them. For instance, even if sexual overt behaviour is not bad in any way, one can still make a truth-evaluable claim with an utterance of "Mick is lewd".[14]

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[13]Maybe there are differences with respect to the projection behaviour in indirect speech reports (Copper 1983; Yanovich 2010). However, see Stokke (2022) for a critical discussion of the pertinent view.

[14]This is also noted in Eklund (2011: 33). He points out that one can say something true with sentences that contain empty thick terms, i.e. ones that have a false evaluative content. Further, note that we are aware that some authors (Strawson 1964; Yablo 2006) think that there are cases of so-called non-catastrophic presupposition failure (e.g. "The exhibition was visited by the king of France" appears false, so it seems that one can make a truth-evaluable

To sum up, thick terms exhibit features that present trouble for secondary content views. Firstly, the evaluative and the descriptive content conveyed by thick terms cannot be disentangled. Secondly, the falsity of the evaluative content does not have the consequence that the assertive enterprise is wrecked. Conventional implicature views can easily account for the second feature but have trouble to account for the first one. In contrast, presuppositional views can easily account for the first feature but have trouble to account for the second one. So, none of the two versions can account for both of them. In the following we will focus on another linguistic datum that has not been considered so far and that provides counter-evidence against either version of a secondary content view.

Further Counterevidence

In the following we will focus on an observation made by Oswald Ducrot (1975) about the embedding behaviour of evaluative content under subjective attitude verbs (like "find") and argue that it provides additional evidence that the evaluative content conveyed by thick terms is not part of the secondary content of sentences containing them (while the evaluative content conveyed by other hybrid evaluative terms may very well be).

Subjective Attitude Verbs and Ducrot's Thesis

So-called "subjective attitude verbs" constitute a class of verbs used for attitude ascription, which require their complement to be *subjective* in some sense that is not very easy to articulate. This is, for instance, illustrated by the following contrast in acceptability, which is pointed out in Kennedy (2013):

(31) I find Saltimbocca tasty.

(32) # I find Saltimbocca vegetarian.

"Vegetarian" is not acceptable with "find" since it is, in some sense, an objective matter whether the dish is vegetarian or not.

Subjective attitude verbs have received quite a bit of attention in recent literature in linguistics and philosophy of language.[15] However, what appears to be the first systematic discussion of the topic is published in the 70's, authored by Ducrot (1975), who was writing about the French term "trouver que", meaning literally "to find". Our focus here will be on one particular observation from Ducrot's discussion. Examining the particularities of "trouver que", Ducrot notices that felicitous embedding

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claim in uttering the sentence). However, as Felka (2015) has argued, the pertinent cases are ones in which the definite description does not function referentially and, thus, does not trigger a presupposition. This explanation is not applicable in the case of thick terms, so there is no reason to assume that we can mitigate the worry by referring to cases of non-catastrophic presupposition failure (as, e.g., Cepollaro (2020: 36) suggests).

[15]See, e.g., Bylinina (2017), Coppock (2018), Kennedy (2013), Kennedy and Willer (2016), Franzén (2020), Sæbø (2009), Silk (2012), and Stojanovic and McNally (2023).

under this term seems to require that the evaluative aspect of an expression is part of its primary content, rather than being merely presupposed. Here is what we will call *Ducrot's thesis*:

> **Ducrot's thesis** For an evaluative expression to be embeddable under "trouver que" ("to find"), its evaluative aspect needs to be part of the primary content of the sentence in which it appears, rather than in its secondary content.

Ducrot argues for this thesis on the basis of the contrast in embeddability between the two expressions "avoir tort de" and "avoir le tort de" (both meaning "to be wrong"), as in:

(33) Il avait tort de faire cela.

> Asserted: He was wrong to do that.
>
> Presupposed: He did that.

(34) Il avait le tort de faire cela.

> Asserted: He did that.
>
> Presupposed: He was wrong to do that.

(33) presupposes that he did the relevant action, whereas it asserts that it is wrong. (34), by contrast, asserts that he did the action while presupposing that it was wrong. This is what accounts for the difference in embedding behaviour between the two expressions with respect to "trouver que". Whereas "il avait tort" is embeddable under "trouver que", "il avait le tort" is not:

(35) Je trouve qu'il avait tort de faire cela.

> ~ I find that it was wrong that he did that.

(36) # Je trouve qu'il avait le tort de faire cela.

> ~ I find that he did that, which was wrong.

If Ducrot's thesis is accurate, it provides an important diagnostic tool for identifying whether an evaluation conveyed with an expression is part of the primary or secondary content of sentences containing it: In the former, but not in the latter case, the expression should be embeddable under "trouver que".

Can the thesis be generalised to English? We think so. In English, it is difficult to find a minimal pair along the lines of "avoir tort" and "avoir le tort" where the only difference concerns what part of the content is asserted and what part is presupposed. However, switching an adjective's position from predicative to attributive position (while keeping the definite article) has precisely this effect. Consider:

(37) The nice teacher is Norwegian.

(38) The Norwegian teacher is nice.

On some level of description, the content of (37) and (38) is the same. They both report about the teacher that they are Norwegian and nice. The only difference in meaning between the two is that the first presupposes the evaluative content (the teacher being nice) and asserts the

descriptive content (the teacher being Norwegian), whereas the latter presupposes the descriptive content and asserts the evaluative. That the content of an adjective in the attributive position indeed is presupposed is illustrated by the fact that it projects out of for instance negation and conditional antecedents:

(39) It is not the case that the nice teacher is Norwegian.

(40) It is not the case that the Norwegian teacher is nice.

(41) If the nice teacher is Norwegian, she will want to go hiking.

(42) If the Norwegian teacher is nice, we are lucky.

In (39)—(42), the content of the adjective in the attributive position is still affirmed, whereas the content of the predicate in the predicative position is not. This provides some evidence for the view that the predicate in the attributive position only contributes to the secondary content of the sentence in which it appears.

Next, consider "find"-embeddings. If Ducrot's thesis holds for English "find", we should expect there to be a difference in the embeddability of the sentences under "find" when one of them predicates a descriptive content while presupposing an evaluative one, and the other predicates an evaluative content while presupposing a descriptive one. Only if the evaluative content is predicated, rather than presupposed, should it be embeddable under "find", if Ducrot's thesis holds for English. This is precisely what we find:

(43) I find the Norwegian teacher nice.

(44) # I find the nice teacher Norwegian.

(45) Karl finds the dead man horrible.

(46) # Karl finds the horrible man dead.

So "find"-embeddability does seem to track having an evaluation as part of the primary content, rather than being merely presupposed.

Ducrot himself put the embedding point as concerning whether an evaluation is part of the assertive content or presupposed by it. However, Ducrot's thesis can naturally be generalised to also include conventional implicatures. Having merely conventionally implicated evaluative content is not sufficient for embedding under "find":

(47) # I find Mr. Stette, who was a good man, Norwegian.

So it seems that if the evaluative content was conventionally implicated, rather than part of the primary content of thick terms, they should not embed under "find", just like the sentence embedded in (47).

Applying Ducrot's Thesis to Thick Terms

Armed with this test, let us return to secondary content views of thick terms. Recall that according to such views the evaluative content of thick terms is presupposed or conventionally implicated respectively. Their descriptive content, on the other hand, is taken to be predicated and, thus, part of the primary content of sentences containing them. By Ducrot's

Thesis, we should then expect thick terms not to be felicitously embed-dable under "find". But this is precisely what we *don't* find. Thick terms are perfectly felicitous under subjective attitude verbs:

(48) I find it courageous.

(49) I find him generous.

(50) I find Mick lewd.

By Ducrot's Thesis then, we should conclude that the evaluative content conveyed by thick terms is neither presupposed nor conventionally im-plicated but rather part of the primary content of sentences containing them.

Note that Ducrot's Thesis does not yield the same result for all kinds of hybrid evaluative terms: In contrast to thick terms, slurs do *not* felicitously embed under "find":

(51) # I find Klaus a kraut.

This lends further support to the view that we should treat slurs and thick terms differently: While a secondary content view might be attractive for hybrid evaluative terms like slurs, it does not appear to be plausible for thick terms.

It is also of some interest to note that this test is indicative of a dif-ference within the larger class of pejorative expressions. Sometimes in-sulting terms like "bitch", "idiot" and "asshole" are assimilated into the class of slurs. But the "find"-test is indicative of there being an important taxonomical difference within the class, since the pertinent terms embed felicitously under "find":

(52) I find her to be a bitch.

(53) I find him to be an asshole.

(54) I find him to be an idiot.[16]

This data lends support to Nunberg (2018)'s taxonomical distinction be-tween slurs proper (like "kraut") and other insulting expressions (like "bitch"), with reference to the fact that other insulting expressions, unlike slurs proper, carry evaluations as part of their primary content, whereas slurs, in the narrower sense, do not. It also seems related to Ashwell (2016)'s observation that insulting expressions like "bitch", unlike slurs like "krauts", more often than not lack a neutral counterpart. For a "bitch"-user, not all women are necessarily bitches. By contrast, for a "kraut"-user, all Germans are krauts.

Potential Objections

A natural way to push back against this reasoning is to target Ducrot's Thesis. Contrary to what Ducrot thought, one might be inclined to argue

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[16]It can be noted that English "find" (in the relevant sense) is quite restrictive in accepting full propositional clauses and that examples with noun-complements like (52)–(54) for that reason can feel a bit cumbersome. In languages where the attitude verb more happily takes a full propositional clause, as the French "trouver que", none of this cumbersomeness is felt when giving the verb a noun-complement (see Reis (2013) for further discussion of this issue).

that felicitous "find"-embedding does not track an evaluation being part of the primary content of an expression. Instead, one could argue, it merely tracks some less exciting property, like gradeability in the primary content. This would then explain the difference between "The nice teacher is Norwegian" and "The Norwegian teacher is nice" and would also explain why slurs do not embed under "find".

But this cannot be right. With the slurs in (33)—(35) we have already given examples of non-gradable content embedding under "find". To add to the stock, consider also:

(55) I find Mr. Stette to be a hero.

Here again, we have non-gradable content felicitously embedded under "find".[17]

Another alternative could be that felicitous "find"-embedding does not track evaluative primary content, but rather something like there intuitively being *no-fact-of-the-matter* regarding the issue of the primary content (cf. Silk (2012)'s proposal that "find"-embeddability tracks a special kind of *contextual underdetermination*). One way of spelling this out is in terms of vagueness: Perhaps what matters for embeddability under "find" is not evaluativity but whether the primary content is vague or not. This would account for why "The Norwegian teacher is nice" works with "find" whereas "The nice teacher is Norwegian" does not, on the assumption that "Norwegian" is not vague in the relevant way. The reason "nice" (in the predicative position) is felicitous with "find" would not have to do with evaluativity, but with that, intuitively, it is vague or indeterminate whether someone is nice or not (at least in some contexts). It could then be hypothesised that thick terms embed under "find" because it is (at least in some contexts) vague or indeterminate whether someone is cowardly/lewd/generous etc. If this was the case, it could still be that thick terms are evaluative by virtue of some secondary content or extra-conventional mechanism. Some potential support for this reasoning could perhaps be found in that

(56) I find Mr. Stette tall.

is felicitous to some speaker's ears. But there is nothing evaluative with tallness, and so we have some reasons to doubt Ducrot's Thesis.

We know of no to knock-down argument against this alternative hypothesis, but it strikes us as implausible on the face of it that the vagueness or indeterminacy of thick terms would derive from a different source than their evaluativity.

Luckily, some observations of relevance to this issue have been made by Kennedy (2013), writing about the mixed intuitions we have regarding the embeddability of non-evaluative dimensional adjectives under "find". Kennedy proposes that close scrutiny of the evidence suggests that "tall" is embeddable under "find" only to the extent that we can find a subjective or evaluative reading (e.g. by supplementing a suppressed "too" as in "too tall").

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[17]As noted in the previous footnote, subjective attitude verbs with noun-phrases might roll of the tongue slightly more easily in languages where the attitude verb happily takes a full propositional clause, as the French "trouver que".

Firstly, Kennedy notes that while terms such as "heavy", "light", "dense" can have both an "objective/ quantitative" and a "subjective/ evaluative" reading in (57), only the "subjective/ evaluative" reading seems available in (58):

(57) This piece of cake is heavy/light/dense.

(58) I find this piece of cake heavy/light/dense.

Secondly, non-evaluative, dimensional adjectives in the comparative are very clearly infelicitous under "find" (at least where no subjective, evaluative reading is easily accessible):

(59) # I find Mr. Stette taller than Mr. Bergman.

(60) # I find Mr. Stette richer than Mr. Bergman.

By contrast, evaluatives are paradigmatically felicitous in the comparative with "find":

(61) I find Mr. Stette nicer than Mr. Bergman.

(62) I find meat-eating crueler than child abuse.

These data speak against "find"-embedding and semantic evaluativity being separate, orthogonal dimensions. This is the conclusion Kennedy (2013) favours:

> ... when we take a closer look at a range of data involving adjectives like the ones in [(57)-(58)], I believe that we are led to the conclusion that they are acceptable in the *find* construction only to the extent that they can take on a subjective/evaluative understanding. When they are understood in a purely dimensional way, they are not acceptable, even though they are vague. This indicates that although vagueness can license faultless disagreement, it is not sufficient by itself to license acceptability under *find*. (Kennedy 2013: 264)

Ducrot's contention that embedding under "trouver que" tracks evaluativity in the primary content, and its extension to English "find", thus withstands closer scrutiny.

Conclusion

In recent literature many authors—including Eklund (2011)—endorse a secondary content view of thick terms, or are at least sympathetic to it. However, in the present paper we have argued that one important piece of evidence—the embedding behaviour of objectionable thick terms—does not conclusively speak for such a view. Secondly, we have pointed out specific difficulties for each version of a secondary content view that derives from the non-detachability feature of thick terms as well as the observation that the falsity of the evaluative content conveyed by thick terms does not wreck the assertive enterprise. Thirdly, we have considered the embedding behaviour of thick terms under subjective attitude verbs and argued that it speaks against either version of a secondary content view. We thus

conclude that the linguistic data connected to thick terms do not support such a view.

There are two more things we would like to emphasise. Firstly, while a secondary content view is not plausible for thick terms, we have argued that it may very well be for other hybrid evaluative terms, in particular for so-called slurs. This speaks against a common contention in the literature that is, e.g., explicitly endorsed in Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016): that thick terms and slurs work in the same way. The results of the paper might thus be used for building up a more fine-grained taxonomy of hybrid evaluative terms, as it is already hinted at in Nunberg (2018).

Secondly, we should point out that primary content views as well as secondary content views are not the only contenders for answering the location question. There are also merely *pragmatic* views, like Väyrynen (2013)'s implicature view, that locate the evaluative content conveyed by thick terms neither within the primary nor within the secondary content of sentences containing them. Thus, in order to give an adequate answer to the location question, one also has to compare primary content views with pragmatic views. Since this is beyond the scope of the present paper, we have to leave it open what kind of account provides the most attractive answer to the location question.

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