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Derogatory Words and Speech Acts: An Illocutionary Force Indicator Theory of Slurs

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Abstract

Slurs are derogatory words; they seem to express contempt and hatred toward marginalized groups. They are used to insult and derogate their victims. Moreover, slurs give rise to philosophical questions. In virtue of what is the word "chink," unlike "Chinese," a derogatory word? Does "chink" refer to the same group as "Chinese"? If "chink" is a derogatory word, how is it possible to use it in a non-derogatory way (e.g., by Chinese comedians or between Chinese friends)? Many theories of slurs answer these questions by assuming that slurs *communicate* derogatory messages. However, little attention has been paid to the speech acts slurs are used to *perform*. In this dissertation, I argue that slurs are illocutionary force indicators: words to perform the speech acts of derogation. "Chink" is a derogatory word because its use is to derogate the Chinese, just like the phrase "I promise" has the use to make a promise. To derogate the Chinese is to enforce a norm which assigns to them an inferior normative status. Slurs are also propositional indicators: words that contribute to the truth-conditions. "Chink" has the same referent as "Chinese," its neutral counterpart. Appealing to speech act theory enables my theory to answer questions about slurs, e.g., slurs can be used in non-derogatory ways because the felicity conditions of derogation are not met. To illustrate the advantage of my theory, I will explain how other theories of slurs fall short because they take positions opposite to mine on certain issues. For instance, Mark Richard's theory, unlike mine, takes utterances of slurs to have no truth

values. It follows from his theory, I will argue, that lying with “Chang is a chink” is impossible. Finally, I will defend the force indicator theory from common objections. My force indicator theory provides a case study of the use theory of meaning and a framework for political philosophers to study the harm of slurs.

Keywords

Slurs, Speech Acts, Illocutionary Force, Illocutionary Force Indicators, Derogation, Offensive Language, Hate Speech, Philosophy of Language

Summary for Lay Audience

Slurs are very puzzling. As derogatory words, they are used to insult and express hatred and contempt toward marginalized groups. But in other contexts, they seem to be able to do the opposite. For example, bigots call sexual and gender minorities “queer” to insult them. However, since the 1980s, activists have been proudly labeling themselves “queer” in order to challenge discrimination. Slurs raise many philosophical questions. Why is a slur like “queer” a derogatory word? How can a derogatory word like “queer” be used to show pride? The most common answer is that the use of the word “queer” is to describe the bad things about a person, such as being odd, strange, and eccentric. But this does not easily explain why “queer” can be used in a non-derogatory way. To challenge this answer, I argue that the use of a slur like “queer” is not just to *say* something about people; its use is to *do* something to them, that is, to derogate them. To derogate people is to make them inferior. A derogatory word like “queer” can be used proudly by activists, just like a dagger can be used on a cutting board as a cooking tool, despite its standard use as a weapon. This picture of slurs helps us to better understand their harms and how to regulate offensive language.

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1 Introduction[1]

1.1 The Need for a Theory of Slurs

Slurs are terrible words. They are said to be "among the most rhetorically powerful and insidious expressions in a language" (Camp 2013, 330). In particular, slurs are considered "derogatory expressions, understood to convey contempt and hatred toward their targets" (Hom 2008, 416). They are "meant to insult or disparage" (Hom 2012, 383). These observations are not merely theoretical; they are rooted in real-life experiences of oppression. In his book on the N-word, Randall Kennedy recounts his mother's experience of slurs during the years of Jim Crow segregation:[2]

> "Yet it was a word—this word n**ger—that lay at the core of a recollection that revealed to me the pain my mother continues to feel on account of wounds inflicted upon her by racists during the era of Jim Crow segregation. Several years ago I asked her to tell me about her earliest memory of the color line. She began laughingly, telling me about how, in Columbia, she had often accompanied her mother to white folks' homes to pick up and return laundry. Although they typically traveled on public buses, my mother had failed to notice that her mother, Big Mama, always took her to the back of the bus where Negroes were segregated. One day, Big Mama asked my mother to run an errand that required her to catch a bus on which they had often ridden together. This errand marked the first time that my mother rode the bus on her own. She stood at the correct stop, got on the right bus, and deposited the appropriate

[1] Warning**:** This dissertation contains examples of offensive language. I apologize for any potential offense this could cause.

[2] Some slurs such as the N-word are far more offensive and toxic than others, such that even mentioning them may be harmful. I will avoid spelling the full word, when these slurs are mentioned in the text.

> fare. Being a bit scared, however, she sat down immediately behind the bus driver. After about a block, the driver pulled the bus over to the curb, cut the engine, and suddenly wheeled around and began to scream at my mother who was all of about eight or nine years old—'N**ger, you know better than to sit there! Get to the back where you belong!'" (Kennedy 2003, xii)

This recounting illustrates just how harmful slurs can be. If slurs are so horrible and nasty, why should we study them? It seems that we already know enough about them; they are just terrible words to hurt people. What more needs to be said? In particular, why do we need a theory to explain them? I believe there are both practical and philosophical reasons for developing a theory of slurs.

The practical reason is that a better understanding of slurs makes us better informed when confronting real-life controversies about slurs. Slurs cause legal and political trouble. "The Slants," an Asian American rock band, attempted to register the slur as their trademark but got turned down (Chappell 2017). They fought the trademark case in the Supreme Court and eventually won the case. However, the issue remains: how should the law regulate slurs? Should there be exceptions where certain groups are allowed to use slurs against themselves? Alternatively, should slurs be totally banned and ideally purged from the vocabulary of English? Answers to these questions should be informed by a theory of slurs which explains how slurs harm people.

In addition to legal issues, there are political controversies over whether certain words count as a slur. For example, there is a debate over whether the acronym "TERF" (which stands for "Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist") is a slur (Flaherty 2018). Some take "TERF" to be a slur for a subgroup of feminists, while some consider it an innocent word to challenge transphobia. When people disagree over whether a word is a slur, how should such disagreement be settled? Can there be a test for slurs? Again, a good theory of slurs may help us in addressing these puzzles.

Beyond the practical reasons, there are philosophical reasons for developing a theory of slurs. The theory would address *two* issues in philosophy of language.

First, slurs seem problematic for the dominant approach to meaning in philosophy of language. Let us call this approach "the thing theory of meaning." According to the thing theory, the meaning (or the semantic content) of an expression is the *thing* it stands for. Within this approach, different semantics (or theories of meaning) assign different things, such as individuals, functions, truth-conditions, sets of individuals, and sets of possible worlds, as the semantic content. I shall omit the details here since this is a broad approach rather than a specific theory.

However, this approach seems to be at odds with explaining the uses of certain words. What kind of things do words like "hello," "goodbye," and "damn" stand for? These words surely have meanings, but they do not seem to be standing for anything. The dominant approach largely neglects these words in theorizing about meaning. For instance, Frege

(1956, 295) famously banishes words such as “alas,” “thank God,” and “still” from the realm of thoughts, the meanings of sentences. They make no difference to thoughts because they merely act on the feelings, instead of contributing to truth. Because of such neglect, Wittgenstein (2009) criticizes this approach as “the Augustinian picture of language,” and Austin (1961) describes it as “the descriptive fallacy.”

Slurs also seem to challenge this dominant approach of the thing theory. Compare the slur “chink” with its neutral counterpart “Chinese.” It appears that both stand for the same group of people, i.e., the Chinese.[3] Nonetheless, their meanings seem to differ; it would be a mistake to teach an English learner that “chink” and “Chinese” are synonymous in English. Where does such a difference in meaning come from, if not from their referents? A natural answer is that the difference comes from their different uses. “Chink” is used for derogating the Chinese and expressing contempt, hatred toward them, whereas “Chinese” lacks this use.

Therefore, theories of slurs are significant because they support an alternative approach to meaning, i.e., *the use theory of meaning*. This theory can be elegantly captured by its slogan, “meaning is use.” For instance, the meaning of “chink” should be explained in terms of its use, that is, the use to derogate people or to express contempt and hatred. There are recent attempts at reviving the use theory of meaning. Alston’s theory tries to

[3] This claim may strike you as controversial. For more detailed analysis see section 2.4.

identify the meanings of sentences with their illocutionary act potentials, i.e., the speech acts the sentence is used to perform (Alston 2000). Moreover, inferential role semantics defines the meaning of a sentence in terms of its use in making inferences, i.e., its inferential role with regard to other sentences (Brandom 1994). Even the proponents of the thing theory have been experimenting with "use-conditional meaning," i.e., the condition under which an expression is appropriately used (Kaplan unpublished, Predelli 2013). Slurs might serve as evidence for these use theories because they are better at explaining the meaning of slurs. For example, inferential role semantics has been applied to slurs (§ 5.3).

Second, theories of slurs are also significant for related areas such as moral language (e.g., "right," "wrong"), thick concepts (e.g., "brave," "cruel"), evaluative terms (e.g., "delicious"), swear words (e.g., "damn," the F-word), general pejoratives (e.g., "asshole"). Crudely speaking, these expressions also seem to express emotive or evaluative attitudes like slurs.[4] A theory of slurs might be extended to explain these expressions.

Take moral language for instance. In meta-ethics, hybrid theorists combine expressivism with cognitivism and hold that moral terms have both a descriptive content and an expressivist element. For instance, to say something is "wrong" amounts to saying that it is prohibited by a certain moral standard and expressing one's attitude of endorsing

[4] In what sense do these words *express* emotive attitudes? I shall leave the term "express" undefined so as to allow two possibilities: 1) a speaker uses the word to express an attitude; and 2) the word itself, not the speaker, expresses the attitude as a part of its semantic content. I do not intend to take a position about the nature of expressivist language here.

that moral standard (Copp 2001). Many hybrid theorists believe that moral terms function like slurs (Boisvert 2014, Copp 2014).

Another example is the literature on "expressives" (Potts 2007, Schlenker 2007). Many philosophers and linguists believe that slurs behave just like all other expressives (e.g., "damn," "asshole"). They take "expressives" to be a kind of expression that incorporates sub-kinds such as swear words, general pejoratives, and slurs. Therefore, slurs should receive no sui generis treatment; they should be explained just like all other expressives. These theorists usually just give a general theory of expressives and then apply it to slurs.

However, this seeming similarity gives rise to further questions, which could be answered by a theory of slurs. Do slurs genuinely function in the same way as these expressions? Does a theory of slurs give us a "free" explanation for moral language and thick concepts? If not, how do slurs behave differently than these related expressions? What is the origin of such a difference? Theories of slurs are crucial for answering these questions. If our explanation of slurs applies to other expressions, developing a theory of slurs can be the stepping stone toward a unified framework of expressivist language. Even if slurs turn out to be very different from other expressives, it is still philosophically rewarding to study their differences.

1.2 The Basic Idea of the Force Indicator Theory

Imagine a hateful person who walks up to and starts yelling at Chang. He hates Chang as a Chinese person and finds Chang's very presence unpleasant. He calls him a "chink" and shouts, "You do not belong here because you are a chink!" What is going on in this situation? What makes the word "chink" in this context derogatory and hurtful? Some believe that calling Chang a "chink" is to tell people something about him, e.g., the hateful speaker is describing Chang as a "devious, slanty-eyed Chinese…who should be discriminated against." Others think that calling Chang a "chink" is for the speaker to show people his contempt of him, just like frowning at Chang or raising a middle finger. The job of slurs, for many people, is communication; the hateful speaker uses "chink" because he wants people to learn something about Chang (besides his ethnicity). I disagree.

Here is the basic idea of my alternative view. Calling Chang a "chink" is not merely telling people something about him or showing the speaker's feelings; it is doing something to Chang (and other Chinese), that is, an act of derogation.[5] To derogate Chang with a slur is to enforce the norm of racism, in which the Chinese are treated as an inferior group. In other words, labeling Chang as a "chink" is for the hateful speaker to allow other people to discriminate against him, to reject his right to be respected, and to deny his worth as a human being, etc. This is why slurs are used to enforce racism and commit hate crimes.

[5] Derogation cannot be reduced to (merely) an act of asserting something or expressing a feeling. In other words, derogation is a declarative illocutionary act, rather than an assertive or expressive act. For the nature of derogation, see section 4.1.

For those who find this description of the basic idea too vague, allow me to expand on the details. Many theories of slurs have been proposed. Most theories share the same picture that slurs communicate certain derogatory "messages" about certain groups.[6] The messages are said to be either propositional (e.g., the proposition that the Chinese are devious … and should be discriminated against) or non-propositional (e.g., hatred or contempt). These messages are taken to be communicated via truth-conditional contents (Hom 2008, 2010, 2012), conversational implicatures (Bolinger 2015, Nunberg 2018), conventional implicatures (Whiting 2013, Williamson 2009, Sennet and Copp 2017), or presuppositions (Schlenker 2007), etc. Arguably, this picture fails to capture what is essential to slurs; their use is to derogate certain groups of people. Derogation is not merely a matter of communication; it can be better understood by considering what speech acts speakers perform.

To provide an alternative, I will develop an *illocutionary force indicator theory* of slurs ("force indicator theory" for short). The basic idea is to explain slurs in terms of what they are used to do, i.e., to derogate their targets. One of the key lessons from the speech act theory is that language is not merely for describing; it is also used to perform (non-constative) speech acts (Austin 1961). For example, "Hello" is used for greeting people, and "I promise" is used to make promises. These words that are used to perform speech

[6] I choose the vague term "message," instead of "content," so as to avoid excluding non-propositional theories like Whiting's conventional implicature theory (Whiting 2013). For the definition of the "content," see section 2.5.

acts are called "*illocutionary force indicators*" (or "illocutionary force devices"). The force indicator theory takes slurs to be analogous to force indicators (or performatives) like "hello" and "I promise"; a slur like "chink" is the word to derogate the Chinese.

The force indicator theory takes slurs to be illocutionary force indicators of derogation.[7] For example, the force indicator "chink" in the utterance "Chang is a chink" makes it explicit that this utterance should be taken as an act of derogation. That is, it has the illocutionary force of derogation. Derogation is a declarative illocutionary act (such as approving, naming, resigning, and blessing), the point of which is to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior normative status on a target. For instance, to derogate the Chinese is to assign them an inferior status which is deprived of rights to be respected, eligibility to certain career opportunities, freedom from discriminations, etc. In addition to being force indicators, slurs are also propositional indicators that contribute to the propositional contents of utterances. "Chink" makes the same contribution to the propositional content as its neutral counterpart, "Chinese." The details of this theory will be developed in chapter 4.

Before ending this section, I must clarify the scope of the term "slur." One might complain that I am only addressing slurs like "chink" and "queer," while ignoring "slurs" such as someone's false claim that "Bob cheats on his wife!". The ordinary usage of "slur"

[7] Slurs are not the only force indicators of derogation. For instance, the force might be indicated by a negative tone or a gesture.

in English is ambiguous between two senses. In the first sense, it refers to what are called "slurring words," or "slurring expressions." Certain words, linguistic expressions, or lexical items are called "slurs." It is in this sense that people describe words such as "chink," "cracker," "queer" as "slurs." In the second sense, "slur" has been commonly used for "slurring speech" or "slurring acts," as reported in "John slurred the integrity of Bob" or "her article is a slur on their reputation."

I use the term "slur" in the sense of "slurring expressions," *not* in the sense of "slurring acts" or "slurring speech." That is, it stands for a kind of word or lexical item (e.g., ethnic epithets), rather than a kind of speech or utterance. In this thesis, I will use "slurs" and "slurring expressions" interchangeably; readers should always read "slur" as "slurring expressions." My theoretical reason to use the term in the first sense is simply to maintain consistency with the literature on slurs. The philosophical debate focuses on "slurs" in the first sense. "Slur," in the second sense, despite its significance, is a separate issue.

1.3 Outline of the Chapters

Many issues have to be addressed in order to develop an illocutionary force indicator theory of slurs. What are the phenomena or features of slurs that a theory has to explain (chapter 2)? Since the force indicator theory is based on speech act theory, how should we understand basic notions such as illocutionary act, illocutionary force, and force indicators (chapter 3)? After addressing these background questions, this dissertation will proceed to

address the following questions. What exactly is the illocutionary force indicator theory (chapter 4)? What are the alternative theories to the force indicator theory, and why should my theory be favored (chapter 5)? Can such a theory withstand the objections against it (chapter 6)?

An overview of the following chapters is helpful here. I will summarize the key ideas of each chapter. This should serve as a roadmap to guide readers.

Chapter 2 surveys the features of slurs, as well as the questions corresponding to those features.[8] Throughout the literature, theorists have proposed many features to be explained. For instance, slurs are said to exhibit features such as derogatory power (§ 2.2), offensiveness (§ 2.3), truth-conditional contribution (§ 2.4), independence (§ 2.5), descriptive ineffability (§ 2.6), and perspective dependence (§ 2.7), etc. An essential job of theories of slurs is to explain the puzzling features of slurs.

However, there is no consensus over what the list of features should include. Moreover, the selection and categorization of features are arbitrary and messy. Some features ultimately collapse into others. For instance, explaining the so-called "appropriation of slurs" (§ 2.10) involves no more than answering the questions about historical variability (§ 2.8), and non-derogatory utterances (§ 2.9). Additionally, some features conflate different issues together under a single label. For example, explaining

[8] I shall use the term "slur" in the sense of *slurring expressions* (e.g., ethnic epithets), rather than *slurring acts* or *slurring speeches*. Therefore, these features are features of linguistic expressions like "chink," and "honky."

what is commonly called "derogatory power" (§ 2.2) involves answering two different questions identified below.

To provide a clear and systematic survey, each section of chapter 2 will reformulate a feature of slurs into corresponding questions. For example, section 2.2 will introduce the *derogatory power* of slurs by disambiguating two questions: (Q1) "In virtue of what is a slur such as 'chink' a derogatory word?", and (Q2) "In virtue of what is an utterance like saying that 'Chang is a chink' derogatory?".[9] Section 2.4 will present the *truth-conditional contribution* by asking question (Q5) "Does a slur like 'chink' make the same truth-conditional contribution as its neutral counterpart 'Chinese'?" Subsequent sections will reformulate other features into corresponding questions such as question (Q6) "Why is the derogatory dimension of 'chink' independent from its descriptive meaning?", and (Q7) "Why cannot the derogatory dimension of 'chink' be satisfactorily paraphrased in purely descriptive terms?". Section 2.14 will list all the questions introduced in this chapter.

Chapter 3 provides the necessary theoretical background for the force indicator theory by introducing the basic notion of speech act theory. *Illocutionary acts*, such as ordering, apologizing, asserting, promising, are the acts of doing something *in* saying something (§ 3.1). They have two major components, *illocutionary forces* and *propositional contents*.

[9] What question (Q1) asks for is to find the element or the mechanism, in virtue of which a slur like "chink" is derogatory. Potential answers include truth-conditional contents, conventional implicatures, etc. It is *not* asking for evidence for proving that "chink" is derogatory, e.g., that "chink" is marked as offensive in the Oxford English Dictionary, and that it is censored by FAA in public media. It is also *not* asking how did the word "chink" historically acquire the element that makes it derogatory, e.g., the etymology of "chink." For clarifications on the nature of this question, see section 2.2.

For instance, the illocutionary act of promising that I will give you money has the illocutionary force of promising, as well as the propositional content that I will give you money. But how are illocutionary force and propositional content determined? *Illocutionary force indicator* and *propositional indicators* are the linguistic expressions that help determine the force and the content respectively (§ 3.2). Suppose I make a promise by saying, "I promise that I will give you money." The force of the promise is determined by "I promise," the force indicator, while its propositional content is determined by the propositional indicator, "I will give you money." However, one can still raise a further question: how exactly does a force indicator (in a sentence type) determine the illocutionary force (of an utterance)? In section 3.3, I will show that force indicators provide a default interpretation in determining the illocutionary force of an utterance.[10] For instance, an utterance that contains "I promise" is interpreted as a promise by default, unless there are defeating factors such as insincerity and sarcasm.

In chapter 4, I will develop the illocutionary force indicator theory of slurs in detail. I will show that a slur like "chink" is an illocutionary force indicator of the illocutionary acts of derogation (§ 4.1). Slurs like "chink" are also propositional indicators which make the same truth-conditional contribution as their neutral counterparts like "Chinese." This force indicator theory requires an explanation of the illocutionary acts of derogation. I take

[10] For the nature of the "default interpretation," see section 3.3.

derogation to be a kind of declarative illocutionary act, the point of which is to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior normative status on a target group (§ 4.2). In section 4.3, I will characterize how slurs determine the illocutionary force of derogation. Although slurs are neither sufficient nor necessary for derogation, they help to determine the illocutionary force by providing the default interpretation (of utterances of that general kind).[11] That is, utterances that contain slurs are interpreted as derogation by default unless there are defeating factors. In section 4.4, I will address the offensiveness of slurs. In addition to providing illocutionary force, a slur produces the perlocutionary effects of causing offense.

This force indicator theory provides a better explanation of the features of slurs. In section 4.5, I will apply the force indicator theory to explain the features of slurs. It has no difficulty in explaining features such as derogatory power, offensiveness, truth-conditional contribution, independence, etc. Why is "chink" a derogatory word? "Chink" is derogatory because it is an indicator for the illocutionary acts of derogation. Why is it impossible to paraphrase "chink" in a purely descriptive way? Illocutionary force simply cannot be paraphrased into propositional contents. The force indicator theory is at least adequate in its explanatory power.

Chapter 5 introduces the existing theories of slurs in the literature, such as the truth-conditional content theory (§ 5.1), the conventional implicature theory (§ 5.2),

[11] Readers may be curious about the sense in which the interpretation provided by the slur is the "default" one. For clarifications on "default interpretation," see section 3.3 and section 4.3.

inferentialism (§ 5.3), etc. These theories offer a variety of explanations for slurs. Some of these theories appeal to "semantic" properties such as semantic contents and truth. For example, Christopher Hom's truth-conditional content theory takes slurs to have derogatory truth-conditional contents. Inferentialism takes the meaning of slurs to be determined by inferential rules that license inferences to derogatory statements. Some theories explain slurs in terms of pragmatic factors. For instance, the conventional implicature theory takes slurs to convey derogatory conventional implicatures.[12] There are also theories that appeal to extra-linguistic explanations. The prohibitionist theory (§ 5.4), for example, explains slurs in terms of the social prohibition on using them. These theories serve as the theoretical alternatives to my illocutionary force indicator theory. Contrasting them with the force indicator theory helps to elucidate my position.

In each section in chapter 5, I will introduce a theory and then raise my arguments against it. I believe the existing theories in the literature ultimately run into various problems. For example, Hom's truth-conditional content theory has difficulty in explaining how non-assertions like "Is Chang a chink?" can be derogatory, where the derogatory truth-conditional content of "chink" is not attributed to Chang. The conventional implicature theory cannot accommodate the possibility of derogating Koreans with "chink" because the conventional implicature of "chink" is always about the Chinese. I hope my arguments

[12] It is controversial if conventional implicature is pragmatic or semantic. I do not intend to defend a particular view of the semantic/pragmatic boundary here.

against these theories justify rethinking slurs from the alternative picture of illocutionary force indicators.

Chapter 6 defends the force indicator theory from potential objections. For instance, it might be argued that derogation is not an illocutionary act because it is impossible to derogate by saying "I hereby derogate you" (§ 6.1). Another objection is that slurs embedded in complex sentences remain derogatory (e.g., "If chinks celebrate Lunar New Year, then…"), whereas embedded force indicators cease to provide illocutionary force (e.g., "If I promise to give you money, then ...") (§ 6.2). In addition, it might be objected that the slur "chink" cannot make the same truth-conditional contribution as "Chinese" (§ 6.4). Consider examples like "Institutions that treat the Chinese as chinks are morally depraved," where replacing "chink" with "Chinese" seems to change the truth value. Objections like these challenge my force indicator theory. In each section, I will introduce an objection and respond to it.

1.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have explained the reasons for developing a theory of slurs (§ 1.1). The practical reason is that such a theory is helpful for addressing controversies such as the legal regulation of slurs. The philosophical reason is that a theory of slurs seems to challenge the thing theory of meaning and offer a prototype for other expressivist expressions. I have also introduced the basic idea of my force indicator theory; slurs are

the words to perform the speech act of derogation (§ 1.2). An outline has also been provided for each chapter of the dissertation (§ 1.3). With this background in place, we are ready to introduce the features of slurs to be explained.

2 Features of Slurs

The puzzling features of slurs give rise to many questions. Take the slur "chink" for instance. Unlike the neutral word "Chinese," "chink" is a derogatory word. For instance, The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "chink" as "an insulting and contemptuous term for a person of Chinese birth or descent."[13] In other words, "chink" has *derogatory power*. Both "Chinese" and "chink" seem to refer to the same people. However, why is "chink" derogatory, while "Chinese" is not? Furthermore, slurs can be *appropriated* or *reclaimed*, e.g., the term "queer" was a slur for homosexuals, but it has been "appropriated" by the LGBTQ community as a symbol for taking pride in challenging heterosexual norms. This feature gives rise to the question, "What is it for a slur to become less derogatory?" Slurs have more puzzling features than these examples. An adequate theory of slurs, including my force indicator theory, must explain the features of slurs and answer questions corresponding to them. Therefore, I need to survey the features of slurs to be explained.

Here is an overview of the sections of the chapter. First, section 2.1 presents methodological remarks on how to analyze the features of slurs and what it means to explain these features. Then, each section examines one feature of slurs and analyzes it by raising corresponding questions. Section 2.2 disambiguates the *derogatory power* of a slur, such as "chink." There are two questions to be asked about this feature. Why is "chink" a

[13] "Chink". Merriam-Webster Online. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chink (accessed June 8, 2019).

derogatory word? In addition, why is someone's saying that "Chang is a chink" derogatory? Section 2.3 distinguishes the *offensiveness* of slurs (e.g., in virtue of what is "chink" an offensive word?) from their derogatory power. In section 2.4, I will discuss the *truth-conditional contribution* of slurs (e.g., why do "Chang is a chink" and "Chang is a Chinese" share the same truth-condition?). In section 2.5, I will address the feature of *independence* (e.g., why is it possible for "Chinese" to refer to the same people as "chink" without being derogatory like the slur?). Section 2.6 focuses on the *descriptive ineffability* of slurs (e.g., why is it impossible to accurately paraphrase "chink"?), while section 2.7 discusses *perspective dependence* (e.g., why does an utterance of slurs such as "Chang does business with chinks" express the attitude of the speaker, not others?).

In section 2.8, I will discuss the *historical variability* of slurs (e.g., how can a slur like "queer" become less derogatory over time?) Section 2.9 is about *non-derogatory utterances* of slurs (e.g., if "chink" is a derogatory word, how can it be used in a non-derogatory way?). In section 2.10, I will point out that the so-called *appropriation* of slurs is not a *sui generis* feature, but two features conflated together. Explaining "appropriation" is nothing but explaining the *historical variability* and the *non-derogatory utterances* of slurs. In section 2.11, I will introduce the *non-displaceability* of slurs (e.g., why does an embedded slur remain derogatory, as in "If Chang is a chink, he celebrates Lunar New Year"?). Section 2.12 addresses the *Kaplanian inference puzzle* (e.g., Why does the inference from "the Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year" to "the chinks celebrate Lunar

New Year" seem invalid?). In addition to these existing features in the literature, I will introduce a new feature, *self-defeating sentences*, in section 2.13. Slurs seem to make sentences like "praise the chink!" self-defeating. How do slurs make such sentences inconsistent? These features and their corresponding questions may be difficult to keep track of. For quick reference, section 2.14 summarizes all the questions introduced in each section.

2.1 Methodological Remarks

This chapter introduces and clarifies features of slurs by analyzing them into a list of distinct questions for theories of slurs. Every theorist of slurs has her own a list of features to be explained. However, the selection of the features can be arbitrary and controversial. Different questions might be conflated together under one single feature. For instance, explaining the so-called "*derogatory power*" of slurs, as I will show in section 2.2, involves answering two different questions. Sometimes theorists list a feature even though it collapses into other features. What is called the "appropriation of slurs," as I will argue in section 2.10, is not a single feature; it conflates both *historical variability* and *non-derogatory utterances of slurs*. In short, the best way to analyze the features of slurs is to organize them into a list of questions.

For the questions regarding slurs, I will formulate each of them in its own paragraph and label them as questions **(Q1)**, **(Q2)**, etc.[14] Each label corresponds to a question that a theory of slurs has to answer, e.g.,

(Q1) *Type Derogatory Power*: In virtue of what is a slur like "chink" a derogatory word?

The features and questions I identify, despite being different from one another, are not totally independent of each other. Many of them are related to the two basic questions, i.e., **(Q1)** "In virtue of what is a slur like 'chink' a derogatory word?", and **(Q2)** "In virtue of what is an utterance like someone's saying that 'Chang is a chink' derogatory?". For example, one's answer to **(Q1)** partially determines how she answers other questions such as (Q9) "what is it for a slur to become more derogatory or less derogatory over time?". I will illustrate this dependency between questions with boldface and regular fonts; question **(Q1)** and **(Q2)** will be emphasized with boldface font, so as to show their status as the most fundamental questions.

My formulations of the features of slurs may conflict with other theorists' understandings. This is a result of the disagreement over slurs' features between theorists. When in conflict, my formulations reflect my own position of what those features are,

[14] There is a need to label questions, theories, and arguments systematically. The literature on slurs is gigantic and disorganized. More than ten features of slurs have been discussed, and each author has her own list of the features. A handy way to keep track of them is to label the questions, theories, and arguments numerically.

rather than the opposing understandings in the literature. I will defend my position later by criticizing opposing views in chapter 5. Readers should notice that different theorists of slurs often have conflicting intuitions about the same feature. Sometimes they cannot even agree on what exactly the question is to be asked. Take the *truth-conditional contribution* of slurs (§ 2.4) for instance. For most theories, explaining this feature amounts to asking: why does the slur "chink" make the *same* truth-conditional contribution as its neutral counterpart "Chinese"? However, some theorists would have completely opposite intuitions (Hom and May 2013, 293); by their lights, the slur "chink" has a different referent than "Chinese," such that literally, no Chinese person is a chink. For them, the right question to ask is: why do slurs make *different* truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterpart (see section 5.1). My formulation of *truth-conditional contribution* in this chapter endorses the majority view, and I will criticize the opposite intuitions later in chapter 5.

After explaining my way of analyzing the features of slurs, deeper questions will remain: what is it to explain a feature such as the *derogatory power* of slurs? Correspondingly, what are we doing when we answer a question about those features, e.g., (Q1) "why is a slur like 'chink' a derogatory word?" These questions are important because the project of explaining the features of slurs could be misunderstood in certain ways. For instance, one might think that to explain the *derogatory power* of slurs is to prove that slurs are derogatory (e.g., with evidence such as the definition of "chink" in dictionaries), instead

of explaining why they are derogatory. One might also misunderstand explaining the derogatory power to be *merely* clarifying what this feature is (e.g., it is a linguistic phenomenon, rather than an economic or logical phenomenon) without specifying its source. This dissertation will address these side issues, but explaining slurs' features requires more.

Here is my answer to these questions: a feature of slurs is an interpretive effect of slurs (that characterize them as a kind of linguistic expression), and to explain a feature is to find the factor or the mechanism that gives rise to the effect.[15] Take *non-displaceability* (§ 2.11) for instance. One of the crucial effects of slurs, unlike general pejoratives such as "asshole," is to make the whole sentence derogatory when they are embedded within the sentence. Therefore, to introduce a feature like *non-displaceability* is to clarify this interpretive effect, e.g., what kind of sentences slurs affect, and whether other kinds of expressions share this effect. These features are the phenomena to be explained by theories of slurs. For a theory to explain a feature of slurs is to specify the factor or the mechanism that gives rise to the interpretive effect (causally or constitutively). For instance, a theory might trace the *non-displaceability* of a slur back to its derogatory conventional implicature, which is also *non-displaceable*.

[15] These characterizing effects do not have to be essential properties of slurs.

2.2 Derogatory Power

Here is the outline of this complex section. First, I will clarify some terminology. Then I will proceed to introduce the *derogatory power* of slurs by reformulating it into question **(Q1)** and question **(Q2)**. Reasons will be given for why we should separate these two questions. Then I will clarify the nature of question **(Q1)** by rejecting two common misreadings of it. Since *derogatory power* is often called "derogatory force" in the literature, I will explain my terminological choice of "derogatory power" at the end of this section.

Before analyzing the feature of *derogatory power*, a few clarifications of terminology have to be made. Defining certain terms is crucial for accurately characterizing the feature of derogatory power. However, readers could skip these clarifications and come back when necessary.

I will mention "types" and "tokens" of slurs. Therefore, I need to clarify the relationship between a "type" and a "token" of a slur, as well as the "type" and the "token" of a sentence that contains slurs. A token of a slur is a particular instance of the word. The tokens of a slur belong to or share the same type of slur. For example, when two speakers utter the same sentence, "Chang is a chink," there are two tokens of the type of "chink." The type-token distinction applies to sentences that contain slurs as well. In the case above, there are two tokens of the same type of the sentence "Chang is a chink."

A term related to the type-token distinction is the term "utterance." An "utterance" of a sentence is the act of verbally producing a token of the sentence. To "utter" a sentence is to make an utterance of the sentence. My usage of "utterance," without any qualification, stands for the production of a token of a *sentence*, rather than a *word*. For instance, when I address "non-derogatory utterance" in section 2.9, I am talking about non-derogatory utterances of *sentences* that contain slurs.

Now that I have clarified this terminology, it is time to introduce one of the essential features of slurs, that is, their *derogatory power* (or *expressive force*) (Croom 2011, 345, Jeshion 2013, 232, Richard 2008, 12, Hom 2008, 426, 2010, 164). Slurs are derogatory words, and they are used to derogate people. Therefore, they are said to have "derogatory power" (also called "derogatory force," or "expressive force"). However, the term "derogatory power" describes two related but distinct phenomena.

First, theories of slurs use "derogatory power" to describe certain phenomena of those *words* themselves. Some theorists associate these words with derogation. Croom (2011, 345) describes slurs as words that "carry derogatory force whereas descriptives usually do not." Jeshion (2013, 232) takes slurs to be words with the "function to derogate or dehumanize, by which I mean, that they function to signal that … they are inferior as persons." Other theorists describe this feature of slurs in terms of what those words express. Slurs are said to be words that "forcefully convey hatred and contempt of their targets" (Hom 2008, 426) and "express the negative, psychological attitudes of their speakers"

(Hom 2010, 164). In addition, Richard (2008, 12) identify slurs as words that are "conventional means to express strong negative attitudes towards members of a group." According to Hornsby (2001, 128), slurs "are commonly understood to convey hatred or contempt."

Second, "derogatory power" has been used to describe not slurs themselves, but *utterances* or usages of slurs; using these words in these utterances can be derogatory and insulting. For example, "calling someone a racial epithet is extremely pejorative, controversial, and usually much more insulting than using ordinary derogatory terms like 'stupid' or 'lazy'" (Hom 2008, 426), such that "to call some a n**ger is usually understood as an act of derogation" (Croom 2011, 345). Richard (2008, 12) claims that "Given what slurs are used to do, it is no surprise that their use often achieves extreme effects on their targets—humiliation, subjugation, shame."

It is clear now that two different but related questions are therefore conflated under the label "derogatory power." That is, explaining "derogatory power" involves answering *two* related questions. I will introduce both questions and explain their difference.

First, theories of slurs answer a question about the feature of those words *themselves*, i.e., why they are derogatory expressions in a language. Compare the slur "chink" with its neutral counterpart "Chinese." Seemingly, these are two co-extensional expressions refer to the same group of people. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the words themselves: "chink" is a derogatory word in English, whereas "Chinese" is not. For any

given slur, a theory of slurs must explain why it is a derogatory word. I shall reformulate this question as question **(Q1)**, the question of the type derogatory power. This is the question theorists address when they talk about why slurs, as a type of word, express "hatred and contempt" or have the function to derogate.

(Q1) *Type Derogatory Power*: In virtue of what is a slur like "chink" a derogatory word?

Second, theories of slurs answer a related question, not about those words themselves, but about *utterances* of slurs. Imagine a situation in which Chang's nationality is questioned. Two speakers give two different statements about Chang. The first one asserts that (1) "Chang is a chink," whereas the other speaker asserts that (2) "Chang is a Chinese."

(1) Chang is a chink

(2) Chang is a Chinese

Now we can ask a question about these two utterances: why is utterance (1) derogatory, whereas utterance (2) is not? Notice that this is a question about utterances (or acts) of slurs, not about the words themselves. I shall label this "**(Q2)** the question of token derogatory power." This is the question at issue when theorists explain why *calling* someone the N-word is derogatory and why *using* slurs can derogate or humiliate the target.

(Q2) *Token Derogatory Power*: In virtue of what is the utterance of a slur (e.g., "Chang is a chink") a derogatory utterance?

Question **(Q1)** and question **(Q2)** are usually conflated together in the literature. Most theories do not even differentiate between them.[16] It seems to many that in answering one of them, one would automatically answer the other. One might argue that uttering (1) "Chang is a chink" is derogatory because it includes a derogatory word, "chink." Once we have an answer for **(Q1)** why "chink" is a derogatory word, we have the answer for **(Q2)** as well.

However, there are two theoretical reasons to separate these two questions. First, answering question **(Q1)** does not give us a free answer for **(Q2)**. Take "chink" for instance. No matter what sentence it is embedded into and what the speaker uses it to do, it is always a derogatory word: a derogatory word against the Chinese. It remains a derogatory word until a change happens in the vocabulary of English. By contrast, whether an utterance of "chink" (e.g., saying that "Chang is a chink") is derogatory depends on contextual factors such as intentions, situations, etc. Not all utterances of "chink" are derogatory, and not all

[16] Many theories run into problems because they try to answer (**Q2**) with their answer to **(Q1)**. For example, Hom's theory (§ 5.1) answers both questions in terms of truth-conditional content. "Chink" is a derogatory word because it has a derogatory truth-conditional content. Similarly, saying that "Chang is a chink" is a derogatory utterance because the derogatory content is predicated of Chang. As I will argue in chapter 5, theories like this are vulnerable to my objections because they conflate these two questions, and they do not always succeed at answering both.

of them are derogatory against the Chinese. As I will show in 2.9, certain utterances of slurs can be non-derogatory, even if they contain derogatory words (e.g., used by a Chinese comedian or between Chinese friends). It is not the case that an utterance of "chink" is derogatory simply because it contains "chink," a derogatory word.

Second, these two questions might receive different kinds of answers. It is possible that question **(Q1)** is explained by semantic properties, whereas **(Q2)** is explained in terms of pragmatic mechanisms such as implicatures or presuppositions.[17] It might be argued that "chink" is a derogatory word because of its semantic content, but calling someone "chink" is derogatory because of what the utterance conversationally implicates. It is theoretically useful to keep these two questions apart since they might be answered differently.

After differentiating question **(Q1)** from (**Q2**), I need to clarify question **(Q1)**. This is because question **(Q1)** could be misunderstood in two ways. Therefore, I will explain this question by showing what it is *not* asking for.

First, question **(Q1)** is not asking for a conceptual analysis or a definition of the English word "slur." Asking question **(Q1)** could be misunderstood as asking the seemingly trivial question of "Why are slurs derogatory words?", just like asking "Why is a bachelor an unmarried man?". This appears to be trivial because "slurs" seem to be

[17] "Semantic" and "pragmatic" are very controversial terminologies. For my definitions, see section 2.10.

"derogatory words" by definition. Therefore, the answer to **(Q1)** is nothing but the trivial observation that the term "slur" simply has part of its definition "derogatory word."

I will defend the non-triviality of **(Q1)** by clarifying what this question asks for. The above reading of **(Q1)** misrepresents it to be a definitional or conceptual question about the meaning of the English word "slur." In fact, what question **(Q1)** asks, for each slur like "chink" and "honky," is why *it* is derogatory. Answering **(Q1)** does not consist in investigating if the term "slurs" means "derogatory words," but specifying the semantic, pragmatic properties of words like "chink" and how those properties make those words derogatory. Therefore, **(Q1)** is not comparable to asking, "Why is a bachelor an unmarried man?"; it is analogous to asking, "In virtue of what is John, a bachelor, unmarried?" Answering this question requires specifying the personal factors that explain his being single, rather than the trivial response that "bachelor" means "unmarried males." Similarly, **(Q1)** should not be understood as a trivial question asking for the definition of the term "slur."

Second, question **(Q1)** is not asking a historical question. Question **(Q1)** is ambiguous between two readings. Consider an analogy: the question "why is the water boiling?" is also ambiguous between two readings. In the first reading, the question is asking for the thermodynamic property in virtue of which the water is boiling, i.e., the water molecules have enough kinetic energy to break away and become steam. In the second reading, the question is a *historical* one, asking for how the water acquired the thermodynamic property

in virtue of which the water is boiling. The appropriate answers would be like "It is boiling because I put it on the stove 10 minutes ago."

Analogously, **(Q1)** "In virtue of what is a slur like 'chink' a derogatory word?" could be misread as asking the historical question, i.e., when and how did "chink" historically acquire the property in virtue of which it is derogatory. Potential answers to the historical question include etymological explanations like "'Chink' acquired a negative meaning in English in the 20th century when racists used the word for 'a narrow opening' to describe the eyes of Chinese immigrants." Despite the importance of the historical question, **(Q1)** is not asking the historical question of how a slur like "chink" comes to be derogatory. Answering **(Q1)** involves specifying the property in virtue of which a slur is derogatory, *not* how and when the slur came to acquire that property.

After clarifying question **(Q1)**, I need to explain my choice of terminology, especially why I choose to call this feature "derogatory power," instead of other commonly used terms such as "derogatory force."

What I call the "*derogatory power"* of slurs is commonly called "derogatory force" in the literature.[18] However, I will avoid using the term "derogatory force" because it can be misleading in two ways.[19] First, "derogatory force" would be misunderstood as an

[18] Derogatory power is also labeled "offensiveness" by some theorists. For my distinction between derogatory power and offensiveness, see section 2.3.

[19] The term "force," borrowed from the force-content distinction in speech act theory, needs to be clarified since it can be easily confused with "derogatory power." I will talk about the "force" of promising, asserting, derogating, etc. Unless

illocutionary force, e.g., the force of a promise. However, *derogatory power* is meant to describe a property of a word. It is *not* an illocutionary force, which is a property of a speech act, rather than a linguistic expression.[20] If *derogatory power* were called "derogatory force," my theory would appear to be explaining an illocutionary force with an illocutionary force. This theory would look like a nonstarter. Second, "derogatory force" could be misunderstood as a property of types of *sentences*, such as "interrogative force." Sometimes types of sentences, instead of illocutionary acts, are said to have "interrogative force" or "imperative force." For instance, the interrogative sentence "Is Chang there?" may be said to have an "interrogative force" provided by the grammatical mood. Contrary to this usage, I shall reserve the term "force" for illocutionary acts.

2.3 Offensiveness

In addition to derogatory power, slurs have the feature of *offensiveness*; they are words that cause offense. Therefore, using them or even mentioning them can cause audiences to take offense. Taking offense is a mental state in which the subject feels offended by something. To offend someone is to cause the mental state of feeling offended. People often protest

specified as "derogatory power," "interrogative force," etc., my usage of the term "force" stands for *illocutionary force* of illocutionary acts. For the basics of illocutionary force, see section 3.1.

[20] Linguistic expressions may have an *use* to provide illocutionary force. However, this does not mean they have illocutionary force by themselves. For instance, the phrase "I promise" itself is not a promise, if it sits in the dictionaries without ever being used by someone.

against the public usages of slurs such as naming the football team “Redskins” because they feel hurt and upset by them (Cox 2014).

The *offensiveness* of slurs is commonly confused with the *derogatory power* of slurs. Almost all theorists conflate these two features together. Therefore, the relation between offensiveness and derogatory power should be clarified. Some theorists formulate the questions about slurs in terms of their “offensiveness,” rather than “derogatory power” (Bolinger 2015, Anderson and Lepore 2013). Instead of asking **(Q1)** “why are slurs derogatory words?”, they formulate the questions as “why are slurs offensive words?”, “why is the utterance ‘Chang is a chink’ offensive?”, etc. They are using “derogatory power” and “offensiveness” interchangeably.

Nevertheless, I will argue that offensiveness is different from derogatory power. Therefore, these two should be not conflated with each other. This is because (although slurs are both *derogatory* and *offensive*) it is possible for (the types of) words to be offensive without being derogatory, and vice versa.

First, words can be offensive without being derogatory. For instance, addressing a staunch communist with the title “sir” was offensive to him in China during the Cold War era. This is because of the communist ideology that those titles are used by the bourgeoisie, and socialist citizens should be addressed with the title “comrade.” Therefore, the word “sir” was offensive in China in the sense of producing the psychological effect of feeling

offended, even if it is an honorific title to show respect. A word can be offensive in this sense without being derogatory.

Second, words can be derogatory without causing offense. A word can be derogatory, even if no one feels offended by it. A good example is archaic derogatory words. The ancient Greek word "κατάπυγον" is a pejorative for the passive participants in homosexual relationships. It remains a derogatory word, even if no one feels hurt by it anymore (because it is archaic).

In addition to (the types of) words, it is also possible for utterances to be offensive without being derogatory, and vice versa. For example, unwittingly *praising* a third-generation Chinese Canadian with "Your English is so good! Where are you from?" is not derogatory. However, it is still offensive because the hearer can be offended by the presupposition that he is not a true Canadian. Furthermore, criticizing the ancient Carthaginians by saying "Carthaginians are terrible!" is derogatory, but it hardly offends anyone nowadays.

Having distinguished offensiveness from derogatory power, we can now analyze the former feature into corresponding questions. Just like the two questions about the derogatory power, explaining the offensiveness of slurs requires answering the two related questions, (Q3) and (Q4).

(Q3) *Type Offensiveness*: In virtue of what is a slur like "chink" an offensive word?

(Q4) *Token Offensiveness*: In virtue of what is the utterance of a slur (e.g., "Chang is a chink") an offensive utterance?

Before ending this section, I need to address an objection against my formulation of *offensiveness* as causing offense. It might be argued that offensiveness is not the same as causing offense. In the ordinary use of "offensive," we sometimes describe a word as "offensive," even if the audiences do not feel offended by it. Imagine a situation where I call my friend "asshole," and he is amused instead of feeling offended. It seems that "asshole" remains an "offensive" word (in the sense that it can be used as an attack or an offense against my friend), even if it does not cause the audience to feel offended.

My response is that the ordinary use of "offensive" is ambiguous. In the first sense, this term has been used to describe offensiveness as causing offense. I endorse this sense because this is the most common sense in ordinary language, as well as in the literature on slurs. In addition, "offensive" does have a second sense in which *offensiveness* can be equated with *derogatory power*; a word is "offensive" because it is a tool to derogate or attack the target, no matter how the target feels. The objection above is based on this sense of offensiveness as being derogatory. However, to say a word is "offensive" in this sense is just another way to say it is a "derogatory" word. It is unnecessary to address the second sense, since almost no one in the literature uses it and my discussions on the *derogatory power* have already covered it.

2.4 Truth-Conditional Contribution

The term "neutral counterparts" is essential for characterizing the *truth-conditional contribution* of slurs. A neutral counterpart of a slur is a linguistic expression that *seems* to share the same referent, descriptive content, or truth-conditional contribution as the slur, without being a derogatory word. For instance, "Chinese" is the neutral counterpart of the slur "chink," because both *seem* to refer to the same people. Although some theorists agree that "Chinese" is the neutral counterpart of "chink," they deny that "chink" actually refers to the same people as "Chinese" (Hom 2008). My definition of "neutral counterparts" leaves the issue of their referents open to debate.

In addition, I need to clarify a related term: "truth-conditional content." I will use "truth-conditional content" interchangeably with "truth-conditional contribution," "referent," and "descriptive content." However, what do I exactly mean by "truth-conditional content"? This term is ambiguous between 1) a content that determines the truth-condition (or what is said) of a sentence or an utterance, and 2) a content that has a truth-condition (i.e., it can be true or false), even if it does not determine the truth-condition of a sentence or an utterance. Although the second sense is common, I use the term "truth-conditional content" in the first sense; it does not mean any content that has a truth-

condition. Suppose a speaker conventionally implicates that p in saying that q.[21] The conventional implicature could be described as a "truth-conditional content" in the second sense since it has a content which has the truth-condition that p. However, my usage does not take the conventional implicature that p to be a "truth-conditional content." The "truth-conditional content" of his utterance should be q because the truth-condition of the utterance is determined by what is said.

Given these definitions, we are ready to address the feature of *truth-conditional contribution* of slurs, which raises further questions. For example, "Chinese" is the neutral counterpart of "chink." It appears that both words are co-referential; "chink," after all, is a derogatory word for the Chinese. However, does "chink" really have the same referent as "Chinese"? Do they make the same contribution to the truth condition such that they are interchangeable without altering the truth value? Let us label this question (Q5).

(Q5) *Truth-Conditional Contribution*: Does a slur (e.g., "chink") make the same contribution to the truth-conditional content as its neutral counterpart (e.g., "Chinese")?

[21] For a brief introduction to implicatures, see section 5.2.

Here is another way to put the question. Compare again following sentence (1) with (2), where “chink” is replaced with its neutral counterpart “Chinese.” Suppose Chang is indeed Chinese. Thus (2) must be true, and (4) below must be false. How about the truth value of (1)? Is it true or false? Maybe it has no truth value at all? The truth value of (1) affects the truth value of (3), its negation, as well. If (1) is true, (3) must be false, and vice versa. If (1) lacks truth value, (3) probably lacks truth value too.

(1) Chang is a chink

(2) Chang is a Chinese

(3) Chang is not a chink

(4) Chang is not a Chinese

Question (Q5) can be potentially answered in three ways. The first option is, “Yes, they do make the same contribution as their neutral counterparts.” If Chang is Chinese, sentence (3) should be false. I will adopt this position in my force indicator theory. The other two options both answer “No” to question (Q5). The second option holds that “Slurs make different contributions.” It follows that sentence (3) is true, even if Chang is Chinese. Finally, the third option is that slurs deprive sentences of their truth values. Therefore, sentence (3) is neither true nor false. For the details of my position and alternative views, see section 4.1.

2.5 Independence

Before introducing this feature, I need to define two terms. First, the term "derogatory dimension" (or "derogatory aspect") will be used to refer to whatever element of slurs makes them derogatory. For instance, the slur "chink" has an extra derogatory dimension that its neutral counterpart "Chinese" lacks. This vague term is deliberately introduced to replace the so-called "derogatory content" or "derogatory message" of slurs. It is more neutral in describing the features of slurs because it is inclusive of theories that refuse to explain slurs in terms of propositional contents. For instance, the prohibitionist theory would hold that "chink" expresses the same propositional content as "Chinese"; the only difference is the extra-linguistic (non-linguistic) property of being prohibited by society (see section 5.4). If the derogatory dimension of slurs were labeled "derogatory contents," the prohibitionist theory would not get off the ground in the first place.

Second, I need to clarify my usage of the term "content," which is notoriously ambiguous. Is a "content" always a proposition? Can a non-cognitive attitude such as contempt be a content? The best way to avoid such ambiguity is to avoid using the term "content." When I use the term "content" in this dissertation, it will always be qualified as "truth-conditional content," "propositional content," "non-propositional content," etc. In rare cases where I use "content" without qualifications, it includes both *propositional* and *non-propositional contents*. For instance, I might describe the contempt for the Chinese as

the "content" of a conventional implicature (see §5.2). This terminological choice is made to ensure fairness for the non-propositional theories of slurs; I do not want the "contents" of slurs to be propositional by definition.[22] Nevertheless, I will do my best to avoid using "content" in this unqualified sense.

We are ready to introduce the third feature of slurs, namely, their *independence* or *descriptive detachability* (Whiting 2013, 364, Hornsby 2001, 129, Schlenker 2007, 238, Hay 2013, 455). For any given slur, we can also find a neutral counterpart that shares the same truth-conditional content without being a derogatory word. In other words, the derogatory dimension of slurs seems independent or detachable from their truth-conditional content. For instance, "Chinese" is the neutral word that seems to share the referent of "chink" without sharing its derogatory dimension. "Black people" has the same descriptive content as the N-word, but it is not a derogatory word.

This feature can be clarified by contrasting slurs with other kinds of words. Unlike slurs, the derogatory dimensions of many words are not independent or detachable from their truth-conditional contents. That is, they do not have neutral counterparts that share the same referents without also being derogatory. Consider general pejoratives such as "asshole," "jerk," "bitch." What is the neutral counterpart of "asshole"? It is impossible to find a word that refers to the same kind of people without being derogatory. One might be

[22] Non-propositional theories of contents are rare, but they do exist. For instance, a pure expressivist semantics of moral language might take the semantic content of "Stealing is wrong" to be an evaluative attitude against stealing, rather than a proposition.

tempted to give “mean, despicable person” as an answer. However, “mean, despicable person” itself is pejorative. It is also unclear if “mean, despicable person” really has the same referent as “asshole.”

Finally, we can summarize the question regarding this feature as follows:

(Q6) *Independence*: Why is the derogatory dimension of “chink” independent from its truth-conditional content?

2.6 Descriptive Ineffability

Another interesting feature of slurs is their *descriptive ineffability* (Hom 2010, 166, Potts 2007, 176, Whiting 2013, 365, Schlenker 2007, 239). The derogatory dimension of slurs cannot be satisfactorily paraphrased in purely descriptive, non-expressivist terms.[23] When a sentence or an utterance containing a slur is paraphrased in descriptive terms, the derogatory dimension seems lost. For instance, paraphrasing (1) “Chang is a chink” as “Chang is a Chinese and I have negative attitudes toward the Chinese” loses something in translation.[24] That is, the paraphrase ceases to be derogatory. It seems that the derogatory dimension is not retained in describing someone’s attitudes about the Chinese. This

[23] Expressivist terms are words that “express” non-cognitive attitudes such as contempt, disapproval, desires. Examples include swear words, pejoratives, and moral terms. A non-expressivist term is a term that is not conventionally used to express non-cognitive attitudes.

[24] It is tempting to paraphrase “Chang is a chink” as something like “Chang is a Chinese and the Chinese are terrible.” However, this would not be a purely descriptive paraphrase, since “terrible” is an evaluative term.

suggests that the derogatory dimension of slurs differs from the descriptive content in some way. But why is this the case? Let us label this question (Q7).

(Q7) *Descriptive Ineffability*: Why cannot the derogatory dimension of "chink" be satisfactorily paraphrased in purely descriptive terms?

Notice that descriptive ineffability does *not* mean the impossibility of describing or reporting someone's using a slur. Descriptive ineffability is merely about paraphrasing a certain element of slurs. Suppose a speaker derogates Chang by calling him "chink." It is indeed possible to describe what he has done, i.e., "He derogates Chang by calling him a 'chink.'" Descriptive ineffability does not rule out this kind of description.

Finally, I have to defend *descriptive ineffability* from the objection that it is nothing but the *independence* of slurs. Asking (Q7) why the derogatory dimension of a slur cannot be paraphrased in descriptive terms seems to be the same as asking (Q6) why the derogatory dimension is independent of its descriptive content. Therefore, there is no need to list descriptive ineffability as a different feature than independence.

My response is that *independence* and *descriptive ineffability* are two distinct features because of the theoretical possibility to have one of them without the other. In other words, question (Q6) and (Q7) are logically independent of each other. *First*, it is possible for a derogatory word to have *independence* without *descriptive ineffability*. Suppose the

derogatory dimension of “chink” is the derogatory presupposition that the Chinese are inferior. Such a presupposition is independent of the truth-conditional content but is not ineffable. *Second,* it is also possible for a derogatory word to have the feature of *descriptive ineffability* without *independence*. Slurs might be explained like thick evaluative terms such as “cowardice.” “Cowardice” does not exhibit independence, because its derogatory dimension depends on the descriptive content, such that there is no neutral counterpart for “cowardice.” In addition, it might be argued that the derogatory dimension of slurs, like thick terms, are non-cognitive attitudes such as disapprovals or displeasures. Since non-cognitive attitudes have no propositional contents, they exhibit descriptive ineffability (e.g., consider paraphrasing what is expressed by “boo!”). To sum up, independence and descriptive ineffability should be distinguished from one another. Question (Q6) and (Q7) should not be conflated together.

2.7 Perspective Dependence

Before I introduce this feature, I need to clarify my use of the term “express.” The term “express” is ambiguous between a speaker’s expressing something (e.g., what is expressed in speaker’s meaning) and a word’s expressing something (e.g., what is expressed in the semantic content). Some theories might take the derogatory dimension of a slur to be expressed by the slur itself, whereas others might take it to be expressed by the speaker,

not the word. However, I will leave the sense of "express" open to both senses, so as to remain neutral between different theories.

Now I can introduce another feature of slurs, i.e., their *perspective dependence* or *agent-centeredness*. That is, they are said to express the derogatory attitudes of the *speaker* (Hom 2010, 169, Schlenker 2007, 239, Bolinger 2015, 1, Potts 2007, 166, Hay 2013). As Potts (2007, 166) points out, "the perspective encoded in the expressive aspects of an utterance is always the speaker's." Imagine a racist speaker commenting on Chang's ethnicity by uttering (1) "Chang is a chink." This utterance expresses a negative attitude against the Chinese. But whose attitude is this negative attitude? Whose "perspective" does it reflect? The negative attitudes expressed by (1) seems to belong to the racist speaker, not others. If this is the case, we can formulate the question about this feature as follows:

(Q8) *Perspective Dependence*: Why does an utterance of "chink" express the negative attitude of the speaker, rather than others?

Slurs seem to be perspective dependent in more complicated cases. Consider an example of belief reports. Compare utterance (5) with (6).

(5) Bob believes that Chang is a chink.

(6) Bob believes that Chang is a Chinese.

If a speaker utters (6), he is merely reporting the belief of Bob. However, uttering (5) expresses a negative attitude (of his own) toward the Chinese, in addition to reporting Bob's belief. The question is: whose racist attitude does (5) bring to light? A natural reading, suggested by Hay (2013, 461), is that (5) expresses the attitudes of the speaker, not necessarily Bob's. After all, it is compatible with (5) that Bob has no negative attitudes toward the Chinese; he merely believes that Chang is Chinese. If the negative attitudes expressed are not Bob's, they belong to the speaker.[25]

2.8 Historical Variability

Slurs are said to exhibit *historical variability* (Hom 2010, 166). That is, how derogatory a slur is can change over time. On the one hand, slurs can become less derogatory or cease to be derogatory words over time. For instance, the slur "queer" used to be a very derogatory word against homosexuals. It has become less derogatory in English because it has been "appropriated" or "reclaimed" by the LGBTQ community. On the other hand, certain slurs become more derogatory over time. It has been observed that the derogatory

[25] However, this intuition has been contested. Hom (2010, 169) has proposed exceptions in which slurs do not seem to express the attitudes of the speakers. Reading "I am not prejudiced against the Chinese, but Bob believes that Chang is a chink" in a certain way, it seems to report the negative attitude of Bob, rather than the speaker's.
An adequate answer to question (Q8) should account for such a seeming exception to perspective dependence. It should either explain why there is such an exception or deny it by explaining it away. I will defend the position that slurs always express the negative attitudes of the speaker; For the details of my analysis, see 4.5.

strength of “wetback” and “beaner” has recently increased because of social and political changes in the U.S. (Hom 2010, 166).

Even neutral words can become derogatory and eventually become slurs over time. An interesting example is the Chinese word “gongzhi,” which literally translates to “public intellectuals.” This word was popularized in the early 2000s by the liberal Chinese media to describe intellectuals who engage with public issues. These intellectuals gained influence and prestige on the Chinese Internet by advocating for social progress and political reforms. However, propaganda and crackdowns led to a change in the word. Conservative media and Internet users started using “gongzhi” as a slur; they now verbally abuse public intellectuals by labeling them “gongzhi.” Consequently, this word has acquired a derogatory meaning, although it was neutral at the beginning.

The question about historical variability can be summarized as follows:

(Q9) *Historical Variability*: In virtue of what can a slur become more derogatory or less derogatory over time?

2.9 Non-Derogatory Utterances of Slurs

Theories of slurs all have to face a puzzle: if slurs are derogatory words, how is it ever possible to use them in a non-derogatory way? It has been suggested by many that, as a

tool for derogation, slurs can be used in many ways other than derogation (Jeshion 2013, 233, Diaz-Legaspe, Liu and Stainton 2019).

Here is an example to illustrate the puzzle. Compare utterance (7) and (8) of the same sentence. Imagine a situation in which a white supremacist is giving a speech about the danger of incoming Chinese immigrants. He warns the audience by uttering (8) "Chinks are coming!" In utterance (8), the speaker uses a derogatory word to say something derogatory. By contrast, imagine another situation where radical Chinese activists gather together to protest against racism. They want to show that they are not intimidated by racial oppression by chanting (7) "Chinks are coming!". The radical Chinese activists, in utterance (7), deliberately abuse the derogatory word to protest racism. Although a derogatory word is used, their utterances are not derogatory. Perhaps they are sending a rebellious message that they are not afraid of the oppression imposed on them. However, a puzzle remains to be solved: how is it even possible to use a derogatory word in a non-derogatory way? If "chink" is a derogatory word, why is (7) not as derogatory as (8)?

(7) Chinks are coming! (Chanted by radical Chinese activists in a rally against racism)

(8) Chinks are coming! (uttered by a white supremacist in a speech against Chinese immigrant)

Some readers might be confused by my example of non-derogatory utterance. How can utterance (7) be non-derogatory given that it still seems problematic in certain ways? Isn't the so-called "non-derogatory utterance" simply relabeling appropriation of slurs? Therefore, I need to make two clarifications. First, claiming that utterance (7) is non-derogatory is not to say that it is unproblematic. My analysis does not deny that such non-derogatory usages can be bad or harmful. Non-derogatory uses of slurs can still be offensive (see § 2.3 and § 4.4). Their offensiveness may be harmful by causing emotional turmoil for the victims of oppression. Utterance (7) may be problematic for reasons such as offensiveness, but it is not problematic because of being derogatory. Even if utterance (7) should be denounced, it should not be denounced for the same reason that utterance (8) should be denounced. Second, my examples of non-derogatory uses of slurs are often described as "appropriation of slurs." However, the term "appropriation" is ambiguous between two senses. Non-derogatory uses of slurs are cases of "appropriation" only in one sense. I will elaborate on this in the following section.

Given these considerations, I shall introduce a question concerning the non-derogatory utterances of slurs:

(Q10) *Non-derogatory Utterance*: How can an utterance of a slur (e.g., "chinks are coming") be non-derogatory if the slur is a derogatory word?

2.10 Appropriation of Slurs

Before introducing this feature, I have to define my usage of the term "meaning" and "semantic." I am *not* endorsing the view that "semantic" and "meaning" concern only the truth-conditional content of an expression. Therefore, when I discuss the "semantic" features or the "meaning" of slurs, I do not limit them to the truth-conditional, propositional content of slurs. In contrast, my position on the semantic-pragmatic boundary can be called "the type view" (Ezcurdia and Stainton 2013). By "semantics," I mean the study of meanings of the *type* of an expression, whereas pragmatics studies the utterances or tokens of expressions in contexts. When I talk about the "meaning" of an expression, I mean what is expressed by (or assigned to) the *type* of a linguistic expression. The type view would include non-truth-conditional elements into meaning. For instance, the derogatory dimension of the type of a slur could be a part of its meaning, even if it did not affect the truth condition. Another example is "hello." Its meaning includes the use of greeting people, which is associated with the type of the word. Therefore, its meaning consists of something non-truth-conditional. Since this dissertation is not about the semantics-pragmatics boundary, I will leave this view to be defended in other papers. Clarifying my terminology should be enough for defining the features of slurs.

A crucial phenomenon usually related to historical variability and non-derogatory uses is the *appropriation* or *reclamation* of slurs (Hom 2008, 427, Jeshion 2013, 233). However, the term "appropriation" or "reclamation" is ambiguous between two distinct

senses. I shall draw a distinction between the *semantic appropriation* and *pragmatic appropriation* of slurs.

The *semantic appropriation* of a slur happens when the victims of slurs manage to take back the word by changing its meaning into something less derogatory. Consequently, the word *itself* becomes less derogatory, regardless of how people use it. This is a semantic change in the meaning of slurs over time: hence, "semantic appropriation" or "semantic reclamation." The typical example of this is the slur "queer." Originally used to describe homosexuals who were perceived to be strange and odd, this word became a slur for them as early as the 19th century. In the 1980s, LGBTQ communities began to reclaim or appropriate this slur. Homosexual people started to embrace this word as a distinct symbol of their non-conformity to heterosexual norms. Consequently, the meaning of "queer" started to shift toward a neutral meaning (even though its referent remained the same). According to Oxford English Dictionary, "although originally chiefly derogatory, since the late 1980s it has been used as a neutral or positive term, originally by some homosexuals."[26]

The *pragmatic appropriation* of a slur is the phenomenon whereby the group targeted by a slur merely uses it in a non-derogatory way, for purposes such as showing camaraderie or pride. Unlike semantic appropriation, the pragmatically appropriated slur remains a derogatory word; what becomes non-derogatory is a particular usage in a specific context.

[26] "queer, n.2". OED Online. July 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156235?result=1&rskey=A1xHUU& (accessed September 05, 2018).

This would be analogous to a speaker's deliberately calling a dog a "cat"; the term "cat" still means cats, even if it is used to refer to a dog. This kind of appropriation is a pragmatic phenomenon, rather than a semantic one. An example of pragmatic appropriation might be the N-word; it is sometimes used in a non-derogatory way within the African-American community as a sign of solidarity and the shared history of oppression (Jeshion 2013, 233). As Randall Kennedy (2003) has observed, this slur has also been used for compliments, showing affection, and even showing respect within the African American community. An example from Kennedy (2003, 30) is "James Brown is a straight-up n**ger." Despite these non-derogatory usages, the N-word remains undoubtedly a derogatory word.

Despite the difference between semantic and pragmatic appropriation, these two are still related in a way. That is, semantic appropriation can happen as a result of a pattern of pragmatic appropriations. As the example of "queer" shows, a slur might cease to be a derogatory word because the linguistic community has been using it in a non-derogatory way regularly. This relation is not mysterious from the meta-semantic point of view. It is merely a case of how changes in uses of a word result in the change in the meaning.

After disambiguating "appropriation" into two senses, it is clear that appropriation is not an independent phenomenon; both semantic and pragmatic appropriation collapse into other features of slurs ultimately. First, semantic appropriation is no more than an instance of *historical variability*. In semantic appropriation, a slur has been "appropriated" such that it becomes less derogatory. Therefore, an explanation of historical variability automatically

explains how slurs can be semantically appropriated. Second, pragmatic appropriation is a case of *non-derogatory utterances* of slurs. In pragmatic appropriation, a slur remains a derogatory word. However, the utterance of that slur ceases to derogatory, because of a certain pragmatic mechanism. This is the same puzzle as the one introduced in 2.9, which concerns how the derogatory word "chink" could be used in non-derogatory utterances.

Because of this, the appropriation of slurs is not an independent phenomenon. I will not raise question specifically for appropriation. Explaining this feature is simply to answer question (Q9) and question (Q10).

2.11 Non-Displaceability

One of the most crucial features of slurs is their *non-displaceability* or *scopelessness*. Slurs seem to make the whole sentences derogatory even when embedded within the scope of connectives like negations and conditionals (Hom 2010, 168, Croom 2011, 345, Schlenker 2007, 238, Potts 2007, 166, Bolinger 2015). The feature of being derogatory seems to "project through" the scope of connectives. For example, (1) "Chang is a chink" is no doubt derogatory. Embedding it within the scope of a negation or a conditional makes the whole sentence derogatory.[27] This point is clear from the following examples:

[27] An embedded slur makes a *sentence* a derogatory sentence. Whether the *utterance* of the sentence is derogatory depends on other factors.

(1) Chang is a chink

(3) Chang is not a chink

(9) If Chang is a chink, he celebrates Lunar New Year.

Notice that not all expressivist words are non-displaceable. Compare the examples above with the examples of general pejoratives below. Saying that (10) "Chang is an asshole" is surely derogatory. However, embedding the general pejorative "asshole" within the scope of connectives does not make the whole sentence derogatory, at least in the following examples. Unlike (10), (11) seems to deny the negative attitudes about Chang. Similarly, (12) does not express anything derogatory toward Chang; it is compatible with "Chang is not an asshole!"

(10) Chang is an asshole.

(11) Chang is not an asshole.

(12) If Chang is an asshole, he celebrates Lunar New Year.

Given the phenomenon illustrated above, we can summarize the question about non-displaceability as follows:

(Q11) *Non-Displaceability*: Why does a sentence containing a slur (e.g., "chink") remain derogatory, even if the slur is embedded within the scope of connectives?

2.12 The Kaplanian Inference Puzzle

Slurs give rise to a *Kaplanian inference puzzle* or *the deduction puzzle*, in which slurs seem to affect the course of inferences (Hom 2010, 167, Sennet and Copp 2015, 1087, Kaplan unpublished). In his unpublished manuscripts, Kaplan proposes various sample inferences in which expressives such as "damn" seem to affect the validity of inferences. This motivates him to incorporate uses into semantics and embrace a broader notion of validity. His examples have been extended to slurs. Slurs appear to affect the validity of inferences in a similar way. These examples are labeled the "Kaplanian inference puzzle" instead of "Kaplan's inference puzzle" because they are not the original examples Kaplan used.

I shall illustrate this puzzle with my examples below. Compare inference (13) with (14). Notice that the inferences are made from sentences to sentences, not from propositions to propositions. A person who accepts the premise of inference (13) is not committed to accepting its conclusion. For instance, a non-racist person might agree that "The Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year," but find the conclusion, "the chinks celebrate Lunar New Year," objectionable. Therefore, inference (13) seems "invalid" in some sense. By contrast, someone who accepts the premise of inference (14) is committed to accepting its conclusion. If he agrees that "the chinks celebrate Lunar New Year" for whatever reason,

he should also agree that “the Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year.” Inference (14) seems like a logically valid argument.

(13) The Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year.

Therefore, the chinks celebrate Lunar New Year.

(14) The chinks celebrate Lunar New Year.

Therefore, the Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year.

Here is a caveat on the notion of validity. It might be objected that what the two examples illustrate is not validity or invalidity. This is because validity is nothing but the preservation of truth, and despite its appearance, (13) is valid because the truth of the premise guarantees the truth of the conclusion.

Here is my defense of the Kaplanian inference puzzle: notwithstanding the verbal dispute over whether it should be described in terms of “validity,” this is a genuine feature of slurs that is worth investigating. If it should not be labeled as “validity,” then we can still study it under labels such as “schmadity.” Acknowledging this feature is not to deny the validity of (13) in the sense of truth-preservation. Despite its “validity” in the traditional sense, inference (13) is unacceptable or defective in a certain way.

I shall reformulate the question over the Kaplanian inference puzzle as follows. This formulation presents the feature in a neutral way that does not involve controversial terms such as "validity."

(Q12) *Kaplanian inference puzzle*: Why is someone not committed to accepting the conclusion "The chinks celebrate Lunar New Year," if he accepts the premise "The Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year"?

2.13 Self-Defeating Sentences

Simply containing slurs can make certain sentences self-defeating. I shall call this "the puzzle of self-defeating sentences." Consider sentences (15) and (16) below, as well as examples like "Glory to the chinks!", and "I apologize for my discrimination against the chinks." Intuitively, something is wrong with them; these sentences seem to be self-defeating or self-inconsistent in a certain way. Whatever the literal uses of these sentences are, these uses cannot be fulfilled satisfactorily. This is not to say that they cannot be used *at all*. Self-defeating sentences can be used, but not in a satisfactory, literal way. When they are used, the hearers tend to resolve their inconsistency by hearing them as sarcastic or non-literal. When a speaker utters "Praise the chinks," he is likely to be interpreted to be either sarcastic in praising or sarcastic in derogation. If there is a kind of inconsistency in those self-defeating sentences, what is it?

(15) Praise the chinks!

(16) I apologize for my discrimination against the chinks.

I shall label the question of this puzzle as follows:

(Q13) *Self-defeating Sentences*: Why does "chink" make the sentence "Praise the chinks!" self-defeating?

One might deny this feature of slurs by rejecting the inconsistency in the so-called "self-defeating sentences." There can be two ways to reject it. I will defend this feature from these two objections.

First, consider a counterexample, "Praise chinks for their wonderful food culture!" It might be argued that there is no inconsistency in this "self-defeating sentence." This is because nothing is inconsistent for a racist speaker to derogate the Chinese overall but praise their food culture in particular. Derogating a group is compatible with praising a particular aspect of the group, and vice versa. I agree that this example does not exhibit inconsistency. However, this cannot serve as a counterexample because the incompatibility in my examples is between derogating the Chinese and praising the Chinese, not a

particular aspect of them such as the food culture. It is still impossible to use sentence (15) to both derogate the Chinese and praise them overall.

Second, it might be argued that sentence (15) "Praise the chinks!" itself exhibits no inconsistency in certain contexts. Therefore, praising the Chinese and derogating the Chinese can be compatible in (15). Imagine a Chinese-food-loving racist commenting on Chinese restaurants with "We would not have these wonderful restaurants without their amazing food! So, praise the Chinks!"[28] However, I insist that (the type of) sentence (15) itself remains inconsistent. Despite this, the token utterance of (15) in this context sounds consistent because of pragmatic mechanisms such as pragmatic enrichment. The hearer interprets it as derogating the Chinese overall while praising their food culture, narrowing the content of the praise from the Chinese to their food culture. This could be analogous to hearing the inconsistent sentence "Yesterday was rainy and sunny." It may sound consistent in certain contexts, because the hearer may interpret it as "Yesterday was rainy for a while and sunny for a while," narrowing the concept from "raining all day" to "raining for a while."

[28] Thanks to Robert Statinton for the counterexample.

2.14 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the main features of slurs. These features are analyzed and reformulated into a list of questions for theories of slurs. It turns out that some features involve more than one question and some features collapse into other features. It is therefore helpful to list the questions introduced so far. Readers can come back to this section for reference.

(Q1) *Type Derogatory Power:* In virtue of what is a slur like "chink" a derogatory word?

(Q2) *Token Derogatory Power:* In virtue of what is the utterance of a slur (e.g., "Chang is a chink") a derogatory utterance?

(Q3) *Type Offensiveness*: In virtue of what is a slur like "chink" an offensive word?

(Q4) *Token Offensiveness*: In virtue of what is the utterance of a slur (e.g., "Chang is a chink") an offensive utterance?

(Q5) *Truth-Conditional Contribution*: Does a slur (e.g., "chink") make the same contribution to the truth-conditional content as its neutral counterpart (e.g., "Chinese")?

(Q6) *Independence*: Why is the derogatory dimension of "chink" independent from its truth-conditional content?

(Q7) *Descriptive Ineffability*: Why cannot the derogatory dimension of "chink" be satisfactorily paraphrased in purely descriptive terms?

(Q8) *Perspective Dependence*: Why does an utterance of "chink" express the negative attitude of the speaker, rather than others?

(Q9) *Historical Variability*: In virtue of what can a slur become more derogatory or less derogatory over time?

(Q10) *Non-derogatory Utterance*: How can an utterance of a slur (e.g., "chinks are coming") be non-derogatory if the slur is a derogatory word?

(Q11) *Non-Displaceability*: Why does a sentence containing a slur (e.g., "chink") remain derogatory, even if the slur is embedded within the scope of connectives?

(Q12) *Kaplanian inference puzzle*: Why is someone not committed to accepting the conclusion "The chinks celebrate Lunar New Year," if he accepts the premise "The Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year"?

(Q13) *Self-defeating Sentences: Why does* "chink" make the sentence "Praise the chinks!" self-defeating?

My illocutionary force indicator theory of slurs answers these questions from the approach of speech act theory. It is, therefore, necessary to introduce the basic notions of speech act theory in the following chapter.

3 Preliminaries on Illocutionary Acts

The last chapter surveyed the features of slurs and corresponding questions about them. The best approach to these questions, I believe, is to explain slurs from the perspective of speech act theory. That is, slurs such as “chink” should be understood by their use to perform illocutionary acts, specifically, to derogate people. They are comparable to illocutionary force indicators like “I promise,” the paradigmatic use of which is to make promises.

However, questions remain to be answered before developing an illocutionary force indicator theory of slurs: What are illocutionary forces (e.g., promising, asserting, derogating, etc.)? What do force indicators like “I promise” do? When I perform an illocutionary act (e.g., promising to give you money), how is the illocutionary force determined, especially by force indicators like “I promise”? It is, therefore, necessary for this chapter to introduce the theoretical background of speech act theory and clarify the theoretical framework of my illocutionary force indicator theory.

These questions will be answered in the following sections. Section 3.1 introduces the basic notions of speech act theory such as illocutionary acts, their illocutionary force, felicity conditions, etc. In section 3.2, I will introduce illocutionary force indicators and propositional indicators. I will show their roles in determining the illocutionary force and the propositional content of illocutionary acts. In section 3.3, I will address how illocutionary force indicators help to determine the illocutionary force of utterances. My

view is that force indicators provide the default interpretation in interpreting illocutionary force. It can hence be labeled “the default interpretation view.”

3.1 Basics of Illocutionary Acts

“Speech acts” are the acts we perform with language. It is no surprise that language is used to do lots of things, rather than merely describing things. We say “Hello!” to greet people and say “Can I have a coffee?” to order drinks. We can also utter words to amuse people (e.g., telling a joke) or just to pronounce certain words (e.g., trying to pronounce the word “illocutionary”). Although these speech acts are all performed with language, they fall into different categories.

Austin (1962, 94) distinguishes three kinds of speech acts, i.e., locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. First, locutionary acts are acts of saying something. Austin’s example is a speaker’s saying “Shoot her!”; He means “to photograph” by “shoot” and Maria by “her.” Locutionary acts can be further divided into phonetic acts (i.e., the act of producing certain noise), phatic acts (i.e., acts of uttering words and sentences in a language), and rhetic acts (acts of meaning and referring by those words). For instance, “He said ‘I shall be there’” reports a phatic act whereas “He meant that he would be there” reports a rhetic act. Second, illocutionary acts are the acts of doing something in saying something. Consider Austin’s example again. In saying “Shoot her,” the speaker performs the illocutionary act of urging the hearer to photograph her. Further

examples of illocutionary acts include ordering, warning, or undertaking, etc. Illocutionary acts are taxonomized by their "illocutionary force." For example, all illocutionary acts of promising, despite their propositional contents, share the same illocutionary force of promising. Third, perlocutionary acts are acts of doing something by saying something. Saying something sometimes produces effects on the thoughts, feelings, actions of the hearers (perlocutionary effects). The act of producing these effects by saying something are called "perlocutionary acts." Typical perlocutionary acts include convincing, persuading, and deterring, etc. In Austin's example of saying "Shoot her," the perlocutionary act is the act of persuading the hearer to photograph her.

Here is one question I have to address: what is the relation between utterances and illocutionary acts? Suppose I promise to give you money by uttering (17) "I promise that I will give you money." Is the act of promising identical with the utterance? Or is the illocutionary act something distinct from the utterance, e.g., an effect caused by the utterance? As I have said in section 2.2, I take an utterance to be an act of producing a token of a sentence or other linguistic expressions. Therefore, an utterance corresponds to a "locutionary act" in Austin's framework (except for practicing, performing, etc., where the speaker does not mean what she says). As a locutionary act, an utterance of a sentence, produced in the right circumstances, can be an illocutionary act. In other words, that utterance is token-identical with an illocutionary act. For example, when I promise to give you money by uttering (17) "I promise that I will give you money" under the right context,

there is one single act under different descriptions. The same act can be both described as an utterance of a sentence (e.g., Chang says "I promise that I will give you money") or described as an illocutionary act of promising (e.g., Chang promises to give you money). This answer should be enough for clarifying the relation between utterances and illocutionary acts. I will leave it undefended since this dissertation is not about philosophy of action.

(17) I promise that I will give you money.

Having introduced illocutionary acts, we can further distinguish two components of them. A distinction between *illocutionary force* and *propositional content* is often drawn within the structure of illocutionary acts (Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 1). The distinction between force and content can be shown by the variation of illocutionary acts. For instance, promising that I will give you money has the same propositional content as predicting that I will give you money, but they differ in illocutionary forces. Similarly, illocutionary acts can share illocutionary force but not propositional contents. Promising that I will give you money has the same force as promising that John will come. The difference between the two lies in the propositional content.

A few things should be noticed about the "propositional content" of illocutionary acts. First, this term, used in speech act theory, should not be confused with "semantic contents"

(or the "truth-conditional content") of sentences or utterances. The term "propositional content" is used to describe a property of an illocutionary act, rather than a property of a sentence or an utterance. For example, the proposition that I will give you money can be the "propositional content" of my act promising to give you money, but not the "semantic content" of (17) "I promise that I will give you money." Second, the "propositional contents" of illocutionary acts, despite their name, do not have to be fully propositional (Searle 1969, 30). For instance, welcoming someone by saying "welcome!" does not contain a proposition as its content. After all, it is the people, not propositions, that are welcomed.

The next step, after distinguishing between force and content, is to give an analysis of the illocutionary force of derogation. Searle and Vanderveken (1985) analyze illocutionary force by describing its seven elements, i.e., illocutionary point, degree of strength of the illocutionary point, mode of achievement, propositional content condition, preparatory condition, sincerity condition, and degree of strength of sincerity condition.

I will explain the seven elements of illocutionary force in turn. First, an *illocutionary point* characterizes the purpose essential to a type of illocutionary act. For instance, the illocutionary point of making a promise to do something is to commit the speaker to do it. Second, the *strength of illocutionary point* differentiates types of illocutionary acts that share the same point with different strength. For instance, requesting someone to do something is weaker than insisting that he does it, even though both share the same point

of committing someone to do something. Third, *mode of achievement* specifies the ways the illocutionary point has to be achieved. A good example of this is testifying. Unlike making an assertion, one can testify only if the mode of achievement is satisfied, i.e., he has the position of a witness. Fourth, *propositional content condition* determines the kind of propositional content an illocutionary act can have. A promise has a proposition as its content. However, its propositional content condition requires the proposition to be about acts in the future, not acts in the past. Fifth, *preparatory conditions* are the conditions necessary for the successful and non-defective performance of illocutionary acts. For instance, a preparatory condition of promising requires the promised act to be in the interest of the hearer. Therefore, promising a hearer to do something bad for him would be a successful but defective illocutionary act. Sixth, the *sincerity condition* distinguishes sincere illocutionary act from insincere ones. Sincere illocutionary acts often require the speaker to have corresponding psychological states. The sincerity condition of a promise is that the speaker must intend to uphold it. Finally, *degree of strength of sincerity conditions* differentiates the strength of psychological states expressed by illocutionary acts. For instance, sincerely imploring requires a stronger desire than sincerely requesting.

The successful and non-defective performance of illocutionary acts requires the satisfaction of certain conditions (Austin 1962, Bach and Harnish 1979, 55, Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 12). These conditions are commonly labeled *"felicity conditions.*" Failed or defective illocutionary acts are called *infelicitous* acts. Illocutionary acts can be

infelicitous in two ways (Austin 1962, 16). First, they can be a case of *misfire*, in which the speaker attempts but fails at performing the illocutionary acts. For instance, actually excommunicating someone from the church by saying "I hereby excommunicate you" requires the speaker to hold a certain office in the Catholic church, e.g., the pope. Therefore, a non-Catholic person's saying "I hereby excommunicate you" would be a case of misfire, i.e., a failed attempt of excommunication. Let us call the conditions for successful illocutionary acts without misfire "*success conditions*." The success condition of excommunication, for example, is that the speaker holds a certain office in the Catholic church. Second, infelicitous illocutionary acts can be an instance of *abuse*, where the illocutionary act is successfully performed but is still defective. Suppose I succeed at promising that I will give you money, but I intend to break the promise. This is a successful but insincere promise. Although the success condition is met, the illocutionary act is still defective and unhappy. Let us call the conditions for the non-defective performance *non-defectiveness conditions*. In the case of promise, non-defectiveness conditions require the speaker's intention to keep the promise.

3.2 Illocutionary Force Indicators and Propositional Indicators

Searle (1969, 30) draws a distinction between *illocutionary force indicators* (or "illocutionary indicating devices") and *propositional indicators*. These two kinds of syntactical elements contribute to the illocutionary act in different ways. Illocutionary force

indicators (or illocutionary force indicating devices) explicitly show the illocutionary force of an utterance, in other words, how the propositional content of an utterance should be taken (Searle 1969, 30, Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 2). Propositional indicators, on the other hand, contribute to the propositional content of an utterance. Consider again (17) "[I promise [that I will give you money]]."[29] The propositional indicator "[that I will give you money]" provides the propositional content of this utterance, whereas the force indicator "[I promise]" shows that this should be taken as a promise, not as a confession.

The term "propositional indicator" does not mean that the propositional content of an illocutionary act is always propositional. A propositional indicator can contribute a non-propositional content to the illocutionary act. For instance, what the propositional indicator "John" in "I hereby denounce John" contributes is merely a person, not a proposition. This is because the content of denouncing John is simply a person, rather than a proposition. It would be weird to denounce an abstract object like a proposition.

There is a large variety of force indicators (Austin 1962, 73, Searle 1969, 30). The most common ones are the explicit performative formulas such as "I promise," "I apologize," and "I urge." Austin takes these to be the most successful force indicators but not the only indicators. He introduces additional force indicators. First, moods are also force indicators. The imperative mood indicates the force of a command. For example,

[29] Brackets are added to show the structure of the sentence.

"shoot her!" can have the illocutionary force of an order or command. Second, intonation encodes illocutionary force. Depending on the intonation contour of (the type of) this sentence, "It is going to charge" can encode the illocutionary force of a warning, question or a protest. Third, adding adverbial phrases like "probably" can modify the illocutionary force of indicators like "I shall." Fourth, connecting particles such as "still," "therefore," "although" can provide the illocutionary force of insisting, concluding, conceding, etc. Fifth, Austin (1962, 76) even includes non-linguistic illocutionary force indicators, i.e., "accompanies of the utterance." These include gesture and actions like winks, shrugging, and frowns. Finally, context or "circumstance of the utterance" can indicate illocutionary force. For instance, the health of the speaker may affect the illocutionary force of "I shall die someday."

3.3 How Force Indicators Determine Illocutionary Force

An obvious problem for speech act theory is to explain the relationship between force indicators and illocutionary force. What role do force indicators play in determining the illocutionary force of utterances? When I am making a promise, how does the illocutionary force of promising come from force indicators like "I promise"?

Answering this question is not easy. Consider a naïve answer: if X is a force indicator for the illocutionary act F, every utterance that contains X has the illocutionary force F. For instance, the imperative mood is a force indicator of ordering. Consequently, an utterance

of an imperative sentence has the illocutionary force of ordering; uttering "shoot her!" is the illocutionary act of ordering someone to photograph someone. However, this answer does not stand up to scrutiny. As Alston (2000, 174) points out, imperative mood is insufficient to determine the exact illocutionary force of an utterance; uttering "shoot her!" could be ordering, imploring, urging, or advising that someone is to be photographed (or no illocutionary act at all). There seems to be a gap between the force indicators and the illocutionary force of utterances; the latter is underdetermined by the former. I shall label this "the gap problem," and formulate it as follows:

The gap problem: What role does an illocutionary force indicator play in determining the illocutionary force of an utterance containing the indicator?

Austin's description of the role of force indicators is rather vague (Austin 1962, 69). His view is that the job of explicit force indicators is to make the illocutionary force explicit. For instance, "I promise" makes the illocutionary force of promise explicit in utterance (17) "I promise that I will give you money." Nonetheless, one might wonder what is to make the force explicit. Austin emphasizes that to "make explicit" is not to describe or state what one is doing. He draws an analogy to conventional acts such as bowing before someone. It is unclear if this bowing should be taken as an act of paying obedience, or just observing flowers on the ground. However, further acts like raising hats or saying "Salaam" make it

explicit how the bowing should be taken. Notice that raising hats or saying “Salaam” does not describe what the act is. By analogy, the indicator “I promise” does not describe the act of promising; it shows that the utterance should be taken as a promise. Unfortunately, Austin left “making explicit” largely unexplained, except that it is not describing or stating the act.

My answer to the gap problem is that force indicators provide the default for interpreting illocutionary force. I shall label this view “the default interpretation view” of force indicators. Upon understanding the utterance of a sentence, the hearer starts interpreting its illocutionary force and eventually understands what illocutionary act it is. The mere appearance of a force indicator provides the initial (but defeasible) interpretation of the illocutionary force, without taking other factors into considerations. For example, utterances of the same sentence “Shoot her!” all contain a force indicator, i.e., the imperative mood. The force indicator guides the hearer to the initial hypothesis that the utterance is an illocutionary act of telling the hearer to photograph Maria. If there are no further contextual factors to defeat this interpretation, the utterance is understood to have the illocutionary force of telling.

Nonetheless, the default interpretation alone does not determine the end result; utterances often end up as having illocutionary forces that deviate from the default interpretation provided by the indicators. For instance, the default interpretation of “Shoot her!” as telling the hearer to photograph her may be defeated by further contextual factors.

The hearer may infer that it is an act of ordering because the speaker is invoking his authority in saying so. Similarly, the hearer may interpret the utterance as imploring him to photograph her, because only the hearer has the right to decide. The hearer may decide that the utterance does not have an illocutionary force of directives (e.g., telling, urging, ordering, imploring) at all, on the ground that the speaker is not speaking literally (e.g., the speaker is joking or performing). Although force indicators do not determine illocutionary force by themselves, at least they provide the default interpretation in the process.

Here is a caveat on my terminology "default interpretation." I am using this term in an epistemic sense. The "default interpretation" could mean a nomic notion or an epistemic notion. In the nomic sense, the "default interpretation" of an utterance is the interpretation we are psychologically disposed to reach upon hearing the utterance. It is described and governed by psychological laws, hence a "nomic" notion. However, in the epistemic sense, the default interpretation is the one the hearer *should* accept, until countervailing evidence appears. It is a normative notion, rather than merely a descriptive one. I believe that interpreting illocutionary force is an epistemic process of inferring the illocutionary force from the limited evidence. When I claim that force indicators provide the default interpretation, I mean they serve as primary evidence to form the initial hypothesis in inferring about the illocutionary force. Again, I shall leave this view undefended, since I am not proposing a particular speech act theory.

The default interpretation view is nothing new in the literature. It has been suggested by many philosophers. Alston (2000, 186) calls the default interpretation of illocutionary force the *matching illocutionary act type*. Alston holds that for each sentence, there is always a type of illocutionary act that is made completely explicit by the meaning of the sentence. In other words, if the speaker utters a sentence directly and literally, the hearer can know the type of illocutionary act the speaker is performing, just by knowing the meaning of the sentence. This type is *the matching illocutionary act type* of the sentence. Technically, the matching illocutionary act type is provided by the sentence, rather than illocutionary force indicators. Nonetheless, Alston would agree that force indicators determine the illocutionary force of the matching illocutionary act since the force indicators are components of sentences. Another example of the default interpretation view comes from Stainton (1999, 76). He uses examples of force indicators like the interrogative mood.[30] What is the role of the interrogative mood of "Is it raining?" in determining the illocutionary force of utterances of it? Stainton argues that the illocutionary force of the utterance is simply determined by the interrogative mood *ceteris paribus*. That is, the utterances (or tokens) of "Is it raining?" have the illocutionary force of asking by default, if there are no defeating factors. Despite the details, both Stainton and Alston can be taken as proponents of the default interpretation view.

[30] The interrogative mood can also be called "the interrogative force" of a sentence. I shall avoid this term because it can be easily confused with illocutionary force.

3.4 Summary

To illustrate the background of the force indicator theory, I have introduced the basic notions of speech act theory in this chapter. Illocutionary acts are the acts of doing something in saying something (§ 3.1). An illocutionary act has two components: an illocutionary force and a propositional content. Successful performance of illocutionary acts requires the satisfaction of their felicity conditions. Illocutionary force indicators are the words that determine illocutionary force to illocutionary acts, while propositional indicators can provide propositional contents to them (§ 3.2). Illocutionary force indicators determine the illocutionary force by providing the default interpretation (§ 3.3). These basic notions of speech act theory will enable me to develop the force indicator theory in detail.

4 The Illocutionary Force Indicator Theory of Slurs

The force indicator theory of slurs stems from this idea: the key to understanding slurs is not so much what messages they communicate, but what they are *used to do* in addition. Slurs do not merely describe or represent their targets in certain ways; they are used to insult, derogate, or abuse the targets. This is in line with the spirit of speech act theory. To capture the meaning of words like "hello" and "goodbye," the best way is to study their corresponding speech acts, e.g., greeting and bidding farewell. By analogy, slurs are best explained in terms of the illocutionary acts they are used to perform.

The goal of this chapter is to develop the details of the illocutionary force indicator theory of slurs. Slurs are analogous to illocutionary force indicators like "I promise," the job of which is to perform the illocutionary act of promising. Similarly, the force indicator theory takes slurs to be illocutionary force indicators of derogation. For instance, the use of the slur "chink" is to perform the illocutionary act of derogating the Chinese. Furthermore, derogation is a family of declarative illocutionary acts, which includes acts such as insulting, belittling, disparaging, demeaning, etc. The illocutionary point of these acts is to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior status to the target. For instance, to derogate the Chinese is to enforce a racist norm in which the Chinese are deprived of the right to be respected, the freedom from discrimination, etc.[31] In addition to being force

[31] For the details of enforcing norms and normative status, see section 4.1.

indicators, slurs are also propositional indicators. They contribute to propositions, and their contributions are identical with their neutral counterparts. For instance, asserting "Chang is a chink" has the same truth-condition as asserting "Chang is a Chinese." These details will be specified in the following section.

This chapter will proceed as follows: I will develop the force indicator theory of slurs in section 4.1; they are illocutionary force indicators of derogation. For example, the slur "chink" makes the illocutionary force of derogation explicit in the utterance "Chang is a chink." In addition, slurs are also propositional indicators that make the same truth-conditional contribution as their neutral counterparts, e.g., "Chang is a chink" is true iff "Chang is Chinese" is true. However, this force indicator theory requires an explication of the nature of derogation. In section 4.1, I will analyze the illocutionary acts of derogation in terms of the seven components of its illocutionary force. These acts enforce a norm which assigns an inferior normative status to the target. After clarifying what kind of force indicator slurs are (§4.1) and what illocutionary act derogation is (§4.1), further questions arise. How do slurs as force indicators determine the illocutionary force of derogation? In section 4.3, I will show that slurs are neither necessary nor sufficient for derogation. However, slurs as force indicators provide the default illocutionary force of derogation. That is, utterances of slurs are interpreted as derogation unless defeating factors occur. Do slurs play other roles in addition to being illocutionary force indicators? In section 4.4, I will address a perlocutionary effect of slurs, i.e., their offensiveness. I will distinguish the

perlocutionary effects of slurs from their illocutionary force. Finally, is the force indicator theory a good theory for explaining the features of slurs introduced in chapter 2? In section 4.5, I will apply my theory to answer questions about the features of slurs. Take *descriptive ineffability* for instance. (Q7) Why cannot the derogatory dimension of "chink" be satisfactorily paraphrased in descriptive terms? For the force indicator theory, this is because the derogatory dimension is an illocutionary force, which cannot be paraphrased into propositional contents. These answers should illustrate the explanatory power of the force indicator theory.

4.1 Slurs are Illocutionary Force Indicators of Derogation

An illocutionary approach to slurs has already been suggested by several theorists, even though it has never been explicitly developed (Hornsby 2001, 140, Richard 2008, 12, Anderson and Lepore 2013, 352). According to Hornsby (2001, 130), slurs are useless in the sense that non-bigots cannot accept anything done by using slurs. To explain slurs' uselessness, "there is nowhere else to turn than to the kinds of speech act made by those who use them—speech acts of illocutionary kinds, as we have seen, such as vilifying, snubbing, expressing derision, and so on" (Hornsby 2001, 140). Moreover, Richard (2008, 12) holds that "What makes a word a slur is that it is used to do certain things, that it has (in Austinian jargon) a certain illocutionary potential." Anderson and Lepore (2013, 352) have mentioned a "performative view" of slurs, which "suggest a slur's function is a part

of its meaning; that is, that slurs are performatives whose utterances constitute a pernicious action." My force indicator theory is inspired by these early explorations.

Another precursor of the force indicator theory is "the register view" of slurs, which I endorsed in an earlier article (Diaz-Legaspe, Liu and Stainton 2019).[32] As a sociolinguistic concept, "register" refers to a way of speaking in particular situations. For instance, "tummy" is the word for stomach when people talk to children; therefore, it belongs to the "childish" register. Likewise, slurs are words used to talk in a derogatory way; they belong to the "derogatory" register. What differentiates "chink" from "Chinese" is its use for the derogatory register, not any unique descriptive or expressivist content. The force indicator theory inherits this use-theoretic approach to slurs, with a different understanding of the use of slurs. Their use is to derogate people, in addition to speaking in a derogatory way.

Given this background of speech act theories, I am ready to formulate the *illocutionary force indicator theory of slurs*. The illocutionary force indicator theory takes slurs to play two roles; slurs are both illocutionary force indicators as well as propositional indicators. I shall define the force indicator theory as the conjunction of the following two theses:

[32] For a detailed comparison between my force indicator theory and the register theory, see section 6.6.

(T1) *The Illocutionary Force Indicator Theory of Slurs:* 1) Slurs are illocutionary force indicators of the illocutionary acts of derogation; 2) they are also propositional indicators that make the same truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterparts.

The first thesis says that slurs are illocutionary force indicators of the illocutionary acts of derogation. Whenever a slur is used in the right circumstances, it makes the illocutionary force of derogation explicit in an utterance. That is, the illocutionary force of the utterance is interpreted as derogation by default unless there are defeating factors.[33] In certain contexts, this utterance counts as an illocutionary act of derogation. Consider the example of sentence (1). If a racist utters (1) in a literal way, he is derogating the Chinese people (in addition to his assertion that Chang is Chinese).

(1) Chang is a chink

(2) Chang is a Chinese

(3) Chang is not a chink

(4) Chang is not a Chinese

[33] For how force indicators help to determine illocutionary force, see section 3.3 and section 4.3.

The first thesis answers the two essential questions about the *derogatory power* of slurs. Question **(Q1)** asks in virtue of what a slur, such as "chink," is a derogatory word. The force indicator theory's answer to **(Q1)** is simple; slurs are derogatory words because they are illocutionary force indicators of derogation, i.e., the conventional devices to derogate people.[34] The *derogatory power* of slurs arises from their status as force indicators. For example, "chink" is a derogatory word because the use of this word is to derogate the Chinese, whereas the word "Chinese" lacks such a built-in, linguistically encoded use. In addition, the force indicator theory has no problem in answering question **(Q2)**, i.e., why is an utterance of slurs, such as "Chang is a chink," derogatory? Utterances of slurs are derogatory when they are illocutionary acts of derogation, that is, have the illocutionary force of derogation. For the purpose of introducing the force indicator theory, I will only answer question **(Q1)** and **(Q2)** for now. Other questions about slurs will be answered in section 4.5.

In addition to the first thesis, the second thesis holds that slurs are also propositional indicators. That is, they contribute to the propositional content of utterances. In particular, slurs make the *same* contribution to the proposition as their neutral counterparts. A neutral counterpart of a slur shares the referent of it without being a derogatory word, e.g.,

[34] As I have shown in section 2.2, this is not supposed to be an answer to the questions 1) "what is the definition of the term 'slur'?" and 2) "how did a slur historically become a force indicator?" These two questions are the common misreading of question **(Q1)**.

"Chinese" is the neutral counterpart of "chink."[35] For instance, sentence (1) "Chang is a chink" expresses the same proposition as sentence (2), "Chang is a Chinese," because "chink" make the same truth-conditional contribution as "Chinese." Sentence (1) and (2) share the same truth condition. If Chang were Italian, both (1) and (2) would be false.

The second thesis answers (Q5) the question of *truth conditional-contribution* (i.e., do slurs make the same truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterparts?). Its answer is "Yes. Slurs do make the same truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterparts." This is one of the many potential answers to question (Q5). I will defend this thesis in section 6.4.

Nevertheless, it is useful to contrast the second thesis with alternative answers to (Q5). Theorists of slurs have different theoretically informed intuitions about the *truth-conditional contribution*. There are *three different views*.

First, some theorists, including me, think that slurs make the same truth-conditional contribution as their neutral counterparts (Hom 2010, 169). That is, "chink" has exactly the same referent as "Chinese." Sentence (1) and (2) have the same truth condition; both are true if and only if Chang is Chinese. Sentence (1) is true, despite being derogatory. Consequently, (3) is false. My force indicator theory of slurs endorses this position.

[35] Only co-reference (and being non-derogatory) is needed to be a neutral counterpart of "chink." We can still take "Chinese" to be a neutral counterpart of "chink," even if it has a different sense or other descriptive content.

Second, other theorists believe that slurs make different contributions; it is false to predicate them of their supposed targets (Hom and May 2013, 293). No Chinese person is a chink. Despite Chang's being Chinese, (1) "Chang is a chink" is literally false. Correspondingly, (3) "Chang is not a chink" is true, rather than false or void of truth value. The intuition seems to be that slurs cannot be true of their targets because they misrepresent them in an objectionable way. We would find sentence (1) unacceptable. It is unacceptable because it is false. This intuition is supported by further explanations, which will be presented in detail in 5.1.

Third, some theorists agree that slurs make different truth-conditional contributions, but they think sentences containing slurs are neither true nor false. That is, unlike the true sentence (2), sentence (1) has no truth value at all. Similarly, (3) is neither true nor false. A proponent of this view is Richard (2008, 13). Richard's intuition is supported by the claim that to agree that (1) "Chang is a chink" is true is to agree with the racist thought expressed by (1). Since we do not agree with those racist thoughts, we cannot take (1) to be true. In addition, sentence (1) is not false. If it were false, its negation, (3) "Chang is not a chink," would be true. However, its negation is equally unacceptable, because it expresses a racist thought too. For Richard's explanation that supports this intuition, see 5.5.

After introducing the force indicator theory and its two theses, a few *quick clarifications* have to be made before I proceed. *First*, the claim that slurs are both force indicators and propositional indicators should *not* be understood as proposing that slurs

contain two syntactical components, a force indicator and a propositional indicator. For instance, the expression "damn Chinese" syntactically contains the force indicator "damn" and the propositional indicator "Chinese." My force indicator theory does not claim that slurs have two syntactical components like "damn Chinese." A slur such as "chink" is a minimal syntactical unit by itself. *Second,* the force indicator theory does not entail the ambiguity of slurs. The theory might be misunderstood as taking slurs to be ambiguous between a force indicator and a propositional indicator, e.g., "chink" *either* indicates the force of derogation *or* contributes its referent to the proposition. On the contrary, I believe that a slur is simultaneously a force indicator and a propositional indicator. *Third,* I agree that slurs can also be used in non-sentential speech acts. A potential objection against my theory is that it ignores non-sentential speech acts. This is because my examples so far are all about uttering *sentences* with slurs. However, it is indeed possible to utter a single slur instead of a whole sentence. Suppose a speaker points at a Chinese person and utters "Chinks!". I would take this to be a non-sentential speech act of both assertion and derogation. This would be analogous to making a non-sentential assertion by pointing at a Chinese person and uttering "Chinese!".

Despite these quick clarifications, I still need to address some *common worries* about the force indicator theory. These common worries often arise from certain confusions of the force indicator theory. Therefore, addressing them here helps clarify the claims of the

indicator theory. However, certain substantive objections require more than clarifications. Therefore, they will be addressed later in chapter 6.

First, it might be argued that the force indicator theory's explanation of the "derogatory power" of slurs is trivial. This is because the saying that slurs indicate the "illocutionary force of derogation" merely redescribes the feature of "derogatory power," rather than explaining it. However, this objection is based on a terminological confusion. As I have shown in section 2.2, the term "derogatory power" of slurs should not be conflated with "illocutionary force of derogation." Technically, "derogatory power" refers to a property of the types of slurs and sentences that contain them; it is not an illocutionary force. The type of word is said to have "derogatory power" simply when it is a derogatory word. By "the illocutionary force of derogation," I mean a property of particular utterances or illocutionary acts; it can be sometimes made explicit by slurs in utterances. But this illocutionary force itself is not a property of the types of slurs. Slurs do not have illocutionary forces because they are not illocutionary acts.

Second, one might worry about my claim that slurs are force indicators to derogate the target group, rather than individuals. Takes (1) "Chang is a chink" for instance. My theory holds that uttering (1) in the right circumstance is an act of derogating the Chinese. However, is not this utterance also derogating Chang, the subject of (1)? This seems to be the very point of calling Chang a "chink." How can slurs be force indicators to derogate the target groups, if they are already used to derogate individuals?

I believe that slurs derogate individuals via their group membership. Here is an analogy; a promise to come quickly is also a promise to come. Likewise, an act of derogating the Chinese is also an act of derogating Chang, who is a Chinese person. As I will show in section 4.1, derogation is an illocutionary act of enforcing a norm that assigns an inferior status to the target. Therefore, enforcing a norm in which the Chinese are assigned an inferior role is also enforcing a norm in which Chang is treated as inferior. This is why calling Chang a "chink" derogates him via derogating the Chinese.

Third, the force indicator theory might face the objection that slurs cannot provide the illocutionary force of derogation when the utterances already have other illocutionary forces. For instance, uttering (1) "Chang is a chink" is already an illocutionary act of assertion. How can this utterance have the illocutionary force of derogation when it already has the force of assertion? How can an assertion also be an act of derogation?

It is common for an utterance to be multiple illocutionary acts and have multiple illocutionary forces. Suppose a flight attendant utters "I am sorry that the flight is delayed." This utterance could be both an apology and an assertion. Searle and Vanderveken (1985, 3) provide similar examples such as "I will go to his house, but will he be there?". Such an utterance would be both an assertion and asking a question. It is useful to borrow the framework developed by Searle and Vanderveken (1985). These utterances with multiple illocutionary forces are taken to be performing *complex illocutionary acts*. These complex acts have logical forms like "$(F_1(P_1)$ & $F_2(P_2))$," where "F(P)" stands for an illocutionary

act with the force F and the propositional content P. The conjunction between two illocutionary acts is "success functional" in the sense that the success of the complex illocutionary act is a function of the success of the two constituent acts. For instance, uttering "I am sorry that the flight is delayed" performs a complex illocutionary act, the success of which requires the success of an apology and the success of an assertion.

Slurs are usually uttered to perform complex illocutionary acts. That is, uttering sentences with slurs usually performs multiple illocutionary acts in addition to derogation. For instance, an utterance of (1) "Chang is a chink" might be both an act of derogating the Chinese and an assertion that Chang is a Chinese. Similarly, uttering (18) "Is Chang a chink?" could simultaneously perform the act of asking a question as well as derogating the Chinese. It would be implausible to claim that uttering (18) does nothing but derogating the Chinese; it obviously asks a question.

Fourth, one might argue that general pejoratives like "asshole" are also force indicators of derogation, but they are not slurs. For instance, saying that (10) "Chang is an asshole" is an act of derogation just like saying (1) "Chang is a chink." Nevertheless, "asshole" is not a slur because it derogates only an individual, instead of derogating the whole target group. It would be bizarre to say all other "assholes" beside Chang are hurt by "Chang is an asshole." This seems to be a counterexample to my claim that slurs are force indicators of derogation.

This objection rests on a misunderstanding, i.e., it takes my theory to hold that slurs are the *only* force indicators of derogation. On the contrary, I agree that there are force indicators of derogation other than slurs. General pejoratives (e.g., "asshole"), moral terms (e.g., "wrong"), and thick concepts (e.g., "cruel") can all be used to derogate someone. Nevertheless, they differ from slurs in many aspects. For example, general pejoratives do not derogate via group memberships, and moral terms often apply to someone's acts rather than the person. Since this is a dissertation on slurs, I will not delve into how other kinds of words function as force indicators of derogation.

4.2 The Illocutionary Acts of Derogation

My force indicator theory of slurs, which takes slurs to be force indicators of derogation, requires a corresponding account of derogation. What is to derogate someone? If it is an illocutionary act, which kind is it? Is derogation a single illocutionary act or a family of them? These questions have to be answered by an analysis of derogation.

I believe that derogation is a kind of declarative illocutionary act; its point is to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior normative status on the target.[36] Declarative illocutionary acts are the acts of changing the world by saying something, that is, the speaker brings

[36] It is tempting to think of derogation as an expressivist illocutionary act to express negative attitudes. I believe expressing the negative attitudes is a part of the sincerity condition, not the illocutionary point of derogation. This is analogous with the relation between assertion and expressing a belief. Expressing a belief is necessary for a sincere assertion, but an assertion is not merely an expression of a belief. For more discussion, see section 6.5.

about certain states of affairs by the successful performance of the speech act (Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 37). As a declarative act, derogation is analogous to illocutionary acts such as approving, naming, resigning, and blessing. Moreover, I need to specify the aspect of the world changed by derogation. I believe the point of derogating someone is to lower her normative status. By "normative status," I mean a position defined by its rights or lack of rights, as well as its value assigned by a norm (e.g., being a knight, a priest, a prisoner). A normative status is inferior to other statuses when it is deprived of rights or deemed to be worse. Racism is a discriminatory norm that assigns people superior and inferior normative statuses by their race. Consider a society with a racist hierarchy, where racism deprives Chinese minorities of the rights to be respected, eligibility to certain career opportunities, freedom from discrimination, etc. To derogate the Chinese by calling them "chink" is to enforce a racist norm which assigns an inferior normative status on them, e.g., denying their right to respect, licensing discrimination against them, etc.

A good example of the declarative nature of derogation comes from Tirrell's analysis of the role of slurs in the Rwandan genocide (Tirrell 2012). Tutsi people were labeled with slurs such as "inzoka" (snake). Snakes occupy a special normative status in Rwandan society. That is, snakes *should* be killed by smashing their heads and cutting them up, and being trusted to cut off their heads is an honor for Rwandan boys. Therefore, calling someone an "inzoka" is not merely an expression of contempt. When the propaganda derogates Tutsis by calling them "inzoka," they are given the normative status of snakes in

Rwandan culture. This is why "inzoka" is action-engendering; it licenses atrocious actions to treat Tutsis as snakes, such as "dismemberment of the person's limbs, and death by exsanguination" (Tirrell 2012, 200).

After introducing derogation as a declarative illocutionary act, I will analyze its illocutionary force in more detail. I shall adopt the framework of Searle and Vanderveken (1985, 46) to illustrate the seven components of the illocutionary force of derogation.[37]

First, the *illocutionary point* of derogation, as I just showed, is a declarative point. To derogate is to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior normative status on the target.

Second, derogation encompasses a range of *strength of illocutionary points*. It is possible to derogate a group strongly or weakly. Strong derogation enforces a norm with an even lower normative status than weak derogation. For example, derogating someone with the N-word is stronger than derogating someone by calling someone "honky." This is because the racist social hierarchy denies more rights and freedoms of black people than whites.

Third, derogation does not have a *special mode of achievement*. Unlike testifying or commanding, there is no restriction on how the illocutionary point is achieved. Derogation does not require the speaker to be in a special position. When it comes to slurs, anyone in any position can use them for derogation. Slurs not only can be used by the dominant group

[37] For the details of Searle and Vanderveken's analysis of illocutionary force, see section 3.1.

to derogate the oppressed group; they can also be used by the oppressed group to derogate the dominant group or even themselves. For example, it is possible for a black foreman, both a participant and a victim of racism, to enforce a norm which assigns the low normative status on other black slaves by calling them the N-word.

Fourth, derogation has a special *content condition*. Unlike promises or assertions, the content of derogation is not a proposition. It takes persons or groups of people as its content. For instance, derogating the Chinese takes the Chinese as its content. It is also possible to derogate Chang, a particular person.[38] However, one cannot derogate abstract entities like a set of possible worlds, since this violates the content condition. This is because norms such as racism and sexism assign normative statuses only to people, not to abstract objects like sets and possible worlds.[39]

Fifth, derogation has a *preparatory condition*, i.e., the speaker must intend to enforce a norm which assigns the lower normative status on the target. For example, it is impossible for a speaker to derogate the Chinese unless he wants to endorse the norm that denies them rights and freedoms enjoyed by the equal members of the society.

Sixth, the *sincerity condition* of derogation requires that the speaker has negative evaluative attitudes (e.g., hatred or contempt) toward the target. Derogation can be

[38] It is possible to simultaneously derogate a group and an individual, e.g., saying that "Chang is a chink" derogates Chang through his group membership.

[39] Nevertheless, if a society had a discriminatory norm against certain abstract entities (say, "setism"), it would be possible to derogate objects like sets and functions. It would also be possible to have slurs for sets and functions.

insincere when the speaker does not hate or despise the people he derogates. However, insincerity does not affect the success (in the technical sense of speech act theory) of derogation; an insincere derogation is still an act of derogation. Imagine someone who is kidnapped and forced to derogate the Chinese. Although the speaker does not have negative attitudes toward the Chinese (sincerity condition), he intends to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior normative status to them (preparatory condition), in order to satisfy the kidnapper. In this case, derogation can be successful without being sincere.

Finally, derogation encompasses a range of *degrees of strength of sincerity conditions*. Different kinds of derogation may require different strength in the negative evaluative attitudes expressed.

After introducing my account of derogation, I have to address some worries by further clarifying it.

First, one might worry about the relation between derogation and other kinds of illocutionary acts. What is the difference between derogating, disparaging, and discrediting someone? Are they the same kind of illocutionary act?

This brings out one interesting point about derogation. That is, derogation encompasses a family of overlapping (i.e., sharing many things in common) illocutionary acts, such as denigrating, disparaging, belittling, humiliating, insulting, and discrediting. These illocutionary acts all belong to the family of derogation because they mostly share the seven components of derogation as specified above. For instance, denigrating,

disparaging, discrediting the Chinese are all declarative acts to enforce a norm which assigns inferior statuses to them. They all require that the speaker must intend to enforce that norm.

The second worry is that derogation needs not to be social or political. I have been focusing on derogation with racial slurs. However, it seems possible to derogate other people in terms of their taste or intelligence. What happens when I derogate someone by calling them "a moron"?

Here is my response. Despite sharing many components of illocutionary force, these overlapping members of derogation vary by the *kinds* of norms they enforce in their illocutionary points. Derogating one's aesthetic status by calling one a "philistine" is different from derogating someone's epistemic standing by calling him a "moron." Acts of derogation can enforce different kinds of norms such as moral, aesthetic, epistemic norms, etc. For instance, discrediting someone has a more specific illocutionary point than other acts of derogation; the inferior status enforced by discrediting is about the *trustworthiness* or the reputation of the target. This is why all acts of discrediting the Chinese are acts of derogating them, but the reverse is not true.

Since acts of derogation are taxonomized by different kinds of norms, slurs also fall into different kinds by the norms. Different kinds of slurs are force indicators to enforce different kinds of norms. There are non-racial slurs, such as sexist slurs (e.g., "bitch" enforces sexist norms), and homophobic slurs (e.g., "faggot" enforces homophobic norms).

Just like the examples above, there are also non-social-and-political slurs, such as aesthetic slurs and epistemic slurs.

Thirdly, one of the worries is that my view remains unclear about how some slurs can be more oppressive than others. Comparing to calling black people the N-word, calling white people "honky" seems more harmless and less oppressive. However, it follows from my view that both are acts of derogation, i.e., enforcing norms that discriminate against black people and white people respectively. Why is using "honky" less oppressive than the N-word?

I will address this worry by clarifying the relation between the acts of derogation and the norms they enforce. Norms can be more or less instantiated (or realized) in a world. For example, the norm of racism is instantiated in a racist society, whereas a society with full racial equality violates such a norm. How oppressive and harmful an act of derogation is depends on the kind of norm it enforces. Derogating black people with slurs is very oppressive because there are actual institutions and cultures that perpetuate racism against them in real life. By contrast, derogating white people by calling them "honky" is far less oppressive because a racist norm against white people is hardly instantiated in the real world.

Finally, my claim that a single act of derogation can change the normative status of a group seems too strong to some readers. Suppose Chinese minorities have achieved equal status in society by years of struggle and activism. My view appears to entail that a racist

speaker can change their social status with just a few slurs and thereby reverse the result of the political progress of many years. This seems hardly plausible.

My response is that derogation usually enforces a norm in a local and circumstantial way. When a racist speaker derogates the Chinese before his audiences, the norm is usually enforced between the speaker and the audiences, without affecting the whole society.[40] For instance, the audiences have acquired personal approval from the speaker to discriminate against the Chinese, even if the society at large is still against discrimination.[41] Moreover, derogation can fail at enforcing a norm when the audiences refuse to cooperate with the norm. For example, (even successfully) derogating the Chinese before a group of Chinese political activists may not enforce a racist norm because the activists will always undermine the norm.

4.3 How Slurs Determine Illocutionary Force

After introducing the illocutionary act of derogation, the relation between the force indicator and the illocutionary acts of derogation remains to be clarified. If slurs are force indicators of derogation, are slurs necessary for utterances to have the illocutionary force of derogation? Are they sufficient for utterances to have the force of derogation?

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[40] Nevertheless, it is possible that, on rare occasions, a speaker has enough power in a society such that he can change the status of a group in society by derogating them. Imagine that a powerful president or a religious leader has the support of all the members of society. If he openly derogates the Chinese with slurs in a public speech and everyone cooperates, he may able to change the social status with a few slurs.

[41] If enough members of society keep enforcing a racist norm, the norm will eventually be realized in the entire society.

Although slurs are force indicators of derogation, they are not necessary for derogation for two reasons. First, many illocutionary acts can be performed without relevant force indicators; the force could be provided by context. For instance, one can make promises without saying "I promise" in certain contexts. Similarly, derogation can be done without slurs, e.g., through indirect speech acts such as asserting that "I would not befriend the Chinese" or warning that "The Chinese are taking our jobs!". Although slurs are unnecessary for derogation, they are still the conventional linguistic tools to facilitate derogation; they make derogation more easy and explicit.

Second, slurs are not necessary for derogation because they are not the only force indicators of derogation. As I have explained in section 4.1, there are other illocutionary force indicators of derogation. For instance, many negative evaluative terms such as "damn," "boo," and the F-word can make the force of derogation explicit. Instead of using "chink," one can also derogate the Chinese by saying "Damn the Chinese!" Unlike slurs, the illocutionary force of these evaluative terms is not tied with a particular group. The use of "chink" is to derogate the Chinese, whereas "damn" can be used to derogate anyone.

Not only are slurs unnecessary for derogation, but they are also insufficient for derogation. A slur has the use to make the illocutionary force of derogation explicit in an utterance. Nevertheless, the utterance of a slur does not always count as an illocutionary act of derogation. This is because illocutionary acts can misfire when their success conditions (including preparatory conditions) are not met. In particular, the success

condition of derogation requires satisfying the preparatory condition that the speaker must want to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior normative status on the target. Suppose an innocent child (or an English learner), who is ignorant of the meaning of "chink," uses it unintentionally, even though he does not intend to express contempt of the Chinese.[42] His utterance of "chink" fails to be an act of derogation, because the success condition is not met. This is not to say the usage of the slur is not offensive or unproblematic; the child may be punished, but not on the grounds of derogating the Chinese people. I will revisit unsuccessful or infelicitous derogation in my analysis of non-derogatory uses of slurs in 4.5.

The force indicator theory of slurs gives rise to deeper issues about illocutionary force indicators. If slurs are neither necessary nor sufficient for derogation, what do they do in determining the illocutionary force of derogation? What does it mean to say slurs make the illocutionary force of derogation explicit? The discussion on illocutionary force indicators in section 3.3 is helpful here.

What slurs do as force indicators in determining the illocutionary force is to provide the default interpretation of illocutionary force. This is simply an application of the default interpretation view introduced in section 3.3. That is, utterances of slurs are interpreted as having the illocutionary force of derogation by default unless there are defeating factors.

[42] For an alternative analysis of the same phenomenon, see Diaz-Legaspe, Liu and Stainton (2019).

The "default interpretation" is an epistemic notion about what the hearer should infer from the given evidence. Take an utterance of (1) "Chang is a chink" for instance. Upon hearing this utterance, the hearer, merely by recognizing the force indicator "chink," can arrive at the default interpretation that this utterance has the force of derogation. Suppose there are no defeating factors to this interpretation, i.e., the speaker is not speaking metaphorically or sarcastically, and the felicity conditions are met. The hearer can conclude that utterance (1) is at least an act of derogating the Chinese.

Two things need to be clarified here. First, although utterance (1) is interpreted by default as an illocutionary act of derogation, it is not *merely* a single act of derogation. As I have explained in 4.1, it may be a complex illocutionary act with multiple illocutionary forces. For instance, the hearer may interpret utterance (1) as *both* asserting that Chang is a Chinese *and* derogating the Chinese. Similarly, utterance (1) could be complex illocutionary acts such as asserting & derogating, suggesting & derogating, claiming & derogating, etc.

Second, the illocutionary force of derogation can be further narrowed down into its subcategories. As I have shown in section 4.1, derogation is a family of overlapping illocutionary acts such as denigrating, disparaging, belittling, insulting and discrediting.[43]

[43] Some might deny that acts like insulting are illocutionary on the ground that one cannot insult a person with "I hereby insult you" (the hereby test). However, the hereby test may not be a good guide for illocutionary acts. This is because insulting may pass the hereby test in other languages, as I will show in section 6.1 with Austin's example of "I insult you" in German.

Upon hearing (1) “Chang is a chink,” a hearer initially reaches the default interpretation that (1) has the illocutionary force of derogation. However, she may infer from her background knowledge (e.g., the speaker despises the Chinese for being unreliable) that (1) is not merely derogating the Chinese, but discrediting their reliability specifically. Consequently, the hearer narrows her interpretation of illocutionary force from derogating to discrediting.

4.4 Offensiveness as Perlocutionary Effects of Slurs

Despite my explanation of derogatory power in terms of illocutionary force, I believe the offensiveness of slurs is perlocutionary, rather than illocutionary. That is, taking offense is a perlocutionary effect of slurs, i.e., an effect of words on the thoughts and feels of the hearer. Offending someone with a slur is a perlocutionary act, intentional or not, to produce those effects.[44] A slur like “chink” often causes audiences to feel offended for various reasons. Imagine Chang hears someone’s utterance of (1) “Chang is a chink.” He might feel offended because of his political view against using hate speech, his feeling of being disrespected, his personal traumatic experience of being called “chink,” etc. No matter how the offense is caused, it is a perlocutionary effect of the slur. Likewise, the speaker can

[44] For my discussions on perlocutionary effects, see section 3.1

utter (1) “Chang is a chink” to offend Chang because of the perlocutionary effects “chink” produces.

This perlocutionary view of offensiveness explains how *derogatory power* and *offensiveness* can come apart. That is, utterances of slurs can be derogatory without being offensive, and vice versa.

First, consider the possibility of derogatory power without offensiveness. Imagine a group of racist speakers keeps calling the Chinese “chinks” among themselves. Suppose no other people hear them using the slur. The racist speakers use the slur to derogate the Chinese, but no one among them feels offended by the usage of “chink.” After all, they are not the target of the slur, and they feel no remorse about using it. This is possible because their utterances of “chink” are successful acts of derogating the Chinese,” without producing the perlocutionary effects of taking offense.

Second, it is also possible to have offensiveness without derogatory power. Consider again the example of an innocent child.[45] He does not understand the meaning and the history of the slur “chink,” but he finds it funny because the adults are offended by it. The child calls other kids on the playground “chinks” as a prank, even if he does not hate or despise the Chinese. Despite using a derogatory word, his utterances are *non-derogatory* since he does not want to derogate the Chinese. That is, his utterance is a locutionary act

[45] Thanks for Carolyn McLeod for providing this example. For more discussions on non-derogatory utterances, see section 2.9.

of using a derogatory word, without being an illocutionary act of derogation. Nevertheless, what he says is not totally harmless; it remains *offensive*. The child uses a slur in order to offend other kids on the playground, i.e., a perlocutionary act to cause offense. Again, the possibility of this case can be accommodated by my distinction between perlocutionary effects and illocutionary force of slurs.

One crucial difference between *offensiveness* and *derogatory power* is their dependence on intentions. Whether an utterance of slurs is derogatory depends on the intention of the speaker, whereas it can be offensive regardless of the intention. As I have shown in section 4.1, the preparatory condition must be met for an utterance to be an act of derogation, i.e., the speaker must intend to enforce a norm that assigns an inferior status on the target. This is why intentions can make certain utterances of slurs non-derogatory, e.g., calling close Chinese friends "chinks" to show intimacy. While derogatory power is speaker-centered, offensiveness is hearer-centered; the intention of the speaker plays no role in the offensiveness. No matter what the speaker intends, his utterance is offensive so long as the hearer feels offended. Recall the example of the radical Chinese activists chanting (7) "Chinks are coming!". Other Chinese hearers may still find their utterance offensive, even if they intend to challenge racism rather than to enforce it.

This difference of the dependence on intentions matters for regulating the harms of slurs. To over-simply the matter, there are two opposing views on the harm of slurs. First, it is believed that slurs are always harmful no matter what the speaker intends. This is why

we should purge these words altogether from our vocabulary. Second, others argue that slurs are harmful only when the speaker intends to harm. It follows that usages of slurs can always be excused by the non-malign intentions of the speaker.

I believe both views capture only half of the whole picture. Slurs produce two kinds of harms; *derogation* harms the target normatively by enforcing discriminatory norms, while *offense* harms the target psychologically by producing pain and suffering. *Derogation* depends on the intention, whereas *offense* does not. The first view is true to the extent that slurs can always cause offense regardless of the intention. The second view is true in the sense that using slurs can be non-derogatory when the intention is not to malign. My distinction between offensiveness and derogatory power illustrates the complexity of the harms of slurs and how to regulate them.

4.5 Explaining the Features of Slurs

After introducing the force indicator theory, we can apply it to explain the features of slurs. Unlike other theories of slurs, the force indicator theory has no problem in explaining them.

Derogatory Power: The force indicator theory has to answer two questions associated with the *derogatory power* of slurs (Croom 2011, 345, Jeshion 2013, 232, Richard 2008, 12, Hom 2008, 426, 2010, 164). I have used the force indicator theory to answer these questions in section 4.1. However, it is useful to repeat them here. Consider question **(Q1)**: In virtue of what is a slur such as “chink” a derogatory word? According to the force

indicator theory, slurs are derogatory words because they are illocutionary force indicators of derogation.[46] How about question **(Q2)**? In virtue of what is an utterance of slurs, e.g., "Chang is a chink," derogatory? It follows from the force indicator theory that an utterance of slurs is derogatory when it is an illocutionary act of derogation. The force indicator theory has no problem with answering **(Q1)** and **(Q2)**.

Offensiveness: The force indicator theory also has to answer questions about slurs' offensiveness. Question (Q3) asks: "Why is a word such as 'chink' an offensive word?" Similarly, question (Q4) asks: "Why is an utterance of slurs such as "Chang is a chink" an offensive utterance?" My answer is that slurs and utterances of them are offensive because of their perlocutionary effects, i.e., they tend to cause the hearers to feel offended. Hearers take offense from slurs for a variety of reasons such as conflicting political views, feeling disrespect, or personal experiences of racism, etc.

Truth-conditional Contribution: The force indicator theory has to explain the *truth-conditional contribution* of slurs by answering (Q5): Does a slur (e.g., "chink") make the same truth-conditional contribution as its neutral counterpart (e.g., "Chinese")? The force indicator theory explains this by allowing slurs to be propositional indicators that make the same truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterparts. For instance, "chink"

[46] For how force indicators work, see section 3.3 and section 4.3.

made the same contribution as “Chinese” to the truth-condition, such that (1) “Chang is a chink” shares the same truth-condition as (2) “Chang is a Chinese.”

Independence: The force indicator theory has no problem in explaining the *independence* of slurs (Whiting 2013, 364, Hornsby 2001, 129). To explain this question, it has to answer question (Q6): Why is the derogatory dimension of a slur, (e.g., “chink”) independent from its descriptive content? That is, how is it possible for “Chinese” to share the same descriptive content as “chink,” without the former being a derogatory word? The force indicator theory answers this by separating the role of force indicator and the role of propositional indicator; it is possible to have one role without the other. Since slurs are both force indicators and propositional indicators, they can have neutral counterparts that share the same role as propositional indicators without being force indicators.

Descriptive Ineffability: The force indicator theory is capable of explaining the *descriptive ineffability* of slurs. That is, it answers the question (Q7): why cannot the derogatory dimension of a slur like “chink” be satisfactorily paraphrased in purely descriptive terms (Hom 2010, 166, Potts 2007, 176, Whiting 2013, 365, Schlenker 2007, 239)? For instance, paraphrasing (1) “Chang is a chink” as “Chang is a Chinese and I have negative attitudes toward the Chinese” does not capture the derogatory dimension of “chink.” Something is lost.

For the force indicator theory, this is a consequence of the distinction between force and content. Illocutionary force and propositional contents are not mutually translatable.

Consequently, no illocutionary force indicator can be paraphrased into a (pure) propositional indicator. Consider the illocutionary act of greeting someone by saying "hello!". It is unsatisfactory to paraphrase "hello!" with "I am greeting you"; asserting that "I am greeting you," after all, may not be a greeting. This is because of the impossibility to translate the illocutionary force of greeting into the proposition that I am greeting you. Similarly, one cannot paraphrase the illocutionary force of "Chang is a chink" with "Chang is a Chinese, and I have negative attitudes toward the Chinese."

One might suggest that "hello!" could have a descriptive paraphrase, i.e., "I hereby greet you." I agree that "I hereby greet you" accurately paraphrases the illocutionary force of "hello." However, "I hereby greet you" is no longer purely descriptive; this performative sentence also contains force indicators. As for slurs like "chink," "I hereby derogate the Chinese" does *not* even paraphrase the illocutionary force of "chink." This is because "I hereby derogate" does not have a performative use in English. For more discussions on the performative verbs of derogation, see section 6.1.

Perspective Independence: The force indicator theory can answer the questions about the *perspective dependence* or *agent-centeredness* of slurs. Slurs are said to always indicate the derogatory attitudes of the *speaker* (Hom 2010, 169, Schlenker 2007, 239, Bolinger 2015, 1). As Potts (2007, 166) claims, "the perspective encoded in the expressive aspects of an utterance is always the speaker's." According to the force indicator theory, this is simply because derogation expresses negative evaluative attitudes as its sincerity condition

(just like an assertion expresses a belief. See § 4.1). The negative evaluative attitude is always an attitude of *the speaker*¸ not others; the sincerity of derogation depends only on the attitudes of the speaker. This is analogous to the fact that an assertion expresses no one's belief but the speaker's belief.

It might be argued that certain force indicators are not *perspective dependent.* For instance, uttering sentences like "John promised Bob to give him five dollars" reports the promising-attitude of John, not the attitude of the speaker. However, this does not constitute a counterexample to my claim. This is because the verb "promised," unlike the performative formula "I promise," does not function as a force indicator in this example.

Historical Variability: The force indicator theory explains the feature of *historical variability* of slurs. Recall the question (Q9): how can a slur become more derogatory or less derogatory over time? Answering this question takes two steps.

Step one is to answer this question: what is it for a slur to be more or less derogatory? According to the force indicator theory, for a slur to be more or less derogatory is for it to be a force indicator of stronger or weaker illocutionary force of derogation (than it was). As I have illustrated earlier, the illocutionary force of derogation can be strong or weak, because it can vary in the *strength of illocutionary points.*

Step two involves explaining what it is for a slur to be a force indicator of stronger illocutionary force over time. I believe this is a meta-semantic question concerning the change of force indicators. There is nothing mysterious about a word's becoming a force

indicator of stronger or weaker illocutionary force. It is also possible for a word to acquire the role of force indicators or lose it completely. The role of force indicators changes because of changes in the regularity of usages in a linguistic community. For instance, the phrase "I was wondering if…" was originally a pure propositional indicator describing one's interest, without providing illocutionary force. It has been regularly used by English speakers as a polite way of requesting someone to do something. Consequently, it has become an illocutionary force indicator for requesting.

Taking the two steps together, we have an answer to question (Q9): slurs become more or less derogatory when their roles as force indicators change, and such changes are the result of how slurs are used in a linguistic community. Consider the example of "queer" in section 2.10 again. This slur became less derogatory because the LGBTQ community started to use it in a non-derogatory way, to show their non-conformity to heterosexual norms. This change in the use resulted in the change of force indicator; "queer" became a force indicator of weaker illocutionary force or ceased to be a force indicator of derogation at all.

Non-Derogatory Utterances: After historical variability, the force indicator theory has to explain the *non-derogatory utterances of slurs*. These are simply cases of misfire of illocutionary acts. Uses of slurs are derogatory utterances when they are illocutionary acts of derogation. However, the Chinese activists' utterance 5) fails to be an act of derogation, despite using the derogatory word "chink." As I have shown in 2.2, having the illocutionary

force of derogation is insufficient for an utterance to be an act of derogation. Derogating the Chinese requires satisfying the preparatory condition that the speaker must intend to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior status on the Chinese. Otherwise, the utterance would misfire. Unlike the white supremacist, the Chinese activists do not actually want to enforce racism against the Chinese. Consequently, their utterance 5) fails to be an illocutionary act of derogation against the Chinese, and hence fails to be derogatory.

Appropriation: The *appropriation* of slurs, as I have argued in section 2.10, collapses into *historical variability* and *non-derogatory utterances* of slurs. Since appropriation is not an independent feature, the force indicator theory has already explained appropriation by explaining historical variability and non-derogatory utterances.

Non-Displaceability: Another crucial feature of slurs is *non-displaceability*. Slurs are derogatory even when embedded within the scope of connectives like negations and conditionals (Hom 2010, 168, Croom 2011, 345, Schlenker 2007, 238, Potts 2007, 166, Bolinger 2015). The feature of being derogatory seems to "project through" the scope of connectives. According to the force indicator theory, certain force indicators, including slurs, provide illocutionary force when they are embedded in connectives.[47] For example, "chink" provides the illocutionary force of derogation to the utterance (9) "If Chang is a chink, he celebrates Lunar New Year," even if it is embedded in the antecedent. Since *non-*

[47] Not all force indicators retain their illocutionary force when embedded. See section 6.2 for more discussions.

displaceability could be used as an objection, I will address this feature in greater detail in section 6.2.

Kaplanian Inference Puzzle: Slurs give rise to a *Kaplanian inference puzzle* (Hom 2010, 167, Sennet and Copp 2015, 1087, Kaplan unpublished). A person who accepts the premise of inference (13) is not committed to accepting its conclusion.[48] Inference (13) seems "invalid," whereas inference (14) seems "valid" (in a sense other than validity as truth-preservation). What kind of "invalidity" is it?

(13) The Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year.

Therefore, the chinks celebrate Lunar New Year.

(14) The chinks celebrate Lunar New Year.

Therefore, the Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year.

This kind of "invalidity" can be explained by an illocutionary approach; it is not a logical relation between propositional contents, but a logical relation between illocutionary forces. Borrowing the framework from Searle and Vanderveken (1985), there is a lack of illocutionary entailment between the premises and the conclusion of (13). Inference (13) seems invalid because its conclusion contains the force indicator of derogation which its

[48] However, this is not to deny that a person accepting the *truth* of the premise is committed to the accept the *truth* of the conclusion in inference (13)

premise lacks. Its invalidity is analogous to the problematic inference from "I apologize for P" to "I apologize for P, and I promise that Q." The validity of inference (14) is explained by the illocutionary entailment in a similar way.

Self-Defeating Sentences: The illocutionary force indicator theory helps to explain what I call "the puzzle of *self-defeating sentences*," i.e., how slurs make certain sentences self-defeating.[49] Consider the following sentences. Intuitively, something is wrong with them; these sentences seem to be self-defeating or self-inconsistent. Whatever the literal uses of these sentences are, these uses cannot be fulfilled satisfactorily. What kind of inconsistency is involved here?

(15) Praise the chinks!

(16) I apologize for my discrimination against the chinks.

This phenomenon of inconsistency is not a consequence of inconsistent propositional contents. These sentences are not inconsistent in the same way as asserting that P&~P. In particular, sentence (15) does not even express full propositions, not to mention inconsistent propositional contents. For example, an utterance of sentence (15) "Praise the

[49] One might reject that the following sentences are self-defeating. In particular, there would be no inconsistency, if (15) is read as derogating the Chinese but praising an aspect of them, e.g., the Chinese food culture. For my responses, see section 2.13.

chinks!" has the Chinese as its content, rather than a proposition. In fact, it does not even have a truth condition. This is why sentence (15) cannot be a case of logical falsity like P&~P. Therefore, any inconsistency in it cannot lie within its propositional content.[50]

If self-defeating sentences cannot be explained by inconsistent propositional contents, this points toward the force indicator theory. That is, the inconsistency lies not in propositional contents, but in illocutionary force. I shall adopt Searle and Vanderveken's (1985, 261) analysis of "illocutionary incompatibility" to explain this. Two illocutionary acts are incompatible when it is impossible to perform both successfully. Take (15) "Praise chinks" for instance. It is self-defeating because it contains illocutionary force indicators for both praise and derogation. However, praising and derogating the same group are two incompatible illocutionary acts. To praise a group is to assign a superior status in a certain norm. Unlike praising, derogation aims at achieving the illocutionary point of imposing an inferior normative status on someone. Because of the impossibility of assigning both an inferior and a superior normative status to a given group, derogation and praising are two incompatible illocutionary acts. This is why sentence (15) appears self-defeating; its two illocutionary force indicators indicate forces of incompatible illocutionary acts. A similar analysis can be given of other cases of self-defeating sentences.

[50] Theories that take slurs to communicate derogatory contents would have difficulty explaining this.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has introduced the force indicator theory of slurs in detail. In section (§ 4.1), I have defined the force indicator theory as the conjunction of two theses: 1) Slurs are illocutionary force indicators of the illocutionary acts of derogation; 2) They are also propositional indicators that make the same truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterparts. This theory requires an analysis of the illocutionary act of derogation. In section 4.1, I have analyzed derogation as a declarative illocutionary act of enforcing a norm that assigns an inferior normative status to the target. Moreover, I have shown that slurs are force indicators in the sense that utterances of slurs are interpreted as illocutionary acts of derogation by default (§ 4.3). In addition to slurs' role as force indicators, I have also illustrated their perlocutionary effects, i.e., offensiveness (§ 4.4). Finally, I have applied the force indicator theory to answer questions about the features of slurs (§ 4.5).

5 Alternative Theories of Slurs and Objections

Many theories of slurs have been proposed to explain the features of slurs.[51] This chapter surveys and critiques major alternatives to my theory. I will introduce each theory by briefly summarizing it and providing its answers to the questions introduced in chapter 2.

Theories of slurs are listed and labeled as theory (T1), (T2) and so on. For instance, I shall define the main thesis of the truth-conditional content theory as follows:

(T2) *Truth-conditional content theory:* Slurs have derogatory truth-conditional contents, i.e., complex normative properties of the form "ought to be discriminated against in certain ways because of having certain stereotypical properties because of belonging to a certain group."

The existing theories, I believe, ultimately fail for different reasons. Nonetheless, appreciating those theories and their weaknesses helps to strengthen my illocutionary force indicator theory of slurs. Therefore, I will evaluate each theory by raising arguments against them. I will label these arguments numerically as arguments (A1), (A2), etc.[52] For example:

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[51] As mentioned in section 1.2, the term "slur" is ambiguous. Following the literature, I shall use "slurs" in a narrower sense. This paper focuses on "slurs" as derogatory expressions such as ethnic epithets, not "slurs" as derogatory speech, e.g., what is described by "John's comments slurred me."

[52] One theory might be criticized by multiple arguments. For instance, theory (T1) might face the argument (A1) against (T1), argument (A2) against (T1), etc.

(A1) *Argument from Non-Assertions*: If the truth-conditional content theory is true, then non-assertion utterances of slurs cannot be derogatory. However, utterances like "Is Chang a chink?" can still be derogatory.

My survey includes the most common theories but not all existing theories of slurs. First, the literature on slurs is large, and a comprehensive survey is difficult. In addition, only certain theories need to be selected because rejecting them supports my force indicator theory in some way. These theories often endorse an opposing position to mine on a feature or a question about slurs. I will discuss cases which highlight the strengths of my own view. Therefore, including them is helpful for paving the way for developing the force indicator theory. For instance, the truth-conditional content theory (T2) holds that "chink" has a different referent than "Chinese," whereas my force indicator theory takes them to be co-referential. Therefore, the truth-conditional content theory is introduced and criticized, because this helps to establish my view.

Here is the outline of this chapter. In each section, a theory will be introduced, and my arguments will be raised against it. In section 5.1, I will introduce Hom's truth-conditional content theory (T2), the view that slurs have derogatory truth-conditional content. Section 5.2 discusses (T3) the conventional implicature theory, which takes slurs to carry derogatory conventional implicatures. In section 5.3, I will present (T4)

inferentialism about slurs, which explains slurs in terms of inferential rules to derogatory statements. (T5) Prohibitionism of slurs offers an account of slurs from the prohibition of the usage of slurs (§ 5.4). (T6) Mark Richard's theory provides a unique theory of slurs, according to which utterances that contain slurs have no truth values (§ 5.5). Hornsby offers (T7) an account of slurs which draws an analogy between slurs and derogatory gestures (§ 5.6). Finally, I will summarize the theories introduced in this chapter in section 5.7, where readers can find a list of definitions of those theories for quick reference.

5.1 Hom's Truth-Conditional Content Theory

Hom's truth-conditional content theory (or "combinatorial externalism" as he calls it) explains slurs' derogatory power in terms of truth-conditional contents (Hom 2008).[53] Recall that question **(Q1)** asks why a given slur such as "chink" is a derogatory word. The truth-conditional content theory has a simple answer: words are derogatory when they have derogatory truth-conditional contents (which represent their targets as having negative properties), and slurs are derogatory words because they have derogatory truth-conditional contents. The truth-conditional contents of slurs are complex normative properties like "ought to be subject to such-and-such discriminatory practices for having such-and-such stereotypical properties all because of belonging to such-and-such groups." (Hom 2010,

[53] For my definition of "truth-conditional content," see section 2.5.

394) For instance, “chink” does not refer to the same group of people as “Chinese,” the truth-conditional content of which is simply the property of being Chinese. For Hom (Hom 2012, 394), “chink” means “ought to be subject to higher college admissions standards, and ought to be subject to exclusion from advancement to managerial positions,…, because of being slanty-eyed, and devious, and good-at-laundering, …, all because of being Chinese.” In general, the truth-conditional contents of slurs are properties with the following form: “ought be subject to $p^*_1 + \ldots + p^*_n$ because of being $d^*_1 + \ldots + d^*_n$ all because of being NPC*,” “where $p^*_1, \ldots, p^*_n$ are deontic prescriptions derived from the set of racist practices, $d^*_1, \ldots, d^*_n$ are the negative properties derived from the racist ideology, and NPC* is the semantic value of the appropriate nonpejorative correlate of the epithet” (Hom 2008, 431).

Let us reformulate the main thesis of this theory as follows:

(T2) *Truth-conditional content theory:* Slurs have derogatory truth-conditional contents, i.e., complex normative properties of the form “ought to be discriminated against in certain ways because of having certain stereotypical properties because of belonging to a certain group.”

The truth-conditional content theory also must answer **(Q2)**, i.e., why is an utterance like “Chang is a chink” derogatory. Hom extends his answer for **(Q1)** to answer **(Q2)**. Slurs

are derogatory words because they express derogatory truth-conditional contents. Consequently, utterances of slurs are derogatory if and only if the truth-conditional content of slurs are predicated of someone (Hom 2012, 397, Hom 2008, 432). Asserting that "Chang is a chink" is derogatory because it asserts that Chang ought to be discriminated against in certain ways… because he is Chinese. As Hom (2008, 432) puts it, "derogation is the actual application, or predication, of derogatory content. This speech act of applying the epithet to an individual is to predicate the derogatory truth-conditional content of someone, and thus literally to say something deeply negative, and threatening, towards that person."

The truth-conditional content theory would deny that (Q5) (i.e., Do slurs make the *same* truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterparts?) is the right question to be asked. It asks a different question: why does a slur like "chink" make a *different* truth-conditional contribution as its seemingly neutral counterpart "Chinese," despite its appearance of co-reference? This is because the truth-conditional content theory endorses the opposite intuition about the truth-conditional contribution of slurs. Slurs seem to make different contributions because unlike their neutral counterparts, slurs seem to be false of their targets (Hom and May 2013, 293). Despite Chang's being Chinese, (1) "Chang is a chink" is literally false, according to the truth-conditional content theory (it insists on the *truth* of (3) "Chang is not a chink"). The intuition seems to be that slurs like "chink" cannot be true of their targets because they misrepresent them in an objectionable way. We would

find utterance (1) unacceptable. Accepting the truth of (1) appears to be accepting the point of view of racism. The best explanation of the unacceptability of (1) is simply that it is false.

If the truth-conditional content theory holds that, contrary to (Q5), we should explain the *different* truth-conditional contribution of slurs, what is its answer? Why does "chink" make a different truth-conditional contribution as "Chinese"? The truth-conditional content theory has a unique answer. Because of their derogatory truth-conditional contents, slurs make different contributions to the truth conditions than their neutral counterparts do. Therefore, switching a slur with its neutral counterpart in a sentence changes its truth condition. It follows from the truth-conditional content theory that (1) "Chang is a chink" is true if and only if Chang ought to be discriminated against in such-and-such ways… because of being Chinese. In contrast, (2) "Chang is a Chinese" is true if and only if Chang is a Chinese. Consequently, (1) "Chang is a chink" is false and (3) "Chang is not a chink" is true, even if Chang is Chinese. This is because no one is a chink, who should be discriminated against because of being Chinese (Hom and May 2013). The truth-conditional content theory insists that (1) "Chang is a chink" must be false by appealing to the intuition that it is unacceptable. To accept the truth of (1) seems to be agreeing with the racist speaker in derogating the Chinese.

A consequence of the truth-conditional content theory's answer to (Q5) is the *null extensionality* of slurs, i.e., the claim that slurs have empty extensions or they refer to

nothing (Hom and May 2013, 294). This is because of the moral fact that no one should be discriminated against for stereotypical properties because of their identity. If no one should be discriminated against because of being Chinese, "chink" has a null extension. In other words, no one is a "chink." The so-called "chinks," just like unicorns and Santa Claus, do not exist. It follows that "there are no chinks in China" is literally true. It also entails that "chinks should be excluded from advancement to managerial positions" is an *a priori* and *necessary* truth. Sennet and Copp (2015, 1096) have argued against this consequence of the truth-conditional theory.

The truth-conditional content theory offers answers to other questions. For the sake of brevity, I will only introduce its answer to (Q6) here. Although Hom does not explicitly address (Q6), the question of independence, his theory would have a unique answer to it. According to Hom's theory, the derogatory dimension of a slur is a part of its truth-conditional content, a complex normative property. Although the derogatory dimension cannot be detached from the truth-conditional content altogether, it can be detached from a certain descriptive content within the whole truth-conditional content. For example, the neutral counterpart "Chinese" shares a part of the complex normative property of being a "chink," i.e., the property of being Chinese. However, "Chinese" lacks the derogatory dimension within the complex normative property, i.e., "ought to be discriminated against in certain ways…"

I have introduced the (T2) the truth-conditional content theory and how it answers questions about slurs. Now we can compare it with my (T1) force indicator theory. There are two major differences. First, these two theories disagree over (Q5) the truth-conditional contribution of slurs. The force indicator theory takes "chink" to have the same truth-conditional content as "Chinese," whereas the truth-conditional content theory does not. Consequently, the force indicator theory takes (1) "Chang is a chink" to be true, while the truth-conditional content theory takes (1) to be false. Second, the force indicator theory has a different understanding of the source of derogatory power (**(Q1)** and **(Q2)**). The force indicator theory ultimately traces the derogatory power back to the illocutionary force, rather than truth-conditional content. By contrast, the truth-conditional content theory takes derogatory power to arise from the truth-conditional contents or applying these contents to people.

These two major differences give rise to objections against the truth-conditional content theory. I will raise three objections of mine and explain how truth-conditional content theory runs into problems because it adopts these different positions.

First, the truth-conditional content theory fails to offer a satisfactory answer to question **(Q2)**, i.e., why utterances of slurs are derogatory. In particular, it has difficulties in explaining why non-assertion utterances of slurs can be derogatory. Asking questions and issuing commands with slurs can be as derogatory as assertions. Consider the following example utterances of slurs:

(18) Is Chang a chink?

(19) Bring me a chink, Chang!

Despite their apparent derogatory power, Hom's truth-conditional content theory cannot allow these two utterances to be derogatory. This is because utterances of slurs, according to Hom, are derogatory only if their derogatory contents are predicated of someone, e.g., claiming that certain people ought to be discriminated against. However, the speakers are not claiming that some people are chinks in the question and the command. Applying their account, the speaker is merely questioning if Chang is Chinese and hence should be discriminated against for being Chinese. Since the speaker is not asserting that Chang should be discriminated against for being Chinese, (18) is not derogatory for Hom. Similarly, the truth-conditional content theory takes (19) to be non-derogatory because the speaker is not predicating the derogatory content to anyone. This argument can be summarized as follows:

(A1) *Argument from Non-Assertions*: If the truth-conditional content theory is true, then non-assertion utterances of slurs cannot be derogatory. However, utterances like "Is Chang a chink?" can still be derogatory.

Notice how (T1) the force indicator theory is immune to objection (A1). My theory takes utterances of slurs to be derogatory when they have the illocutionary force of derogation; it does not appeal to predicating derogatory contents in answering **(Q2)**. Consequently, (T1) allows non-assertions like (18), (19) to be derogatory. Non-assertions of slurs can have multiple illocutionary forces including the force of derogation, as described by Searle and Vandervaken (1985). Ultimately, the truth-conditional content theory is vulnerable to (A1), because it insists that utterances of slurs are derogatory only when they attribute derogatory contents to the target.

Second, the truth-conditional content theory also faces a great problem in answering question (Q10), i.e., how certain utterances of slurs can be non-derogatory. Consider again the examples given in section 2.9. Two utterances of the same sentence are uttered in different contexts by different speakers. Utterance (8) is very derogatory, whereas (7) is not derogatory. If "chink" is a derogatory word, why is (7) not as derogatory as (8)? Why cannot the Chinese activist be accused of making nasty claims about the Chinese just like the white supremacist?

(7) Chinks are coming! (Chanted by radical Chinese activists in a rally against racism)

(8) Chinks are coming! (uttered by a white supremacist in a speech against Chinese immigrant)

Although utterance (7) is not a derogatory utterance, the truth-conditional content theory entails that utterance (7) and utterance (8) should be derogatory exactly in the same way. For Hom, to derogate someone with a slur is to predicate the truth-conditional content of the slur of him. In both utterances, the speakers assert that there are chinks, i.e., people who ought to be discriminated against in such-and-such ways…because of being Chinese. Therefore, both utterances should be derogatory exactly in the same way. The Chinese activists are derogating the Chinese just like the white supremacists are. Again, this is very counterintuitive. Hom's theory should allow slurs to be used in non-derogatory utterances. To summarize:

(A2) *Argument from Non-Derogatory Utterances*: If the truth-conditional content theory is true, then there cannot be non-derogatory utterances in which slurs are predicated of someone. However, such utterances can be non-derogatory in certain contexts.

Again, objection (A2) does not apply to (T1) the force indicator theory. This is because (T1) allows variations in how derogatory utterances are, even if the truth-conditional contents remain unchanged. Utterance (7) lacks the illocutionary force of derogation, even if (7) has the same truth-conditional content as (8). The lesson is that truth-conditional contents do not have enough context-sensitivity as illocutionary forces do to explain non-derogatory utterances of slurs like (7).

The third objection against the truth-conditional content theory concerns truth-conditional contributions. The truth-conditional content theory takes slurs to make *different* truth-conditional contributions than their neutral counterparts do. Consider examples (1) - (4) below. This theory would take (1) to be false and (3) to be true. This is because "chink," unlike "Chinese," means "ought to be subject to higher college admissions standards…, because of being slanty-eyed, and devious…, all because of being Chinese" (2012, 394). According to this theory, sentence (1) is false and (3) is true, because no one is a chink; no one should be discriminated against for being Chinese.

(1) Chang is a chink

(2) Chang is a Chinese

(3) Chang is not a chink

(4) Chang is not a Chinese

I will argue against this analysis of the truth values of (1) and (3), using cases where truth values have significant normative consequences. Contrary to the truth-conditional content theory, I insist that (1) must be capable of being true, and (3) must be able to be false. Suppose testimonies on Chang's ethnicity are requested in a trial. A foul-mouthed racist, who calls the Chinese "chink" by habit, decides to lie about the fact that Chang is Chinese. He asserts that (3) "Chang is not a chink" to the judge. Could he escape the

accusation of perjury with the excuse that (3) is in fact trivially true, as Hom shows? No. This should be clearly treated as perjury because his assertion of (3) is a lie, in particular, a false statement about Chang's ethnicity. On the other hand, if the racist decided to reveal Chang's ethnicity by asserting (1), this would be a derogatory but true statement. It would be implausible for the court to rule that (1) is a false testimony on the grounds that no one is a chink. Let us label this argument (A3):

(A3) *Argument from Truth-conditional Contribution*: The truth-conditional content theory entails that "Chang is not a chink" must be true. However, this sentence can be false as is shown by the fact that asserting it in a court would be perjury as a testimony about Chang's ethnicity.

Objection (A3) does not challenge (T1) the force indicator theory, because (T1) takes slurs to make the same truth-conditional contents as their neutral counterparts. It follows from my theory that (3) "Chang is a not a chink" is false and asserting so counts as perjury. The force indicator theory acknowledges the intuition that non-bigots find "Chang is a not a chink" unacceptable, but denies that this makes it true.[54] The truth-conditional content

[54] For detailed analysis of cases like this, see section 6.4.

theory gives rise to problems like this because of its different view on the truth-conditional contents of slurs.

5.2 The Conventional Implicature Theory

The conventional implicature theory is based on the notion of conventional implicature introduced by Grice (1989, 25). Conventional implicature is a kind of implicature in contrast with what is said. Unlike conversational implicatures, conventional implicatures are determined by choice of words (or the built-in, conventional meanings of words), rather than mere cooperative principles.[55] For instance, "but" carries a conventional implicature of contrast that "and" lacks. What is said by "Chang is rich but kind" is exactly the same as "Chang is rich and kind"; both are true if and only if Chang is rich and Chang is kind. However, "Chang is rich but kind" conventionally implicates the contrast between being rich and being kind, whereas "Chang is rich and kind" does not.

Conventional implicatures exhibit special features, according to Grice (1989). The first feature is their *non-cancellability*. Conventional implicatures cannot be canceled by opting out of the cooperative principle either explicitly or by context. This is because conventional implicatures are carried not by the cooperative principle but the choice of

[55] Generally speaking, the principle is the rule that "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1989, 275).

words (or the conventional meanings of the words). Here is an example Grice would use: one cannot cancel what is conventionally implicated by "Chang is rich but kind" by adding "Don't get me wrong- I don't mean that rich people are not kind."

The second feature of conventional implicatures is their *detachability*, i.e., it is possible to say the same thing without giving rise to the implicature. For instance, what is said by "Chang is rich but kind" can be expressed by "Chang is rich and kind" without the conventional implicature.

The third feature of conventional implicatures is said to be their *non-displaceability* (2005). In other words, conventional implicatures project through the scope of sentential connectives and propositional attitude verbs. For instance, the conventional implicature of "Chang is rich but kind" projects through the scope of "believe" in "Bob believes that Chang is rich but kind."

The conventional implicature theory explains the features of slurs in terms of conventional implicatures (Whiting 2013, 364, Williamson 2009, 149, Sennet and Copp 2017, 248).[56] What distinguishes slurs from their neutral counterparts is their derogatory conventional implicatures. The difference between "chink" and "Chinese" is analogous to the difference between "but" and "and." Conventional implicature theory's answer to question **(Q1)** is simple: slurs are derogatory words because they carry derogatory

[56] Theorists like Bolinger (2015) and Nunberg (2018) explain the features of slurs in terms of conversational implicatures rather than conventional implicatures. These conversational implicatures arise from the speaker's choice to use a slur instead of a neutral word. See Appendix 2 for the details of this conversational implicature view.

conventional implicatures. Question **(Q2)** is also answered in the same way; utterances of slurs are derogatory because they conventionally implicate derogatory contents. For instance, what is said by "Chang is a chink" and "Chang is a Chinese" are the same. Both utterances have the same truth conditions (or what is said) but differ in conventional implicatures. Uttering "Chang is a chink" conventionally implicates a derogatory content such as negative attitudes toward the Chinese. Let us summarize the theory as follows:

(T3) *Conventional Implicature Theory*: Slurs carry derogatory conventional implicatures such as negative attitudes toward the target.

There are two variants of the conventional implicature theory. They disagree over whether the conventional implicature of slurs is propositional or not. Some take the conventional implicature carried by slurs to be propositional (Williamson 2009, Sennet and Copp 2017), while others take the implicature to be non-propositional (Whiting 2013).[57] For Williamson (2009, 149), the derogatory conventional implicature is something propositional; e.g., "Lessing was a Boche" conventionally implicates that Germans are cruel in addition to saying that Lessing was a German. Similarly, Sennet and Copp (2017, 256) take a slur like "papist" to carry the conventional implicature that the speaker "has the

[57] The term "propositional" can be misleading. Notice that "propositional" conventional implicatures are not what is said; they do not affect the truth-condition of the utterance.

relevant bigoted attitude, such as contempt for Catholics or the like." In contrast, Whiting (2013, 365) holds that the conventional implicature of a slur is a non-cognitive attitude such as contempt, scorn, and derision. Such non-propositional conventional implicatures are the reasons why slurs have (Q7) *descriptive ineffability*; non-cognitive attitudes simply cannot be paraphrased. Whiting's notion of conventional implicature deviates from the Gricean orthodoxy, which takes conventional implicature to be propositional by definition. For the sake of argument, I shall grant the possibility of conventionally implicating non-cognitive attitudes.

Conventional implicatures are also invoked to explain other features of slurs. Consider question (Q5). What contribution to the truth-condition does the slur "chink" make? The conventional implicature theory, unlike the truth-conditional content theory, holds that slurs make exactly the same contribution to what is said as their neutral counterparts. Replacing a slur with a neutral counterpart does not affect what is said. For instance, the truth-conditional contribution of "chink" is the same as "Chinese." It follows that (1) "Chang is a chink" is true if and only if (2) "Chang is a Chinese" is true. Furthermore, the conventional implicature theory answers (Q6) —the question of *independence*— by appealing to the detachability of conventional implicatures; the derogatory dimension of slurs is independent because it is possible to say the same thing without the derogatory conventional implicature of slurs. Answering the question (Q11) of non-displaceability is also easy; the derogatory power of slurs projects through the scope of connectives simply

because conventional implicatures always project through like this (Williamson 2009, 151).[58]

The most significant difference between the force indicator theory and the conventional implicature theory is their answer to question to **(Q2).** For the force indicator theory, utterances of slurs are derogatory when they have the illocutionary force of derogation. Illocutionary force is more context-sensitive than conventional implicatures; it is determined by many factors such as semantic meanings, speaker meaning, intonation, grammatical moods, etc. By comparison, the conventional implicature theory takes utterances to be derogatory when they carry derogatory conventional implicatures. Conventional implicature is less context-sensitive than illocutionary force; it is mostly determined by choice of words.[59] As the following objections show, this difference leads to problems for the conventional implicature theory.

I will raise two objections against the conventional implicature theory. The first argument is borrowed from argument (A2) against the truth-conditional content theory. That is, the conventional implicature theory faces a similar problem in explaining the possibility of non-derogatory utterances of slurs (Q10).

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[58] Even propositional conventional implicature can project through the scope of connectives. For example, "Chang is rich but kind" implicates the proposition that rich people are unlikely to be kind. A complex sentence that contains this atomic sentence (e.g., If Chang is rich but kind, he will donate money to charities) implicates the same proposition.

[59] There may be rare cases in which conventional implicature is defeated by contextual factors. This is why I claim it is "mostly" determined by choice of words.

(A4) Argument from Non-Derogatory Utterances: If the conventional implicature theory is true, an utterance of a slur is always derogatory. However, some utterances of slurs can be non-derogatory.

The conventional implicature theory is challenged by (A4) because conventional implicatures are determined by choice of words. Consider the example of utterance (8) and utterance (9) again. Although "chink" is a derogatory word, "chinks are coming!" chanted by Chinese activists to protest racism is not a derogatory utterance. Nevertheless, it follows from the conventional implicature theory that utterance (7) is as derogatory as utterance (8). This because in both utterances, the speaker conventionally implicates his negative attitude toward the Chinese by using the word "chink." When "chink" has been chosen over "Chinese," the utterance carries the same derogatory conventional implicature against the Chinese. Remember that conventional implicatures are *non-cancellable*. If the conventional implicature theory was true, it would be very difficult to find contexts in which "Chinks are coming" could be non-derogatory. As section 2.9 has shown, this consequence is very counterintuitive.

(7) Chinks are coming! (Chanted by radical Chinese activists in a rally against racism)

(8) Chinks are coming! (uttered by a white supremacist in a speech against Chinese immigrant)

A response to argument (A4) might be that conventional implicatures, though not cancellable, could still be defeated in certain cases like sarcasm.[60] This could allow the possibility of non-derogatory utterances for the conventional implicature theory. Imagine a situation where the rich people from the 1% are unhappy with the conventionally implicated contrast between being rich and being kind. They gather in a rally and chant "Rich BUT kind! Rich BUT kind!". It might be argued that their utterances do not carry the conventional implicature that there is a contrast between being rich and being kind. Therefore, the conventional implicature theory could explain utterance (7) just like this case. However, my reply is that the conventional implicature, i.e., the contrast between being rich and being poor, is not defeated by their sarcastic uses in this case. The speakers conventionally implicate the contrast and then conversationally implicate their rejection of this contrast. If this conventional implicature was absent (e.g., chanting "Rich and kind!" instead), the protestors could not express the sarcastic rejection of the contrast.[61]

The second argument against the conventional implicature theory rests on the observation that the slur for one group can be used to derogate another group. Let us label this argument (A5)

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[60] Thanks for David Bourget for raising this response.

[61] Notice that my reply to this response does not apply to my force indicator theory. Just like the conventionally implicated contrast, slurs' role as illocutionary force indicators cannot be canceled or defeated by sarcasm; what is defeated is the act of derogation. Even in sarcastic uses of slurs, slurs are still derogatory words, i.e., illocutionary force indicators of derogation.

(A5) *Argument from Indirect Derogation*: If the conventional implicature theory is true, it is impossible to derogate a group with a slur for another group. However, it is possible to derogate Koreans with a slur for the Chinese.

It is possible to derogate a group with a slur for another group. Consider the following example utterance (20). The word "chink" is a slur against the Chinese. However, utterance (20) below is derogatory for Koreans, even if "chink" is not a derogatory word for being Korean. Perhaps the speaker is implying the Korean neighbors are despicable like "chinks." Because this utterance is derogatory against them, the Korean neighbors have a legitimate reason to feel hurt and to protest it. The speaker cannot excuse himself by pointing out that it has nothing to do with Koreans because he uttered a slur against the Chinese.

(20) "Chinks are moving into our neighborhood." (A white supremacist comments on his new Korean neighbors, even though he knows that they are Korean)

The conventional implicature theory cannot accommodate the intuition that a slur can be uttered to derogate a group other than its referent. When it comes to utterance (20), the conventional implicature theory cannot allow an utterance of "chink" to be derogatory against Koreans. This is because utterances of "chink" conventionally implicate derogatory

contents toward the Chinese, not the Koreans. For example, Williamson (2009) would hold that "chink" conventionally implicates that the Chinese are devious, whereas Whiting (2013) would take the conventional implicature to be the contempt of the Chinese. Either way, the conventional implicature has nothing to do with Koreans.[62] Therefore utterance (20) can be derogatory only against the Chinese, not Koreans. Again, this result of the conventional implicature theory is implausible.

Why does the conventional implicature theory face problems like (A4) and (A5)? This is because conventional implicature is determined by choice of linguistic expressions, rather than pragmatic factors such as cooperative principles (Grice 1989, 25). Therefore, contextual factors play more limited roles in determining if an utterance is derogatory and whom it is derogatory against. Whenever the speaker chooses to use the word "chink," his utterance carries the same derogatory conventional implicature against the Chinese. By contrast, the illocutionary force indicator theory can avoid problems like (A4) and (A5). This is because illocutionary force is more flexible than conventional implicatures.[63] In particular, utterances of slurs can lose the illocutionary force of derogation when the felicity conditions are not met. Moreover, an utterance can derogate the Korean indirectly

[62] By contrasts, a proposition that involves Koreans could be derogatory against them, even if it is false. For example, expressing the proposition that Koreans are American imperialists is indeed derogatory against Koreans, who are not American imperialists. Unfortunately, conventional implicature theorists think that the conventional implicatures of "chink" involves no group other than the Chinese.

[63] The role of illocutionary force indicator can be as conventional as conventional implicatures. For example, when an utterance of a slur is infelicitous, it does not have the illocutionary force of derogation. However, that slur remains a force indicator of derogation. Their role of force indicators is conventionally encoded in the types of slurs.

via directly derogating the Chinese, just like indirect speech acts such as “Can you pass me the salt?”.

5.3 Inferentialism about Slurs

Inferentialism about slurs is based on inferential role semantics. Instead of explaining meanings in terms of reference and truth-conditions, inferential role semantics takes inference relations between sentences to be fundamental for meaning. As Dummett (1973, 453) puts it, “learning to use a statement…involves…learning two things: the conditions under which one is justified in making the statement; and…the consequences of accepting it. Here ‘consequences’ must be taken to include … the inferential powers of the statement...” In particular, the meaning of a term is determined by its inferential rules which license appropriate inferences between sentences. That is, to understand the meaning of “bachelor,” one has to understand that the inferential rules allow inferences from “Chang is a bachelor” to “Chang is unmarried,” “Chang is male,” etc.

According to inferentialism about slurs, the inferential rules of slurs allow inferences to derogatory statements. The example from Dummett (1973, 454) is the slur “Boche” for Germans. The inferential rules of slurs permit inferring from someone’s being a “Boche” to that “he is barbarous and more prone to cruelty than other Europeans.” Williamson (2009, 139) reformulates Dummett's view on the meaning of “Boche” with the following

inferential rules. These two rules allow the inference from "x is a German" to "x is a Boche," and the inference from "x is a Boche" to "x is cruel" respectively.

Boche-Introduction:	*Boche-Elimination:*
x is a German	x is a Boche
x is a Boche	x is cruel

Inferentialism can answer the essential questions about slurs. Consider question (Q2): Why is an utterance like "Chang is a chink" derogatory? This sentence or utterance is derogatory because derogatory statements can be inferred from it.[64] "Chang is a chink" is derogatory because we can infer that "Chang is devious," "Chang is rude," etc., from it. This leads to an answer to question (Q1): why is a slur like "chink" a derogatory word. "Chink" is a derogatory word, because its meaning consists of the inferential rules that license inferences to derogatory statements, e.g., from "Chang is a chink" to "Chang is devious," etc. For example:

Chink-Introduction:	*Chink-Elimination:*
x is a Chinese	x is a chink
x is a chink	x is devious

[64] This explanation of derogatory sentences is not necessarily circular. There might be a holistic account of derogatory sentences.

Inferentialism about slurs could be modified to answer question (Q12) about Kaplanian Inference Puzzle. Inference (14) from "The chinks celebrate Lunar New Year" to "Therefore, the Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year" seems "valid" because the inferential role of "chink" contains a chink elimination rule that licenses such an inference. Likewise, inference (13) from "The Chinese celebrate Lunar New Year" to "Therefore, the chinks celebrate Lunar New Year" seems "invalid" because the inferential role of "chink" does not include a chink-introduction rule that allows it. Notice that this claim about inference (13) may be inconsistent with the chink-introduction rule from "x is a Chinese" to "x is a chink" introduced above. Inferentialism can in principle explain the Kaplanian Inference Puzzle, but it needs to be modified to resolve inconsistencies like this.

It is helpful to summarize inferentialism about slurs as the following thesis:

(T4) *Inferentialism about Slurs*: The meaning of a slur consists of inferential rules that permit inferences to derogatory sentences about the target.

Inferentialism about slurs differs from the force indicator theory because it gives statements or declarative sentences the central role in explaining slurs. Unlike other kinds of sentences, statements are governed by inferential relations between them. Slurs are derogatory when they license inferences between certain statements. By comparison, the force indicator theory does not give statements such a central role; slurs have the same use

to derogate in all kinds of sentences. This emphasis on statements and the relation between statements makes inferentialism vulnerable to my objections.

I will argue that inferentialism also fails to explain how non-declarative sentences can be derogatory. This is similar to (A1) argument from non-assertions against the truth-conditional content theory; slurs can make non-declarative sentences like imperatives or interrogatives derogatory. Consider sentences (18) and (19) again. Both should be as derogatory as the declarative sentence (1) "Chang is a chink."

(18) Is Chang a chink?

(19) Bring me a chink, Chang!

Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that there are any inferential rules from (18) and (19) to derogatory statements. Inferential relation is surely an essential semantic relation between declarative sentences. Nonetheless, it is unclear what can be inferred from interrogatives and imperatives. Is it possible to infer from the question "Is Chang a chink?" a derogatory statement like "Chang is devious"? The answer is no because no inference can be drawn from a question to a statement. A statement may answer a question, but cannot be inferred from it. I shall reformulate the argument as (A6):

(A6) *The Argument from Non-Declarative Sentences*: It follows from inferentialism that non-declarative sentences like “Is Chang a chink?” are not derogatory because no derogatory statements can be inferred from them. However, non-declarative sentences with slurs can be derogatory.

A possible response to argument (A6) is to expand the notion of “inference” to include semantic relations from imperatives to imperatives, and from interrogatives to interrogatives. For instance, one might be able to infer from “Get me a bachelor!” to “Get me a male person!”. This is because issuing the command in some sense entails the further command; if the speaker has asked for a bachelor, he must have asked for a male person. Therefore, the possible response to (A6) would endorse inferences from (18) “Is Chang a chink?” to interrogatives with derogatory terms like “Is Chang devious?”, “Is Chang rude?”, etc. Similarly, the meaning of “chink” would allow inferences from (19) “Bring me a chink, Chang!” to “Get me a devious person, Chang!”, etc.

This response, unfortunately, would not save inferentialism about slurs. For the sake of argument, I shall grant the possibility that inferential rules allow inference from non-declarative sentences with slurs to other non-declarative sentences with derogatory terms. Nonetheless, this response is insufficient to explain **(Q1)** why slurs are derogatory. This is because those non-declarative sentences with derogatory terms are not derogatory sentences themselves. Unlike “Chang is devious,” “Is Chang devious?” is not derogatory

at all. Similarly, “Get me a devious person, Chang!” is also non-derogatory. Even if they can be inferred from (18) or (19), they do not explain why non-declarative sentences like (18) or (19) are derogatory.

Another response to argument (A6) is to limit the scope of inferentialism to propositions (rather than providing a semantics for non-declarative sentences).[65] It might be argued that inferential rules constitute only the proposition, not the grammatical moods. For example, sentence (1) “Chang is a chink” has an indicative mood, whereas (18) “Is Chang a chink?” has an interrogative mood. Nonetheless, both (1) and (18) share the same derogatory proposition that Chang is a chink. This proposition, according to the limited inferentialism, can be defined in terms of inferential rules from it to other derogatory propositions (e.g., that Chang is devious, that Chang is rude, etc.). This response holds a sentence like (18) is derogatory when it expresses a derogatory proposition, regardless of its grammatical mood. Consequently, this limited inferentialism seems to have no problem of explaining why non-declarative sentences like (18) can be derogatory.

My reply to this response rejects its assumption that sentences are derogatory when they express derogatory propositions. Consider the following two sentences:

(10) Chang is an asshole.

[65] Thanks for Robert Stainton for this response.

(21) Is Chang an asshole?

Sentence (10) and (21) share the same derogatory proposition, i.e., that Chang is an asshole. It follows from the assumption that (10) is derogatory iff (21) is derogatory. However, although (10) is derogatory, question (21) is not. Even a person with the utmost respect for Chang has no problem with asking question (21). This suggests that expressing a derogatory proposition is insufficient for a sentence to be derogatory. After all, a derogatory proposition is not necessarily endorsed by a sentence; a proposition could be denied, questioned, or mocked. Therefore, grammatical moods (and other illocutionary force indicators) help to determine if a sentence is derogatory. I do not have a theory for how "asshole" and "chink" interact differently with the interrogative mood. But this example should suffice for defending argument (A6) from the response.

Why is inferentialism about slurs susceptible to objections like (A6)? I believe the source is its overemphasis on the role of statements or declarative sentences. Making inferences between statements is one of the many things slurs can be used to do. It is a mistake to think of it as the most essential function of slurs. The force indicator theory does not face the same problem because it allows non-statements of slurs to have the illocutionary force of derogation. For instance, utterance (18) "Is Chang a chink?" can have both the illocutionary force of asking a question and the force of derogating the Chinese.

5.4 The Prohibition Theory

The prohibitionist theory of slurs is unique in the sense that it explains the derogatory power or offensiveness of slurs in terms of a non-linguistic property, i.e., prohibitions (Anderson and Lepore 2013).[66] Slurs are prohibited words. They are not allowed to be used on many occasions. This fact provides an answer to question **(Q1)**; slurs are derogatory words because they are prohibited. Question (Q3) can be given a similar answer; slurs cause offense because using or mentioning them violates the prohibition on them. Anderson and Lepore do not specify exactly which kind of prohibition is required for slurs. Nonetheless, they suggest that a word can be made a slur once it is prohibited by relevant groups, which often are the target groups of slurs. For instance, if the Chinese community denounces and protests against the word "chink," such a prohibition should make "chink" a slur. The core thesis of the prohibitionist theory can be formulated as follows:

(T5) *The Prohibition Theory*: Slurs are derogatory or offensive words because they are prohibited words.

Appealing to prohibition is useful in explaining many features of slurs. Take non-displaceability (Q11) for instance. The derogatory power or offensiveness of slurs project

[66] By a "non-linguistic" property, I mean a property that is not studied by the core areas of theoretical linguistics and philosophy of language, such as semantics, syntax, pragmatics, and phonology.

through the scope of connectives. This is because no matter how slurs are embedded, they are always prohibited (Anderson and Lepore 2013, 354). For example, the occurrence of the slur in (3) “Chang is not a chink” is as prohibited as (1) “Chang is a chink.” Therefore, embedded slurs remain offensive or derogatory.

The most significant difference between the force indicator theory and the prohibition theory is the kind of explanation they give. While the prohibition theory appeals to non-linguistic explanations, the force indicator theory explains the derogatory power or offensiveness of slurs with linguistic explanations. Social prohibition, as a non-linguistic explanation, is too crude to explain the subtleties of offensiveness and derogatory power.

Before I raise objections against the prohibition theory, here is a caveat on the terminology. Unlike my distinction between *derogatory power* and *offensiveness*, the prohibition theory conflates the two features together; Anderson and Lepore use the term “offensiveness” interchangeably with “derogatory power.” Therefore, the prohibition theory can be interpreted in two ways. First, it can be interpreted as explaining *derogatory power* with prohibition (i.e., answering question (Q1) and (Q2)). Second, it can also be read as explaining *offensiveness* with prohibition (i.e., answering (Q3) and (Q4)).

Because of the two possible readings, my objections against the prohibition theory have to address both readings. Therefore, I will first argue against the prohibition theory as an explanation of derogatory power. Then I will raise objections against this theory as an explanation of offensiveness.

First, let us examine the prohibition theory as an explanation of offensiveness. I will argue that the prohibition is insufficient for explaining why using slurs causes offense. Imagine a situation where a close Chinese friend calls Chang "chink" as a sign of intimacy. Chang feels amused instead of taking offense. After all, Chang understands that the friend is merely playing with the taboo or prohibition, rather than insulting him. In this case, a prohibition is violated, but no offense is caused. Causing offense must involve more than violating a prohibition (e.g., perceived hostility). The prohibition theory is vulnerable to this objection because the offensiveness of slurs involves the psychological reactions of the audience, which a violation of a prohibition does not take into account. I shall formulate this argument as follows.

(A7) The Argument from Non-offensive Utterances: Prohibition is insufficient for explaining offensiveness because an utterance of slurs can violate a prohibition without causing offense.

Second, after arguing against the prohibition theory as an explanation of offensiveness, let us test the theory as an explanation of derogatory power.

One of the common objections against the prohibition theory is that it reverses the order of explanation; it seems that slurs' being derogatory explains their prohibitions, not the other way around (Anderson and Lepore 2013, 354). For instance, if we ask "why is

‘chink’ a prohibited word?”, the right answer should be that “chink” is a derogatory word against the Chinese. Therefore, explaining the derogatory power of “chink” in terms of the prohibition against it would be putting the cart before the horse. Anderson and Lepore’s response is to deny that derogatory power is sufficient for explaining prohibition. One of their examples is that pronouncing the tetragrammaton (i.e., YHWH) is prohibited in the Jewish communities. It is prohibited not because it is derogatory, but because it is a divine name.

I will argue against Anderson and Lepore’s response by showing that prohibition is also insufficient for derogatory power. The kind of examples Anderson and Lepore invoke not only undermines explaining prohibition in terms of derogatory power, but also their explanation of derogatory power in terms of prohibition. Many words are prohibited, but they are not derogatory words. Therefore, prohibition is not enough for explaining derogatory power. A good example is the naming taboo in Imperial China. Addressing the Kangxi Emperor by his personal name “Xuanye” (or even using the characters in this name) is strictly prohibited and punishable by the death penalty. However, the prohibition on “Xuanye” does not make this name a derogatory word, not to mention a slur, for the Emperor. The same can be said for the tetragrammaton. Allow me to reformulate my argument as follows:

(A8) The Argument from Prohibited Non-derogatory Words: Prohibition is insufficient for explaining derogatory power because there are prohibited words that are not derogatory words.

It has also been argued that the prohibitionist theory is insufficient for explaining the particular way in which slurs are derogatory. That is, prohibition is insufficient for differentiating between the derogatory power of slurs and general pejoratives (Anderson and Lepore 2013, 355). For instance, the word "chink" is derogatory in a way different from "asshole", even though they are both prohibited words. Prohibition alone is insufficient for explaining the difference. Anderson and Lepore respond to this accusation by denying such a difference; there is no evidence to prove that both words are derogatory in different ways. They insist that there is no difference in the reaction among hearers. Even if we were more offended by slurs, that would be because they are more prohibited.

I will argue that Anderson and Lepore's reply still fails because there is one difference they cannot deny and cannot explain. The derogatory power of slurs, unlike other pejoratives, is directed against all members of the target group, rather than an individual. In particular, "chink" is not just a derogatory word; it is a derogatory word *against* all members of a group. The job of this word is to derogate or insult all the Chinese. This is a feature that general pejoratives lack; they are not derogatory words *against* all members of a group. The word "asshole" does not target all mean, contemptible persons; its use is to

insult particular individuals. For instance, all Chinese would have a reason to feel offended by the sentence "Chang is a Chink," the literal usage of which hurts all Chinese in addition to Chang. By contrast, one would not say that all "assholes" or a national organization of "assholes" have reason to feel hurt and protest the utterance (10) "Chang is an asshole." The word "asshole" is not a derogatory word *against* all members of its referent, say, all mean and contemptible people. After all, the literal usage of (10) "Chang is an asshole" targets no one but Chang. I shall formulate this argument as follows:

(A9) *The Argument from Directness of Derogatory Power*: Both slurs and general pejoratives are prohibited words. However, slurs are derogatory words against all members of the target group, whereas general pejoratives are not. Therefore, prohibition is insufficient for explaining why slurs are derogatory words.

Anderson and Lepore might provide prohibitionist explanations for how words can be derogatory *against* certain groups of people. There can be two approaches, and I will reject both of them. *First*, they might hold that a derogatory word is derogatory against a group because it refers to that group. However, this explanation would not distinguish between slurs and general pejoratives. This is because general pejoratives are not derogatory against their referent; "asshole" is not a word to insult all mean and despicable people. *Second*, they might hold that derogatory words are derogatory against people who prohibit them.

"Chink" is a derogatory word against the Chinese, because it is prohibited by the Chinese community. However, this alternative explanation would not work because a slur is often prohibited by people who are not the target of it. Many groups of activists prohibit and denounce the word "chink," even though they are not Chinese. Nonetheless, this does not make "Chink" a derogatory word against non-Chinese groups.

We should take a step back and reflect on why the prohibition theory is vulnerable to objections like (A9). Unlike illocutionary acts, prohibition is too crude to differentiate slurs from general pejoratives; it does not tell us the target of the offensive and derogatory word. By contrast, the illocutionary force indicator theory would have no problem in explaining the difference. The illocutionary act of derogation can have different targets as its content. "Chang is an asshole" is derogatory against Chang, because it derogates Chang, rather than all "assholes." By contrast, "Chang is a chink" is derogatory against the Chinese because it derogates all the Chinese, not just Chang.

5.5 Mark Richard's Theory

Mark Richard (2008) invokes slurs, in addition to vagueness, taste predicates, etc., as examples of the limitation of defining meaning in terms of truth-conditions. Let me focus on his view on slurs. His theory has a simple answer for **(Q1)**: slurs are derogatory words because they are "conventional means to express strong negative attitudes towards members of a group, attitudes in some sense grounded in nothing more than membership

in the group" (Richard 2008, 12). As for why utterances of slurs are derogatory **(Q2)**, Richard takes these utterances to express distinctive derogatory thoughts. For instance, (1) "Chang is a chink" expresses the slurring thought that Chang is a chink, whereas (2) "Chang is a Chinese" expresses a different thought, i.e., the thought that Chang is a Chinese. To think that someone is a chink requires having contempt for Chinese people because of their ethnic identity, and contempt is a part of the thought.

When it comes to the truth-conditional contribution of slurs (Q5), Richard's theory has a unique answer. Richard (2008, 7) believes that utterances containing slurs lack truth values. That is, (1) "Chang is a chink" is neither true nor false. This is because they express a special kind of thought that is incapable of truth. Compare the slurring thought that Chang is a chink with the thought that Chang is a Chinese. The former thought cannot be true, even though the latter thought is true. It cannot be true because it misrepresents the target of the slurs. Again, the thought that Chang is chink has the contempt of the Chinese as a part it. Simply having such contempt is a misrepresentation of Chinese people, because the contempt represents the Chinese as worthy of contempt. Since they are not contemptible for their Chinese identity, the thought misrepresents them. Because the thoughts expressed by utterances containing slurs misrepresent the target of slurs, they have no truth values.

Richard (2008, 24) offers further arguments for his claim that utterances of slurs have no truth values. First, he argues that utterances of slurs cannot be true. This argument is based on his theory of truth; to say a thought is true is to endorse it as representing the

world correctly. But slurring thoughts misrepresent the world; we do not think a racist thought represents the world correctly. So slurring thoughts are not true. To say they are true is to accept the way racists represent their target. Second, utterances of slurs are not false either. Although they express slurring thoughts that misrepresent the target, misrepresentation does not make them false. This is because to say those thoughts are false is to say their negations are true. For instance, to say that (1) "Chang is a chink" is false is to say that (3) "Chang is not a chink" is true. Nonetheless, we do not accept the truth of those negations. To say (3) "Chang is not a chink" is true amounts to saying that the racist speaker represents the world right. (3) is also not true because it expresses a slurring thought that misrepresents the Chinese.

I will reformulate the central thesis of Richard's theory as follows:

(T6) *Mark Richard's Theory of Slurs*: Utterances of slurs express slurring thoughts that misrepresent the targets as worthy of contempt, and they lack truth values because of the misrepresentation.

Contrary to Richard's theory, my theory does not appeal to slurring thoughts. I believe the derogatory power of slurs arises from utterances and speech acts, not from mental states. This is because to derogate a group is a matter of enforcing a discriminatory norm, rather than expressing one's thoughts. However, I do not have an objection against Richard's

theory from this difference. Therefore, I need to introduce another difference that gives rise to a problem for him.

The most significant disagreement between my force indicator theory and Richard's theory is the truth-conditional contribution of slurs. The force indicator theory does not take utterances of slurs to be void of truth value. Although it agrees that (1) "Chang is a chink" is unacceptable and cannot be endorsed by non-bigots, such unacceptability does not affect its truth value. For example, it takes (1) "Chang is a chink" to be true, even if it is objectionable. After all, slurs' role as force indicators does not affect their role as propositional indicators. By contrast, Richard's theory takes such unacceptability to be the exact reason why utterances of slurs lack truth values. As my objection will show, denying the truth values of utterances of slurs leads to unwanted consequences for Richard's theory.

I will raise an argument similar to argument (A3) against the truth-conditional content theory:

(A10) *The Argument from Lying*: if an utterance has no truth value, it is impossible to lie with it. However, one can lie with an utterance that contains a slur. Therefore, Richard's theory is mistaken in claiming that utterances of slurs have no truth values.

This argument is based on the possibility of lying with slurs. One of the necessary conditions for a lie is the capability of having truth values. For instance, utterances like

"thank you!", "what is that?", and "please go that way" cannot be lies because they cannot be true or false. In telling a lie, the speaker is committed to the truth value of the statement. This is why the speaker can be accused of lying when the statement turns out to be false. A lie misrepresents the world in a certain way that makes it false. If the misrepresentation in an utterance of slur deprives it of truth value, then it cannot be a lie.

Nonetheless, it is surely possible to lie with slurs. Consider again the example of a foul-mouthed racist, who calls the Chinese "chinks" by habit. He is demanded by the court to testify on Chang's ethnicity. He knows that Chang is Chinese, but he decides to hide this fact. Therefore, he utters a sentence with a slur: (3) "Chang is not a chink." It is intuitive that he has lied with (3). Despite being derogatory, what he says is a lie. He could not escape the accusation of being a liar with the excuse that what he says lacks truth value. Similar cases can easily be made. Given the possibility of lies with slurs, Richard's theory (T6) is wrong in claiming utterances of slurs have no truth value.

Why is Richard's theory susceptible to objections like argument (A10)? The objection arises from Richard's assumption that expressing negative attitudes deprives utterances of truth values because of misrepresentation. A theory of slurs can avoid this objection by abandoning this assumption. For example, the force indicator theory would not face problems like (A10). This is because utterance (3) "Chang is not a chink" is both an illocutionary act of derogation and an act of assertion. "Chink" contributes to the truth-

condition of the assertion, which is capable of being a lie. Being an act of derogation does not prevent the utterance from being an assertion.

5.6 Hornsby's Gesture Theory

Hornsby's gesture theory is motivated by an interesting feature of slurs, that is, their *uselessness*. What does *uselessness* mean? According to Hornsby (2001, 130), "In the case of derogatory words … One cannot endorse anything that is done using these words. And this is what I mean by useless—absolutely useless, as it were." Although slurs have a use for bigots, they are useless for non-bigots because they would not use this word to do anything; they could always use the neutral counterpart. In addition, slurs are absolutely useless, in the sense that non-bigots cannot accept anything that is done by using slurs.

Hornsby's positive account is rather vague. She explains usages of slur with an analogy to gestures, although she does not offer a concrete theory. That is, uttering a slur is like uttering its neutral counterpart while making a gesture. The derogatory dimension of the meaning of slur is said to be expressed by this gesture. For instance, someone's uttering (1) "Chang is a chink" is like uttering (2) "Chang is a Chinese" while pointing the middle finger. The derogatory attitude toward the Chinese is expressed by something analogous to the middle finger. Hornsby should not be read as claiming that utterances of slurs involve actual gestures. This would be obviously false; people can make derogatory

utterances of slurs even if they are incapable of making gestures. What she offers is merely an analogy to gestures.

(T7) Hornsby's Gesture Theory: An utterance of a slur is analogous to an utterance with its neutral counterpart while making a gesture.

Because Hornsby does not have a concrete theory beside an analogy, it is difficult to raise objections against it. I will therefore not argue against it. To the contrary, I believe that her gesture theory ultimately collapses into an illocutionary force indicator theory like mine. Therefore, I agree with her approach. According to Austin (1962, 76), gesture is one of the many kinds of illocutionary force indicators. Austin calls gestures such as winks, shrugging, frowns, "accompanies of the utterance." What gestures do is to make the illocutionary force of slurs explicit, i.e., show how the content of the utterances should be taken. In fact, Hornsby herself suggests slurs should be explained in terms of illocutionary acts. When it comes to explaining the uselessness of slurs in particular, Hornsby (2001, 140) claims that "there is nowhere else to turn than to the kinds of speech act made by those who use them—speech acts of illocutionary kinds, as we have seen, such as vilifying, snubbing, expressing derision, and so on. And when sentences containing them are seen as suited for doing such things as these, one has a ready explanation of their uselessness."

Therefore, Hornsby's gesture theory is a helpful approximation of illocutionary force indicator theories.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have summarized and criticized the major theories of slurs. It is helpful to list these theories again here.

(T2) *Truth-conditional content theory*: Slurs have derogatory truth-conditional contents, i.e., complex normative properties of the form "ought to be discriminated against in certain ways because of having certain stereotypical properties because of belonging to a certain group

(T3) *Conventional Implicature Theory*: Slurs carry derogatory conventional implicatures such as negative attitudes toward the target.

(T4) *Inferentialism about Slurs*: The meaning of a slur consists of inferential rules that permit inferences to derogatory sentences about the target.

(T5) *The Prohibition Theory*: Slurs are derogatory or offensive words because they are prohibited words.

(T6) *Mark Richard's Theory of Slurs*: Utterances of slurs express slurring thoughts that misrepresent the targets as worthy of contempt, and they lack truth values because of the misrepresentation.

(T7) *Hornsby's Gesture Theory*: An utterance of a slur is analogous to an utterance with its neutral counterpart while making a gesture.

These alternative theories of slurs are subject to various objections because they often adopt an opposing position to mine on many issues. I have illustrated the differences between my theory and these theories, and I have raised objections against them based on these differences. These challenges help to highlight the advantages of my force indicator theory over the alternatives. However, criticizing other theories of slurs is not enough; I have to defend my theory from objections as well. This is the task of the following chapter.

6 Defending the Illocutionary Force Indicator Theory

Many objections can be raised against different aspects of the force indicator theory. Its first thesis is that slurs are illocutionary force indicators of derogation. One might challenge this thesis by questioning the nature of derogation. Is it really an illocutionary act? If derogation is not an illocutionary act, there can be no force indicators for them. One might also challenge the first thesis by excluding slurs from force indicators. Do slurs behave in the same way as force indicators? If slurs are very different from force indicators, we have a reason to reject the force indicator theory. The second thesis of the force indicator theory takes slurs to make the same truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterparts. However, are there exceptions where they make *different* contributions? If there are, the second thesis has to be rejected. This is not a comprehensive list of all objections. However, a proponent of the force indicator theory must respond to them.

In this chapter, I will defend the force indicator theory from these potential objections. In section 6.1, I will respond to the objection that derogation is not an illocutionary act because one cannot derogate by saying "I hereby derogate…". In section 6.2, I will address the objection that slurs behave differently than force indicators when embedded. Section 6.3 will focus on as objection stating that the force indicator theory leads to systematic ambiguity. In section 6.4, I will discuss the objection that slurs make different truth-conditional contributions than their neutral counterparts. Lastly, it might be argued that my theory collapses into expressivism or a register theory of slurs. In the final two sections, I

will illustrate the advantages of the force indicator theory by comparing it with expressivism (§ 6.5) and the register theory (§ 6.6) respectively.

6.1 Objection 1: Derogation is Not Illocutionary

The first objection against the force indicator theory denies that derogation is an illocutionary act. If so, slurs cannot be the illocutionary force indicators of derogation. Every illocutionary act seems to have a corresponding performative verb. For instance, the illocutionary act of promising has the corresponding performative verb "promise." Thus, one can make a promise by uttering "I hereby promise that…". If derogation is an illocutionary act, how come there is no performative verb for it? If no one can derogate the Chinese by saying "I hereby derogate the Chinese," derogation does not seem like an illocutionary act. Since derogation is not an illocutionary act, slurs cannot be force indicators of derogation.

However, this objection rests on the unjustified assumption that every illocutionary act corresponds to a performative verb. My response is simply to reject this assumption. Many speech act theorists deny that every illocutionary act corresponds to one performative verb (Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 179, Sadock 2004, 56). In particular, some illocutionary acts do not have corresponding performative verbs. For instance, boasting is an illocutionary act, but it is impossible to boast by saying that "I boast that I own a car." Similarly, verbs such as "threaten," "insinuate," and "hint" do not have

performative uses like “promise,” even if they correspond to illocutionary acts. If so, the fact that English has no performative verb for derogation poses no threat to the force indicator theory.

Moreover, the lack of a performative verb for derogation in English might not be shared by other languages. For example, insulting is a member of the family of illocutionary acts of derogation (see section 4.1). Surely one cannot insult a person by saying “I hereby insult you” in English. But this does not necessarily apply to other languages. Austin (1962, 30) points out that “in the heyday of student duelling in Germany it was the custom for members of one club to march past members of a rival club, … and then for each to say to his chosen opponent … ‘Beleidigung’, which means ‘I insult you’.” This example suggests the possibility that insulting and derogation may have corresponding performative verbs in other languages.

Even if acts like boasting and insulting do not have performative verbs, some readers may still be unconvinced that derogation is an illocutionary act. It might be argued that my examples, such as boasting and insulting, should all be expelled from the realm of illocutionary acts. Therefore, their lack of performative verbs does not defend derogation from this objection. I agree that boasting and derogating may not be like prototypical illocutionary acts such as assertion and promising. Nonetheless, there are theoretical reasons to at least treat derogating along the same lines as other illocutionary acts. That is, derogation shares important commonalities with other illocutionary acts. For instance,

derogation can be performed *in* saying something, just like other illocutionary acts. Moreover, its force can be conventionally encoded in the types of linguistic expressions, and derogation can be made infelicitous by the context.

Because of these commonalities, my illocutionary force indicator theory remains intact for the most part, even if a narrow conception of illocutionary act excludes derogation. Let us call derogation a "schmillocutionary act" instead, if it is not illocutionary. As "schmillocutionary force indicators," slurs still provide a default interpretation of derogation to utterances, just like illocutionary force indicators. Derogation, even if not illocutionary, can achieve a "schmillocutionary point" to enforce a certain norm. The features of slurs can be explained by appealing to the mechanisms of illocutionary acts without calling them "illocutionary." Consequently, the dispute over derogation's status as illocutionary act becomes trivial for my theory.

6.2 Objection 2: Embedded Slurs are Not Like Force Indicators

Another objection against the force indicator theory arises from the feature of the *non-displaceability* of slurs. The familiar force indicators do not indicate illocutionary forces when embedded within the scope of connectives. For example, uttering the sentence "If I promise that I will not come, the conference will have fewer participants" does not have the illocutionary force of a promise. By comparison, slurs remain derogatory even when they are embedded within the scope of connectives. This is the feature of *non-*

displaceability of slurs introduced in section 2.11. Consider the following conditional sentence (22). Even if "chink" is embedded within the antecedent, the whole sentence is still derogatory. Therefore, slurs cannot be force indicators because they behave differently when embedded.

(22) If chinks celebrate Lunar New Year, they eat dumplings.

My response to this objection challenges its assumption that embedded force indicators generally indicate no illocutionary force. It has been argued that certain parentheticals are illocutionary force indicators, and they can be embedded without losing illocutionary force (Green 2000, 447). Consider the parenthetical "as I suppose" within the conditional "If snow is white, as I suppose, then grass is green." This parenthetical indicates the illocutionary force of supposing that snow is white, which should be differentiated from asserting that grass is green if snow is white.[67] Furthermore, this example of embedded parenthetical should not be confused with the conditional "If I suppose that snow is white, then grass is green." My response does not claim that this conditional has the force of supposition. Although the embedded expression "I suppose" indicates no illocutionary force of supposition, it is not a parenthetical expression.

[67] I take supposition to be an illocutionary act, the point of which is to present a proposition for consideration without committing to its truth. A speaker supposing that p, unlike someone who asserts that p, cannot be blamed, even if p turns out to be false.

I believe that slurs behave like those parentheticals; they also keep their illocutionary force when embedded. Therefore, sentence (22) is analogous to "If the Chinese, damn those people, celebrate Lunar New Year, they eat dumplings." The embedded parenthetical "damn those people" indicates the force of derogation like slurs, whereas "the Chinese" provides propositional content. This is not to say that slurs are disguised parentheticals. I believe a slur like "chink" is syntactically different from "Chinese, damn those people." Different kinds of illocutionary force indicators behave differently when embedded. Both slurs and certain parentheticals belong to the kind of indicators that retain their illocutionary force when they are embedded. Other indicators of this kind include honorifics like "sir" and swear words like "damn."

6.3 Objection 3: Force Indicator Theory Entails Ambiguity

Anderson and Lepore (2013, 353) raise the ambiguity objection against the force indicator theory. It seems to follow from the force indicator theory, or any performative theory, that slurs must be systematically ambiguous. They give an example in which a racist drives by a group of African Americans and yells out (23), and one person in the group tries to clarify the confusion with (24):

(23) You n**gers and spics don't belong here!

(24) I think you three must be the n**gers, and the rest of us are the spics.

(25) I think you three must be the "n**gers," and the rest of us are the "spics."

Anderson and Lepore argue that the slurs in (24) are non-performative or lack illocutionary force, although their meanings remain the same as those in (23). If the performative aspect or the illocutionary force of slurs were parts of the meanings, those slurs would have different meanings in (23) and (24). However, their meanings do not seem to change at all.

I will defuse this objection by denying that the slurs retain the same meanings in (23) and (24). Their meanings have changed because those slurs in (24) are used in mixed quotations, which should not be regarded as indications for ambiguity. My reply consists of two steps.

First, I believe that slurs in (24) are actually used in mixed quotations and (24) should be analyzed as (25).[68] In mixed quotations, slurs are used to report the derogatory usages of other speakers, instead of being used by the speaker for derogation. This is why slurs seem to lose their performative or illocutionary aspects in (24). (24) is a disguised case of mixed quotation, because the speaker is reporting his thought about the racist's usage of the slurs; he thinks that some of the group were labeled with the N-word and the rest were called "spics" by the racist. In addition, the alternative reading must be rejected; it cannot

[68] Thanks to Robert Stainton for his helpful comments on mixed quotations

be the case that the speaker of (24) uses “spics” in the same meaning as the racist in (23). Unlike the mistaken racist, the speaker knows that they are all African Americans. Why would he claim that he thinks that the rest of them are the Hispanics?

Second, cases of mixed quotations should not be used as evidence for ambiguity, because even unambiguous words change their meanings in mixed quotations. I assume the word “chef” is unambiguous. Suppose a person, who is not a chef, is nicknamed “chef.” Compare (26) with (27). Mixed quotation changes the meaning of “chef” in (27). (26) states that the hearer must be the cook, whereas (27) merely claims that the hearer is called “chef.” However, this case of mixed quotation does not establish the ambiguity of “chef.” Otherwise, every word could be proven ambiguous like this.

(26) You must be the chef.

(27) You must be the “chef.”

6.4 Objection 4: Slurs Make Different Truth-conditional Contributions

An objection could be raised against my claim that slurs make the same truth-conditional contributions as their neutral counterparts. Let us call this “the truth condition objection.” As section 4.1 shows, I believe “chink” contributes the same to the proposition as “Chinese”; both words refer to the Chinese people. Suppose Chang is a Chinese person. It follows from my theory that (1) “Chang is a chink” and (2) “Chang is a Chinese” are both

true. Correspondingly, (3) “Chang is not a chink” and (4) “Chang is not a Chinese” are both false. Against my position, it might be objected that slurs make a different truth-conditional contribution than their neutral counterparts. For example, someone might hold that the sentence (1) “Chang is a chink” is actually false, while (3) “Chang is not a chink” is true. It seems that we have reached an impasse of conflicting intuitions of truth values. This objection needs better examples to support the intuitions behind it.

Unlike controversial cases like (1) and (3), this objection is better supported by the so-called “NDNA” (non-derogatory, non-appropriated) cases, where slurs seem to make different truth-conditional contributions (Hom 2008, 429, 2010, 169, Hom and May 2013, 303). I have adopted the following examples of NDNA uses with minor changes. Consider the following examples. Sentence (28) and (31) are called “NDNA” uses because they are not derogatory even though they contain slurs. Slurs also seem to affect the truth conditions of NDNA uses. Compare the truth conditions of (28) and (29). Replacing “chink” with “Chinese” seems to change their truth values. (28) appears to be true, whereas (29) seems false. That is, treating the Chinese as “chinks” is an immoral act of racism, whereas treating them as “Chinese” commits no wrong. Similarly, the truth conditions of (31) and (32) seem different. (31) appears to be true, whereas (32) is logically false. If these intuitions of NDNA uses are validated, the force indicator theory is false about the truth-conditional contribution of slurs.

(28) Institutions that treat the Chinese as chinks are morally depraved.

(29) Institutions that treat the Chinese as Chinese are morally depraved.

(30) Institutions that treat the Chinese as "chinks" are morally depraved.

(31) I am Chinese, but I am not a chink.

(32) I am Chinese, but I am not a Chinese.

(33) I am Chinese, but I am not a "chink."

Despite their similarities, the truth condition objection is different from the ambiguity objection in the last section. The proponents of the truth condition objection do not take slurs to be ambiguous between a derogatory meaning and neutral meaning. For example, "chink" has one single meaning, which is always different from "Chinese.

However, the truth condition objection rests on the same intuitions as the ambiguity objection, i.e., both invoke cases of disguised mixed quotations. The slur "chink" seems to make a different truth-conditional contribution than "Chinese" in (28) and (31), because "chink" is actually used in mixed quotations. First, (28) is actually a disguised form of (30). This is why replacing "chink" with "Chinese" changes the truth condition; there is a difference between treating someone as "chinks" and treating them as "Chinese." Similarly, (31) should be read as (33). What the speaker denies is not his being Chinese, but his being *called* "chink." Refusing to be called as "chink" is a different thing than refusing to be called "Chinese." This is why replacing "chink" in (31) seems to change the truth value.

My response to the truth condition objection is similar to the response to the ambiguity objection since both objections rest on the same intuition. The truth condition objection fails because mixed quotations are not evidence for different truth-conditional contributions. I will not delve into the semantics of mixed quotations. But one thing is clear: mixed quotations are analogous to opaque contexts. An expression in mixed quotation cannot be replaced with a co-referential expression without altering the truth values.

Consider the example of "Kraft Dinner," the Canadian brand of the same product "Kraft Mac & Cheese" in the U.S. I take the truth-conditional contribution of "Kraft Dinner" to be same as "Kraft Mac & Cheese." Like NDNA uses, I can use mixed quotations to create similar cases where "Kraft Dinner" seems to make a different contribution to the truth condition than "Kraft Mac & Cheese." Imagine a "Kraft Dinner" nationalist who refuses to call the same food "Kraft Mac & Cheese." It makes sense for him to assert (34) and (35). Despite the same truth-conditional contribution, "Kraft Dinner" in mixed quotations is not substitutable with "Kraft Mac & Cheese." To sum up, cases of mixed quotations should not be used as evidence for different truth-conditional contributions.

(34) This is "Kraft Dinner," not "Kraft Mac & Cheese"!

(35) Those who treat "Kraft Dinner" as "Kraft Mac & Cheese" are un-Canadian.

6.5 Objection 5: Collapsing into an Expressivist Theory

It might be argued that the force indicator theory ultimately collapses into an expressivist theory of slurs, which takes a slur to have at least two semantic contents, a truth-conditional content and an expressivist content (Jeshion 2013). Why is the slur "chink" both used to refer to the Chinese and to derogate the Chinese? My theory takes slurs to be both a propositional indicator and a force indicator of derogation. However, derogation involves expressing negative evaluative attitudes toward someone (How can I derogate the Chinese without expressing contempt or disdain for them?). Therefore, expressivism appears to offer a more elegant explanation, i.e., that "chink" expresses two contents, its referent (i.e., the Chinese), and its expressivist content (i.e., contempt toward the Chinese). To derogate the Chinese is to express this expressivist content about them. Such an expressivist theory seems equivalent to the force indicator theory, but without the unnecessary postulates of speech acts.

Before responding to this objection, there is a caveat on my term "express." As I have explained in § 1.1 and § 2.7, "express" is ambiguous between a speaker's expressing something (e.g., speaker meaning) and a word's expressing something (e.g., semantic content). My usage of "express" includes both senses, so as to accommodate different versions of expressivism.

I have two responses to this objection. First, the force indicator theory is not equivalent to an expressivist theory, in terms of how negative attitudes are expressed. My

force indicator theory agrees with expressivism that utterances of slurs involve expressing negative evaluative attitudes. In derogatory speeches, using slurs often expresses contempt, disdain, or disrespect. Although both theories agree that utterances of slurs express negative evaluative attitudes, there is a difference: the force indicator theory insists that the speaker, not the slur, expresses attitudes, whereas the expressivist theory takes the slur to express attitudes. I believe the negative attitudes are expressed via the sincerity condition of derogation, not expressed as a part of the semantic content. When a speaker sincerely derogates the Chinese, he also expresses negative attitudes such as contempt of the Chinese. Otherwise, his utterance would be an insincere act of derogation. By contrast, expressivism takes an utterance of "chink" to express negative attitudes in the same way as the truth-conditional content is expressed; both arise from the semantic contents of the slur. Consequently, even an insincere utterance of "chink" expresses the contempt of the Chinese.

To understand the relation between derogation and expressing negative attitudes, consider an analogy of assertion. In asserting that "Chang is Chinese," a speaker often expresses her belief that Chang is Chinese. This is because the sincerity condition of assertion requires a corresponding belief; asserting that "Chang is Chinese" without believing so is insincere. However, this does not mean that assertion is merely an expression of belief. It also does not entail that the semantic content of "Chang is Chinese"

is a belief. After all, it is the speech act of assertion, not the meaning of the sentence, that requires the belief.

Second, the force indicator theory disagrees with expressivism with regard to the normative consequences of utterances of slurs. When slurs are used, the declarative illocutionary acts of derogation are not reducible to expressing attitudes. For instance, derogating the Chinese brings normative consequences by imposing an inferior normative status, which is deprived of the right to be respected, freedom from discrimination, etc. By contrast, merely expressing an attitude often does not explicitly generate these normative consequences. For example, it is unclear if expressing one's contempt by frowning at the Chinese licenses other people's discriminatory actions against the Chinese.

Third, the force indicator theory provides more explanation than an expressivist theory. Since expressivism takes slurs to express negative attitudes as a part of their semantic content, it does not explain how slurs interact with contexts. Take non-derogatory uses of slurs for instance. Expressivism might explain them as merely non-literal uses of words (Jeshion 2013, 250). However, it does not tell us the factors and the mechanisms that affect these uses. By contrast, the force indicator theory specifies the mechanism of misfiring and the success conditions that interact with the usage of force indicators. Thus, my theory does not collapse into expressivism because it has more explanatory power.

6.6 Objection 6: Collapsing into the Register Theory

One common objection against the force indicator theory is that it collapses into the register theory of slurs, a theory I endorsed in an earlier paper (Diaz-Legaspe, Liu and Stainton 2019). In this section, I will introduce the register theory and explain the advantages of the force indicator theory over the register theory.

What differentiates slurs from their neutral counterparts, according to the register theory, is their use-theoretic meaning. For example, what differentiates "chink" from "Chinese" is neither its truth-conditional content nor the mental state it expresses; "chink" has a derogatory use that "Chinese" lacks. Such a use, according to our meaning pluralism, is a part of the meaning, i.e., use-theoretic meaning. However, what kind of use-theoretic meaning do slurs have? There are two kinds of use-theoretic meaning. The first kind specifies the illocutionary act a word is used to perform and the felicity condition of the act. This is analogous to the use of chopsticks; to define the use of chopsticks is to specify the act it is used to do, i.e., to eat foods. The second kind of use-theoretic meaning defines the felicity condition without specifying the action it is used to do. This is analogous to the use of academic regalia; it should be worn during a graduation ceremony, but it is not tied to a particular act. The use of slurs is the second kind; their use-theoretic content is only the felicity condition of using them, not the illocutionary acts they are used to perform.

The register theory borrows the notion of "register" of socio-linguistics to characterize the felicity condition in the use-theoretic meaning of slurs. A register category specifies

the contexts in which the use of a word is appropriate in a social and cultural sense. For instance, the word “poop,” unlike “shit,” is a childish word marked with the register [+child-oriented]. This is because the use of “poop” is to speak in a childish way; using this word is appropriate only when talking to children. Likewise, slurs are always marked with the register [+derogatory] (as well as the register [-polite]). In other words, it is appropriate to use slurs only in the contexts where the speakers intend to insult the target group or are indifferent about doing so. This is how the register [+derogatory] helps to characterize the use-theoretic meaning of slurs.

One might argue that the force indicator theory ultimately collapses into the register theory. Both theories agree that what differentiates “chink” from “Chinese” is the derogatory use of the slur. Nevertheless, the force indicator theory takes the use of slurs to be performing the illocutionary act of derogation, whereas the register theory takes the use to be the context in which it is appropriate to use slurs. However, the register theory seems to have no less explanatory power than the force indicator theory. If the features of slurs are already explained by their registers, appealing to illocutionary acts of derogation seems theoretically redundant. There is no need to go beyond the register theory. My response to this objection is to illustrate two reasons to favor the illocutionary force indicator theory.

Here is the first reason. The [+derogatory] register of slurs itself requires further explanation (and the best explanation is the force indicator theory). Consider an analogy of sleeping pills. The appropriate context to use sleeping pills is the time before sleep.

However, this gives rise to further questions. What makes it appropriate to take sleeping pills before sleep? We need deeper explanations such as the biological effects of the pills. Likewise, it remains to be explained why slurs have the register [+derogatory]. Why is the appropriate context to use slurs one in which the speaker intends to insult the target group (or is indifferent)?

Slur's [+derogatory] register is very unlikely to be explained without appealing to illocutionary acts. There are three major varieties of registers, but none of their explanations apply to slurs. First, the [+derogatory] register cannot be explained like *topic area registers*. For instance, a word is marked as [+technical], [+scientific], or [+medical] because the rules of a discipline or a profession require using them. However, no discipline or profession has rules that demand using slurs.[69] Second, the [+derogatory] register cannot be explained like a *communicative medium register* such as classroom, journal article, and text messages. Words have these registers because of the social rules that limit their usages to a particular medium. However, unlike "LOL," slurs can be used appropriately in all of these mediums. Third, the [+derogatory] register cannot be explained like a *social relation register* such as [+child-oriented] and [+formal]. For example, "poop" is a [+child-oriented] word because social rules require using them for certain social

[69] It would be funny to have an association of racists that demands using slurs in professional occasions.

relations. Unfortunately, this explanation is unavailable for a slur's register because slurs can be used by everyone in any social relation.

Consequently, the best explanation for a slur's [+derogatory] register is very likely to be the illocutionary force indicator theory. Even the formulation of the [+derogatory] register appeals to illocutionary acts; we describe the appropriate context of using slurs to be that the speaker wants to *insult* the targets.[70] It is almost the same as the felicity condition of derogation in my force indicator theory. This is the appropriate context to use slurs precisely because slurs are used for derogation (or insulting), the appropriate context for which is that the speaker wants to derogate (or insult) the target.

The second reason to favor my theory is that identifying the use-theoretic content of slurs with their felicity conditions oversimplifies the infelicities of using slurs. As I have shown in § 3.1, using slurs can have two kinds of infelicities, misfire and abuse. Since the register theory acknowledges only one kind of appropriate context to use slurs, it cannot explain how using slurs can be a case of abuse. Consider the example in 4.2 again; a captured person is forced by her kidnapper to insult the Chinese by calling them "chinks" against her will. Although she has successfully used the slur, there is something unhappy about it (just like an insincere promise). It follows from the force indicator theory that this is a case of abuse because the sincerity condition is not met. The register theory, however,

[70] I take insulting to be a sub-variety of derogation. For the details of derogation, see section 4.1.

cannot make sense of why the captive's usage of "chink" is unhappy; it is, technically speaking, felicitous and appropriate because the speaker does want to insult the Chinese so as to satisfy her kidnapper.

6.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have defended the force indicator theory from potential objections. It has been argued that derogation is not illocutionary because derogation has no corresponding performative verb (§ 6.1). My response is to reject the assumption that illocutionary acts must have corresponding performative verbs. Another objection is that force indicators, unlike slurs, lose their illocutionary force when embedded (§ 6.2). I have replied to this objection with counterexamples where embedded force indicators still provide illocutionary force. Moreover, the force indicator theory faces the objection that it entails the ambiguity of slurs between a derogatory and non-derogatory meaning (§ 6.3). I point out the seeming examples of ambiguity are in fact cases of mixed quotations, which cannot be taken as signs of ambiguity. Against my position, there are also counterexamples where slurs seem to make different truth-conditional contributions (§ 6.4). I argue that these counterexamples, like the ambiguity case, are also disguised mixed quotations. Therefore, they mislead our intuitions about the truth-conditional content. I have responded to the argument that my theory collapses into an expressivist theory of slurs by showing the difference between the two (§ 6.5). Finally, I have replied to the objection that the force

indicator theory collapses into the register theory; the use of slurs can be explained in terms of registers without appealing to illocutionary acts (§ 6.6).

7 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have proposed a force indicator theory of slurs; slurs are illocutionary force indicators that make the illocutionary force of derogation explicit. In addition, they are also propositional indicators that contribute the same to the truth-condition as their neutral counterparts.

Before introducing the force indicator theory, I surveyed the features of slurs that it has to explain. An adequate theory of slurs must be able to explain slurs' *derogatory power, offensiveness, truth-conditional contribution, independence, descriptive ineffability, perspective dependence, historical variability, non-derogatory utterances, appropriation, non-displaceability, the Kaplanian puzzle*, as well as *self-defeating sentences*. In addition to introducing these features, I have clarified them by reformulating them into distinct questions. Some features conflate different issues together, while some features collapse into others. For instance, I have disambiguated the *derogatory power* of slurs into two questions: **(Q1)** "Why is a slur such as 'chink' a derogatory word?" , **(Q2)** "Why is an utterance like saying that 'Chang is a chink' derogatory?". Moreover, explaining *appropriation* turned out to be nothing but explaining *historical variability* and *non-derogatory utterances*.

I also introduced many competing theories to the force indicator theory. Instead of surveying every theory in the literature, I introduced representative theories such as the *truth-conditional content theory, the conventional implicature theory, inferentialism, the*

prohibition theory, Mark Richard's theory, and *Hornsby's gesture theory*. These competing theories endorse opposing positions than mine on certain issues. Consequently, they are vulnerable to my arguments against them. Take Mark Richard's theory for instance. Unlike the force indicator theory, it takes utterances like "Chang is a chink" to have no truth values. I argued that if "Chang is a chink" has no truth value, one cannot lie with it. However, it is certainly possible to lie using slurs. The failure of these competing theory paves the way for the force indicator theory.

Another prerequisite of the force indicator theory is illustrating the basic concepts of speech act theory. I introduced illocutionary acts and their two components, illocutionary force and propositional content. Illocutionary force indicators and propositional indicators help to determine illocutionary force and propositional content respectively. In particular, illocutionary force indicators determine the illocutionary force by providing the default interpretation, until there are defeating factors.

With these preparations, I developed the force indicator theory in full detail. Slurs play two roles. First, they are illocutionary force indicators of derogation. Second, they are propositional indicators that make the same truth-conditional contribution as their neutral counterparts. Derogation is a declarative illocutionary act. Its illocutionary point is to enforce a norm which assigns an inferior normative status, which deprives some of the rights and freedom enjoyed by equal members of society. Slurs determine the illocutionary force by providing the default interpretation. That is, an utterance of "chink" is interpreted

as derogating the Chinese by default, until there are defeating factors. I applied this force indicator to answer the questions I raised about slurs. It turned out that the force indicator theory has great power in explaining the features of slurs such as their derogatory power, truth-conditional contribution, descriptive ineffability, non-displaceability, etc.

After formulating the force indicator theory, I defended it from potential objections. I addressed the first objection that derogation is not an illocutionary act because it has no corresponding performative verb. I rejected the assumption that all illocutionary acts have performative verbs. The second objection was that slurs behave differently than force indicators when embedded within connectives. I pointed out that not all force indicators lose illocutionary force when embedded. The third objection claimed that the force indicator theory would make slurs systematically ambiguous, while the fourth objection held that "chink" has a different referent than "Chinese" in certain non-derogatory, non-appropriated uses. I pointed out that these two objections rest on mistaken examples of mixed quotations. Finally, I argued that the force indicator theory does not collapse into an expressivist theory or a register theory.

These considerations, I hope, justify rethinking slurs from an alternative illocutionary approach. The job of slurs is not to communicate derogatory messages about their targets, but to perform the illocutionary acts of derogation.

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Appendices

The following two appendices address two theories that are left out of Chapter 5. Appendix 1 focuses on *the presupposition theory*, according to which slurs are presupposition triggers of derogatory presupposition (Schlenker 2007). Appendix 2 introduces what I call *"the choice of words theory,"* which explains the derogatory power of slurs in terms of the speaker's choice of slurs over neutral words (Bolinger 2015, Nunberg 2018). However, my *ad hoc* arguments expose the flaws of the two theories, without helping to establish the advantage of my theory. Therefore, the two theories should be left to the appendices.

Appendix 1: The Presupposition Theory

Schlenker (2007) proposes a presupposition theory which explains the features of slurs in terms of presuppositions. *The presupposition theory* is proposed as a general theory for expressives such as "damn," "fuck," "asshole." Since Schlenker takes slurs to a kind of expressive, his presupposition theory is also a theory of slurs. Let us label this theory (T8) and formulate it as follows:

(T8) *The Presupposition Theory of Slurs*: Slurs carry derogatory presuppositions the speaker believes that the targets of the slurs are despicable.

If slurs are derogatory because of their presuppositions, what kind of presuppositions is it? Schlenker (2007, 237) take slurs to be "lexical items that carry a presupposition of a particular sort, namely one which is indexical (it is evaluated with respect to a context), attitudinal (it predicates something of the mental state of the agent of that context), and sometimes shiftable (the context of evaluation need not be the context of the actual utterance)." For instance, "honky" can be given the following analysis: "(1) a. [[honky]] (c)(w) $\neq$ # iff the agent of c believes in the world of c that white people are despicable. If $\neq$ #, [[honky]] (c)(w) = [[white]] (c)(w)" (Schlenker 2007, 238). In other words, "honky" presupposes that the agent of a context c believes in the world of c that white people are despicable. The semantic value of "honky" is the same as "white" unless presupposition fails.

The presupposition theory can answer the questions about the features of slurs outlined in Chapter 2. Why is a slur such as "chink" derogatory **(Q1)**? Slurs are derogatory simply because they are presupposition triggers for derogatory presuppositions. Why is an utterance of a slur, e.g., "Chang is a chink" derogatory **(Q2)**? An utterance of slurs is derogatory when the speaker presupposes that he believes that the targets of the slurs are despicable. As for (Q5) the truth-conditional contribution, slurs make exactly the same contribution as their neutral counterparts. The derogatory dimension of slurs is independent of its descriptive content (Q6), simply because presupposition is distinct from the "regular" content of an utterance. The derogatory dimension of a slur cannot be satisfactorily

paraphrased (Q7), because it is presupposed, rather than asserted. The *perspective dependence* (Q8) of slurs is a consequence of the presupposition; what is presupposed is a belief of the speaker.

One of the most common objections to the presupposition theory is that it fails to explain (Q11) the *non-displaceability* of slurs. Slurs remain derogatory no matter how they are embedded within the scope of connectives. Their derogatory power even projects through "plugs" of presuppositions, the connectives that block the presuppositions of its components sentences. If slurs carried derogatory presuppositions, these would be blocked by presupposition plugs. "Believes that" is usually considered a presupposition plug; what is presupposed by the that-clause is not presupposed by the entire sentence. For example, "Chang believes that my sister is rich" does not presuppose that the speaker has a sister. However, consider the example "Chang believes that all chinks should be expelled from Canada." This is still derogatory. The derogatory power of slurs is not stopped by the presuppositional plug. This suggests that slurs are not presupposition triggers (Hom 2010, 176).

I will raise a new objection against Schlenker's presupposition theory: that presupposing that the speaker has a certain belief is not derogatory in the same way that slurs are derogatory. Consider a presupposition trigger, "my belief that the Chinese are despicable." This expression carries the same presupposition as what "chink" is said to presuppose by Schlenker, i.e., the presupposition that the speaker believes that the Chinese

are despicable. Therefore, Schlenker's theory entails that "chink" should be derogatory exactly in the same way as "my belief that the Chinese are despicable." However, compare the sentence "Chang is a chink" with "Chang challenged my belief that the Chinese are despicable." Unlike the former sentence, the latter sentence is not derogatory. To see this, consider a hearer who opposes derogatory speeches against the Chinese. The hearer would find "Chang is a chink" unacceptable because accepting it would amount to accepting racist and derogatory speech. By contrast, the hearer would have no problem in accepting "Chang challenged my belief that the Chinese are despicable." Both the speaker and the hearer could agree with the presupposition that the speaker has a certain belief and the assertion that Chang challenged that belief. The hearer would not agree that the Chinese are despicable. Nonetheless, he could have no problem in agreeing that the speaker believes that they are despicable. I shall reformulate this objection as follows:

(A11) *The Argument from Presupposition Triggers*: If "chink" presupposes that the speaker believes that the Chinese are despicable, "my belief that the Chinese are despicable" should be derogatory in the same way as "chink." Nevertheless, "my belief that the Chinese are despicable" is not derogatory in the same way as "chink."

Appendix 2: The Choice of Words Theory

The choice of words theory, as its name suggests, explains why uttering slurs is derogatory in terms of choices of words. The basic idea is simple. Consider the example utterance (1) "Chang is a chink." Calling Chang "Chink" is derogatory because the speaker could have used the neutral word "Chinese" instead. Since the speaker chooses "chink" over "Chinese," his utterance signals his derogatory attitudes toward the Chinese. Let us define this theory as follows:

(T9) *The Choice of Words Theory*: Utterances of slurs express derogatory attitudes because of the speakers' choice of using slurs over neutral words.

There are two major variants of the choice of words theory. The first one is the *contrastive choice account* proposed by Bolinger (2015), who is inspired by the contrastive choice accounts of politeness. Each competent speaker of a language has knowledge of co-occurrence expectations, i.e., the information associated with various terms. The speaker signals his endorsement with the information associated with the term via the choice of words. In Bolinger's terms, "For some content φ, when it is common knowledge…that (i) α is an expression for ψ associated with φ, and (ii) β is an expression for ψ not associated with φ, then…selecting α in contrast to β signals that the speaker endorses or shares φ." (Bolinger 2015, 9).

The second variant comes from Nunberg (2018), who invokes a special kind of conversational implicature called "ventriloquistic implicatures." These are conversational implicatures generated by using a different word that is often conventionally used by another group, rather than the word which would be normally used in the situation. A good example is the *New York Times'* choosing the French word "Scandale" over the English word "Scandal" in reporting the Monica Lewinsky story; the word's association with the French is said to implicate that the scandal is about sex or money (Nunberg 2018). Likewise, choosing to use slurs over neutral words implicates derogatory attitudes because these slurs are often used by people with those derogatory attitudes. Despite the technical differences between Nunberg and Bolinger, both share the same picture. Therefore, their theories can be lumped together under (T9), the choice of words theory, and they face the same objections.

My objection against (T9), the choice of words theory, focuses on the situation where the slur is the only choice. It is possible that in a certain language in a certain period, the only word for a group is a slur. Therefore, the speaker would have no choice but use the slur. For instance, the only words for foreigners in ancient Chinese were slurring words such as *manyi* (i.e., barbarians), because of the ancient Chinese belief that there is no civilization other than the Chinese civilization. Therefore, an ancient Chinese speaker would have no neutral words to call foreigners. Similar cases can be found throughout history. It follows from the choice of word theory that no derogatory attitude is signaled

since the speaker does not deliberately choose the derogatory word. Nonetheless, it still can be derogatory to utter the slur. If this is the case, then the choice of word is unnecessary for explaining why utterances of slurs are derogatory. Let us reformulate the argument as follows:

(A12) The No Choice Argument: It follows from the choice of words theory that an utterance of a slur is not derogatory if there is no neutral alternative to the slur. However, utterances of a slur can be derogatory even if there is no neutral alternative word for it.

A possible reply to my argument is that there is always a choice to use neutral alternatives, even in my examples of limited vocabulary.[71] Remember from section 2.5 that a feature of slurs is their *independence;* the derogatory dimension of a slur like "manyi" is independent of its truth-conditional contents. Consequently, we can always make up a neutral counterpart of a slur even if the vocabulary of a language has no word for it. For instance, "people outside of China," "people of a different country than China," and "people who are not from any of the provinces of China" all seem to be co-referring neutral alternatives to "manyi." This is why calling foreigners "manyi" in ancient China is

[71] Thanks go to David Bourget for raising this reply.

derogatory; the speaker chooses to call foreigners "manyi," but he could have used "people outside of China" instead.

I will defend my argument by showing that this reply does not work for Bolinger and Nunberg. I acknowledge the possibility of making up neutral counterparts when the vocabulary lacks them. Ancient Chinese speaker indeed could have used "people outside of China" instead of "manyi." Nevertheless, the "always a choice" reply is not available to Bolinger and Nunberg because this kind of choice of words is *not* the kind of choice they invoke.

For Bolinger (2015, 9), it must be common knowledge in the linguistic community that a phrase like "people outside of China" is an expression for "manyi," and the speaker *must be aware* of this neutral phrase in making the choice. Awareness of the neutral alternative is crucial for ruling out cases like ignorant usages of slurs (e.g., mistaking a slur to be a neutral word). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the ancient Chinese speaker is aware of the made-up neutral alternatives such as "people outside of China," and "people who are not from any of the provinces of China," in using the word "manyi."[72] After all, these neutral alternatives are rarely used in ancient Chinese.

Likewise, this reply is unavailable to Nunberg (2018), who takes slurs to function like foreign words such as "scandale." Using slurs produces ventriloquistic implicatures by

[72] An (slightly inaccurate) analogy is people's unawareness of "isobutylphenyl propionic acid" when they talk about "ibuprofen."

violating the default linguistic convention of referring to something in a group (e.g. the default English word for a scandal is “scandal”) and appealing to the convention of a different group (e.g., the French call a scandal “scandle”). For Nunberg, the ventriloquistic implicatures of using “manyi” cannot come from the choice between this slur and its made-up neutral alternatives like “people outside of China.” This is because “people outside of China” is not the conventional default way to refer to foreigners in ancient Chinese. On the contrary, the slur “manyi” is the default word.

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