The Power of Words: Unpacking the Sociolinguistic Impact of Slurs

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Abstract

This study explores the complex and multifaceted nature of insults in a modern sociolinguistic context. The aim of the study was to analyse the power dynamics inherent in these terms and examine how insults function as a tool of social control, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing social hierarchies. Through a combination of qualitative analysis and case studies, this study explores the historical origins, development and contemporary use of insulting language across different cultures and communities. The results show that slurs are not only offensive words, but also have historical and cultural significance, often reflecting wider societal attitudes towards race, gender, sexual orientation and other identity markers. The study also examines the psychological impact of insults on individuals and groups, showing how these words can cause lasting emotional harm and lead to a hostile social environment. Furthermore, the study addresses the phenomenon of reappropriation. This process is analyzed to understand its potential in challenging and subverting the oppressive connotations traditionally associated with these terms. Ultimately, this paper underscores the importance of recognizing the deep-seated implications of slurs in everyday language and advocates for a more nuanced approach to addressing linguistic discrimination. The research concludes with recommendations for fostering more inclusive and respectful communication practices in diverse social settings.

Keyword: *Social Control, Linguistic Discrimination, Reappropriation.*

Kelimelerin Gücü: Hakaretlerin Sosyolinguistik Etkisini Anlamak

Özet

Bu araştırma, modern sosyolinguistik bağlamlarda hakaretlerin karmaşık ve çok yönlü doğasını, bu terimlere gömülü güç dinamiklerini incelemeyi, hakaretlerin sosyal kontrol araçları olarak nasıl işlev gördüğünü, stereotipleri nasıl sürdürdüğünü ve sosyal hiyerarşileri nasıl güçlendirdiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel analiz ve vaka çalışmalarının bir kombinasyonu yoluyla, bu araştırma hakaretlerin farklı kültürler ve topluluklar arasında tarihsel kökenlerini, evrimini ve çağdaş kullanımını ele alınmaktadır. Bulgular, hakaretlerin yalnızca saldırgan kelimeler olmadığını, aynı zamanda tarihsel ve kültürel öneme sahip olduğunu, genellikle ırk, cinsiyet, cinsellik ve diğer kimlik belirteçlerine yönelik daha geniş toplumsal tutumları yansıttığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca hakaretlerin bireyler ve gruplar üzerindeki psikolojik etkisini de ele alarak, bu terimlerin nasıl kalıcı duygusal zararlara yol açabileceğini ve düşmanca bir sosyal ortama nasıl katkıda bulunabileceğini göstermektedir. Buna ek olarak, araştırma, marjinal grupların hakaretleri bir güçlendirme ve direniş biçimi olarak geri aldığı yeniden sahiplenme olgusuna da değinmektedir. Bu süreç, geleneksel olarak bu terimlerle ilişkilendirilen baskıcı çağrışımlara meydan okuma ve onları altüst etme potansiyelini anlamak için analiz edilmektedir. Sonuç olarak, bu makale günlük dilde küfürlerin köklü etkilerinin farkına varmanın önemini vurgular ve dilsel ayrımcılığı ele almak için daha ayrıntılı bir yaklaşım savunur. Araştırma, çeşitli sosyal ortamlarda daha kapsayıcı ve saygılı iletişim uygulamalarının teşvik edilmesi için önerilerle sonuçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimler: *Sosyal Kontrol, Linguistik Ayrımcılık, Yeniden Sahiplenme.*

1.1 **Problem of the Study**

The pervasive use of slurs in everyday language presents a significant social and linguistic challenge. Slurs are powerful linguistic tools that can perpetuate stereotypes, reinforce social hierarchies, and inflict profound psychological harm on individuals and communities. Despite their detrimental effects, slurs remain a persistent element of discourse in many societies, often going unchallenged or misunderstood. The problem at the heart of this study is twofold. First, there is a need to understand the mechanisms through which slurs perpetuate social inequalities and maintain existing power dynamics. This includes examining the historical and cultural origins of slurs, their evolution over time, and the contexts in which they are used. Without a comprehensive understanding of these factors, efforts to combat the harmful effects of slurs may be insufficient or misguided. Second, the phenomenon of reappropriation—where marginalized groups reclaim slurs as a form of empowerment—adds a layer of complexity to the issue. While reappropriation can be a powerful act of resistance, it also raises questions about the effectiveness and limits of such strategies in altering the negative connotations of slurs and their impact on broader societal attitudes.

Pragmatically, a slur is considered a fundamentally neutral descriptive term that belongs to the group that coined it. A slur is therefore a marker of the speaker's belonging to a certain social group rather than anything else. Hence, using a slur is a breach of the Gricean Maxim of Manner by using a word that belongs to another social group context than is what considered appropriate, and an act in which the speaker primarily aims to affiliate themselves with the group of people that own the slur, or as a way of showing in-group solidarity by making fun of social groupings outside the own (Jensen, 2019:18).

1.2 **Aims of the Study**

The primary aim of this research paper is to investigate the multifaceted nature of slurs, examining their origins, usage, and impact within contemporary society. This study seeks to achieve the following specific aims:

» Track into the origins of different insults and comprehend how cultural and historical backgrounds have influenced their definitions and implications over time.

» To explore how slurs function as instruments of social control, reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating social hierarchies. This includes analyzing the contexts in which slurs are used and the power dynamics they reflect and maintain

» To investigate the psychological and emotional effects of slurs on individuals and communities. This involves understanding the harm caused by slurs and how they contribute to a hostile social environment

» To examine the processes through which marginalized groups reclaim slurs as acts of empowerment and resistance. This includes analyzing the potential benefits and limitations of reappropriation in challenging and subverting the oppressive connotations of slurs

1.3 Hypotheses

» Slurs are not just offensive terms but serve as powerful tools that reinforce social hierarchies and maintain existing power dynamics by perpetuating stereotypes and marginalizing specific groups.

» The meanings and connotations of slurs are deeply rooted in their historical and cultural contexts. Understanding the origins and evolution of these terms is essential to comprehending their current impact and usage.

» The use of slurs causes substantial psychological and emotional harm to individuals and communities, contributing to a hostile social environment and affecting mental health and well-being**.**

» The process of reappropriation, where marginalized groups reclaim slurs, can subvert the negative connotations of these terms and serve as a form of empowerment and resistance against linguistic oppression.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the following key areas:

» Investigating the etymological roots and historical evolution of various slurs.

» Analyzing how different cultural contexts have shaped the meanings and usage of slurs over time.

» Exploring the role of slurs in reinforcing social hierarchies and perpetuating stereotypes.

» Assessing the psychological and emotional effects of slurs on individuals and communities.

1.5 Value of the Study

The value of this study can be summarized as follows:

» By exploring the historical, cultural, and sociolinguistic dimensions of slurs, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how language shapes and reflects social hierarchies and power dynamics. This deepens the academic discourse on language, power, and identity.

» The study highlights the profound psychological and emotional impact that stigma can have on individuals and communities. This awareness is vital for psychologists, educators and social workers who support people affected by language discrimination..

» The study provides practical insights and guidelines for professionals who translate political language. Understanding the subtle challenges and strategies for maintaining the illocutionary power of insults can improve the accuracy and cultural sensitivity of their work.

» The study's interdisciplinary approach, drawing from sociolinguistics, psychology, history, and cultural studies, makes it relevant to a wide range of academic fields. This fosters cross-disciplinary dialogue and collaboration on issues related to language and social justice.

2.1 Introduction

Language is a powerful tool that shapes our perceptions, interactions, and social structures. Within the vast expanse of linguistic expression, slurs occupy a particularly contentious space. These words or phrases, often rooted in historical and cultural contexts, carry with them the weight of discrimination, prejudice, and social hierarchies. The purpose of this research paper, titled "Slurs," is to explore the multifaceted nature of slurs, examining their origins, usage, and impact within contemporary society.

Slurs are not merely offensive terms; they are potent symbols that encapsulate societal attitudes towards various identity markers, including race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and disability. Their use can reinforce stereotypes, perpetuate social inequalities, and inflict profound psychological harm on individuals and communities. Despite their harmful potential, slurs are also subject to processes of reappropriation, where marginalized groups

reclaim these terms as acts of defiance and empowerment. The complexity of slurs lies in their dual capacity to harm and to empower. This duality necessitates a comprehensive analysis that considers both the historical evolution of slurs and their contemporary implications. By employing a qualitative methodology that includes discourse analysis and case studies, this research aims to uncover the sociolinguistic mechanisms that underpin the use of slurs and to provide insights into their broader societal impact.

In the following sections, this paper will delve into the historical context of various slurs, exploring their etymological roots and the socio-political conditions that have shaped their meanings over time. It will then examine the psychological and emotional effects of slurs on individuals and communities, drawing on firsthand accounts and scholarly research. Finally, the study will address the phenomenon of reappropriation, analyzing its potential to challenge and subvert the oppressive connotations traditionally associated with slurs. Through this exploration, the paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the power dynamics embedded in language and to advocate for more inclusive and respectful communication practices. By highlighting the complex interplay between language and social identity, this research underscores the need for heightened awareness and sensitivity in our linguistic interactions.

2.2 Definition of Slur

Slurs are a term often used to describe certain behaviors that insult group members and are often considered one of the most taboo and offensive linguistic expressions (Dutton, 2007). Different insults are directed at members of different groups. Often described as a form of "hate speech...directed at a group of people based on a common position that is characteristic of this group", insults are often considered emotionally charged derogatory remarks directed at certain group members based on descriptive characteristics, such as their race or their gender (Fraleigh & Tuman, 2010:139). Adam (2010) maintains that a slur is "a disparaging remark' that is usually used to "deprecate" certain targeted members. Utterances of slurs are usually explosively derogatory acts, and different slurs derogate members of different classes. For instance, racial slurs are "derogatory or disrespectful nickname[s] for a racial group". Although different slurs target members of different groups, slurs are in general derogatory terms that target members of a certain class or group.

Panzeri (2016) explains that slurs are derogatory epithets that target specific groups, identified mainly on the basis of race (nigger for a black person), nationality (wop for Italian), and religion (kike for Jew). Slurs differ from other pejoratives (moron, asshole) because they insult a person inasmuch as (s)he belongs to a specific group, that can be identified by means of a non-offensive expression, the neutral counterpart (or non-pejorative correlate). Slurs are particularly hateful and pernicious because they convey and reinforce stereotypes about the target group, they harm "their target's self-conception and self-worth, often in ways that are common to the social group as a whole", and they are thus considered taboo, prohibited words.

Legaspe (2020) belives that referring to others as "nigger" or "faggot" is a very hurtful way of implying that they are demeaning and disparaging because they are black or gay. It is clear that a slur is a term used to disparage and offend others. However, if all words that can cause this effect are referred to as slurs and only the intention with which the word is used is taken into account, the range of derogatory terms is broadened. A slur is any word that is intended to denigrate, offend, or hurt someone. The act of slurring is the use of derogatory terms, which can be accomplished with both slurs and non-slurs.

2.3 The literal meaning of Slur
Croom (2013) explains that it is typically assumed in the literature that '' every word is associated with a conventional meaning which is either a property or relation ''. He maintains that slurs have mixed content in the sense that the use of racial slurs (such as nigger) can be analytically decomposed into both expressive and descriptive aspects. As a racial slur, by choosing to use the slur nigger instead of a neutrally descriptive term such as African American, the speaker intends to express their endorsement of a (usually negative) attitude towards the descriptive properties possessed by the target of their utterance. For instance, consider the following felicitous utterance documented in Haley (1964): Now we all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer – that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be.

 This example suggests that the phrase "But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger" communicates the speaker's endorsement of a negative attitude. While the phrase "Now we all here like you, you know that"

suggests that what the negative attitude being expressed by the speaker is directed towards is not the agent, but rather some set of the agent's properties. That is to say, the properties that the speaker endorses the expression of a negative attitude towards are properties that have been associated with members of a particular racial group, and as a result, the speaker does not directly express a negative attitude towards the agent him or herself. Indeed, in this example the speaker explicitly says that they like the target of their utterance. However, an agent might indirectly express a negative attitude towards a target by expressing a negative attitude towards some set of properties that target possesses (Croom,2010). Furthermore, Croom (2010) adds that slurs usually derogate, ridicule, or demean members of a certain class by targeting certain properties or features associated with those members as a class. For instance, African Americans that have been derogated with the slur nigger have typically been derogated on the basis of being ''emotionally shallow, simple-minded, sexually licentious, and prone to laziness'' (Asim, 2007). It is in such contexts where a speaker intends to ascribe at least some such properties to a target that the slur nigger has typically been employed.

Further, a speaker S who implicates through their use of language that they are of higher social status or more powerful than their hearer H is engaging in talk that ''is risky, but if he [the speaker] gets away with it (hearer doesn't retaliate, for whatever reason), speaker succeeds in actually altering the public definition of his relationship to hearer: that is, his successful exploitation becomes part of the history of interaction, and thereby alters the agreed values of D [social distance between S and H] or P [relative power between S and H]'' (Brown& Levinson,1978:228). Accordingly, since our social identities are in part determined by the way society perceives us, and so the way society comes to interact and continues to interact with us (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1978), the derogative use of slurs can be extremely destructive to the actual character of an individual that it attacks. By ridiculing or derogating a member based on certain negative properties or features, the speaker employing the slur can support, enforce, and contribute to a history of acts that negatively alter the social identity of targeted members. This is done, presumably, for the purpose of increasing the difference in asymmetrical power relations among the interlocutors in the specific conversational context, or among the groups to which they belong more generally. It has been noted, for instance, that ''the British and their colonial counterparts relied on [derogatory] language to maximize

the idea of difference between themselves and their African captives''
(Asim, 2007).

2.4 **Types of Slur**

Slurs refer to derogatory or offensive terms used to refer to a particular group of people based on their actual or perceived membership in a certain social category or group. Slurs are typically used to demean, insult, or dehumanize the target group and often carry historical weight and negative connotations In political debates, the use of slurs can be particularly impactful and controversial because they not only reflect and perpetuate social prejudices but also can significantly influence public perception, discourse, and policy-making (Croom, 2010).

2.4.1 Partisan Slurs

Partisan slurs are derogatory terms or epithets used to disparage or insult individuals or groups based on their political party affiliation or ideological beliefs. These slurs are typically loaded with negative connotations and are intended to degrade, humiliate, or dehumanize those with differing political viewpoints (Groeling, 2010). Lakoff (2004) discusses the power of language in shaping political discourse. He argues that partisan slurs are used to define and frame political debates in ways that favor one side over the other.

Furthermore, Groeling's research (2010) provides a cross-national analysis of political slurs, including partisan slurs. She examines their use in different cultural and linguistic contexts, exploring their impact on political discourse and democratic engagement. This indicates that the study examines political slurs across different countries. It compares how such slurs are used in various nations, considering diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Hence, it might involve analyzing the meanings, connotations, and impact of slurs in different regions, taking into account local norms, values, and communication styles, looking at how slurs shape public opinion, influence political debates, and affect the behavior of politicians and voters, ...etc. Mutz (2015) investigates the effects of political discussion across ideological lines. She finds that exposure to partisan slurs and negative rhetoric can lead to increased political polarization and decreased trust in democratic institutions. Examples of partisan slurs include:

1-''Libtard'': This is a derogatory term used by some conservatives to insult

liberals or progressives. It combines the words "liberal" and "retard," suggesting that individuals with liberal political views are intellectually deficient or lacking in common sense (Groeling, 2010).

2-"Snowflake": While not exclusively political, this term is often used as a partisan slur, suggesting that someone, usually on the political left, is overly sensitive, easily offended, or unable to handle opposing viewpoints

It's important to note that the use of partisan slurs contributes to a toxic political discourse and dehumanizes those with differing viewpoints. Engaging in respectful and constructive dialogue, even with those we disagree with, is essential for a healthy democracy(Lakoff,2002).

2.4.2 Ideological slurs

Ideological slurs refer to derogatory terms or epithets used to disparage individuals or groups based on their ideological beliefs, worldviews, or philosophical orientations. These slurs are often loaded with negative connotations and are intended to demean, stigmatize, or marginalize those who hold different ideological perspectives. They are offensive labels or expressions used to denigrate individuals or groups on the basis of their ideological convictions or worldviews. These slurs typically carry negative stereotypes, prejudice, or bigotry, and are employed to discredit, humiliate, or exclude those with differing ideological beliefs (Callaway,2011). Schneider, et al (2017) offer a critical examination of political discourse, including the use of ideological slurs. They discuss how these slurs contribute to the marginalization and exclusion of certain ideological groups, undermining democratic ideals.

Fairclough (2014) maintains that political ideology slurs are used to disparage individuals or groups based on their political beliefs or affiliations. These slurs often aim to delegitimize opposing viewpoints and create an "us versus them" dynamic. Examples include derogatory labels for liberals, conservatives, socialists, or capitalists. The use of these slurs can hinder constructive political dialogue and contribute to polarization. Examples of ideological slurs include:

1-"Commie" or "Pinko": These slurs are directed at individuals perceived to be communists or to have leftist sympathies, suggesting that they hold un-American or subversive beliefs.

2-"Fascist" or "Nazi": These terms are used to insult individuals or groups associated with far-right ideologies, implying authoritarianism, racism, or extreme nationalism Schneider, et al (2017). Hence, ideological slurs contribute to the polarization and degradation of political discourse. They reflect a lack of respect for differing ideological perspectives and hinder constructive dialogue and understanding.

2.4.3 Racial and Ethnic Slurs
Kennedy (2020) maintains that Ethnic and racial slurs are among the most common and historically prevalent types of slurs in political discourse. These terms are used to demean or dehumanize individuals or groups based on their ethnicity or race. The use of such slurs reinforces racial hierarchies and contributes to systemic racism. They reflect a long history of racism, colonization, and social inequality.

Many racial and ethnic slurs have deep historical roots, originating from periods of systemic racism, colonialism, or xenophobia. They have been used to dehumanize and justify discriminatory practices against marginalized communities. Hence, the use of racial slurs is closely tied to power dynamics, where those in positions of privilege or dominance use derogatory language to assert control and maintain social hierarchies. This reinforces inequalities and perpetuates social divisions (Delgado& Stefancic, 2017).

Additionally, Hughes (2006), who studied the history and usage of offensive language, provide insights into how racial slurs evolve and the contexts in which they are used. Understanding the origins and contexts of these slurs is crucial in addressing their harmful effects and promoting respectful dialogue across different racial and ethnic groups. Examples of racial and ethnic slurs vary widely depending on cultural and historical contexts. Some common examples include derogatory terms for African Americans (such as the "N-word"), derogatory terms for Hispanics or Latinos (such as "spic" or "beaner"), and derogatory terms for Jews (such as "kike"). These terms are deeply offensive and are often used to demean and dehumanize entire groups of people based on their race or ethnicity (Hughes ,2006).

1.5 Semantic, Pragmatic and Philosophical Perspectives of Slurs
Leech (1983) argues that interlocutors may act superficially impolite with one another in order to foster a sense of social intimacy and to reduce

relative inequalities between them. and Culpeper (1996) suggests that ''the more intimate a relationship, the less necessary and important politeness is [. . .] lack of politeness is associated with intimacy, and so being superficially impolite can promote intimacy. Clearly, this only works in contexts in which the impoliteness is understood to be untrue'', such as in communicative exchanges between close friends or in-group members.

Hornsby (2001) adopts a semantic approach, arguing that: A unified representation of pejoratives cannot be achieved by identifying a pragmatic component that must be added to the semantic component represented by the neutral counterpart of the [pejorative] word, because only the [pejorative] word itself can provide a perspective from which one can understand the various [pejorative] speech acts associated with it. The contours of the space of possible speech acts performed by sentences containing certain pejoratives can only be discerned from the perspective of someone who knows the [literal] meaning of the words. Every pejorative word, like any other, has the potential to evoke speech acts because of its [literal] meaning.

Moreover, the semantic theorist Hom (2008) claims that the derogatory content of a slur is part of its literal meaning and that ''their derogatory content gets expressed in every context of utterance''. This view suggests that the derogatory content of a slur can be explained independently of context. The semantic content of slurs includes derogation, which is determined by the semantic conventions that govern them, i.e., the rules that give them their literal meanings.

Additionaly, Croom (2010) confirms that semantic theories of slurs are appealing because they can explain why it is that slurs carry derogatory content and force across such various conversational contexts. It is because according to this account slurs ''literally say bad things, regardless of how they are used'' (cited in Hom, 2008) and because they literally ''prescribe harmful practices'' to their targets.

According to the semantic view Hom (2008), slurs: both insult and threaten their intended targets in deep and specific ways by both predicating negative properties to them and invoking the threat of discriminatory practice towards them. [. . .]

Hom and May (2018) contend that derogation is a component of truth-condition content and that it is functionally related but not equivalent to

the neutral counterpart of slurs. According to them, the specific content of each slur is determined externally by racist institutions or social practices and includes descriptive stereotypes and normative judgments, all of which should be linked to the target group's identity. For example, the epithet [i.e. racial slur] 'chink' expresses a complex, socially constructed property like: ought to be subject to higher college admissions standards, and ought to be subject to exclusion from advancement to managerial positions, and, because of being slanty-eyed, and devious, and good-at-laundering, and all because of being Chinese.

As a result, Hess (2022) adds that "chink" should be held to a higher standard of college admissions, should be barred from managerial positions due to squinty eyes, cunning, money laundering, and all because they are Chinese. This truth-conditional reading demonstrates that slurs have no allegation because no one should be discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.

Croom (2010), (as cited in Goffman ,1967) notes that "people who are familiar with one another and who do not require much ritual" may joke with one another and insult one another "apparently for the amusement of the social circle in which the ritual (the insult) is used.". For instance, imagine that speaker A and hearer B are shut buddies that are aware of every others prevalent beliefs and dispositions. If B is aware of A well enough to recognize that A is now not racist and is normally a first rate person, then sincerely it is safe for B to expect that A meant to create rapport with B as a substitute than to derogate B by A's precise use of the slur. That is, as close friends, it is common knowledge between A and B that A in established intends to create rapport with B and no longer derogate B. This is, indeed, how one in normal creates and keeps friendships, and probable how A and B in precise grew to be friends in the first place'.

2.5. Speech Acts and Slurs
Speech acts as described by J.L. Austin and further developed by John Searle are essential to understanding how language is used not only to convey information but also to perform actions and shape social reality. According to Searle (1969), speech acts can be divided into different types such as: B. Assertive pronouns (statements that express beliefs), demonstrative pronouns (speech acts that are intended to get the listener to do something), delegative pronouns (speech acts that compel the

speaker to do something), expressive pronouns (speech acts that express attitudes and emotions), and declaratives (speech acts that affect changes in the external world). This classification suggests that speech acts are performative in nature and influence social interactions and relationships through the words we use (Searle, 1979). Therefore, speech acts can be explicit or implicit and have different functions depending on the context and intention of the words spoken.

The intentions and effects of speech acts can vary widely, and insults are derogatory terms or expressions used to demean, humiliate, or exclude individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc. As performative acts, insults not only describe social practices of discrimination and exclusion, but also actively participate in them. Anderson and Lepore (2013) argue that insults are used to express negative attitudes and stereotypes, reinforce social hierarchies, and perpetuate prejudices within society. The effects of insults extend beyond their literal meaning, affecting interpersonal relationships and leading to wider patterns of discrimination and inequality. The relationship between speech acts and insults, therefore, lies in their shared performative nature and their different social and ethical implications. Both involve the use of language to perform actions, However, in the speech process, speech acts either have an active or neutral function in the communicative context; insults have primarily negative effects. Speech acts shape social norms and interactions by communicating intentions and commitments, while insults cause social harm by reinforcing stereotypes, fostering discrimination, and creating barriers to inclusive communication practices. Understanding this difference is critical to promoting respectful communication and addressing issues related to social justice and equality in language use (Anderson and Lepore, 2013).

In summary, while both speech acts and insults involve performative aspects of language, their relationship highlights significant differences in intent, effect, and ethical considerations. Speech acts facilitate effective communication and social coordination, whereas insults perpetuate harm and reinforce inequality. Recognizing and addressing these differences is critical to promoting respectful communication practices and fostering inclusive social environments.

2.6 The Current Views on Slurs

The use of slurs is criticized by Chomsky (1997) as a type of linguistic abuse that upholds oppression. He says that in order to uphold social control and quell dissent, insults are used ,»The slur, the smear, the appeal to false authority, the trick of ignoring what has happened in the past, these are standard devices of propaganda, and they are used with far greater sophistication and variety than most people would imagine".

Slurs are multifaceted and carry different meanings depending on the context and the speaker (Katz ,2014) . He examines the complex social dynamics surrounding slurs. "Slurs are not inherently negative or harmful. They can be employed to subvert established power systems or as a means of fostering cohesion within the group. The social and cultural factors that influence how slurs are used and interpreted must be understood.

Furthermore, Jeshion, Robin (2016) investigates the idea of "slur contextualism," contending that slurs' significance and effect are contingent upon the environment in which they are employed. He says that there are three main ways to employ slurs: sarcastically, evaluatively, or descriptively.

According to some linguists, using slurs within specific communities can be an act of empowerment or reappropriation. They acknowledge that slurs can be reclaimed to take away their negative connotations and transform them drastically into expressions of pride and unity. According to Manne (2018), oppressed people might "repurpose slurs as badges of honor or solidarity." She questions the notion that insults are always harmful and considers how their appropriation could strengthen those groups and help them fight against tyranny. According to Manne, slurs can be reappropriated to change their meaning and effect, turning them from being solely harmful means into instruments of resistance and unity.

Indeed, opinions on the usage of slurs have changed over time and are still up for discussion. The views on the use of slurs have changed significantly throughout time and are still a hot topic of debate among academics, linguists, and social scientists. Slogans are considered damaging by many linguists and social scientists, and they should be avoided. According to Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018), they argue that these terms support an oppressive and discriminatory culture.Additionally, some academics have drawn comparisons between slurs and thick terms because slurs can both

refer to groups and contain evaluative content; nevertheless, not all thick terms can be categorized as slurs, and the two can only be related in a similar way (Cepollaro, 2017).

Lastly, there is inconsistent use of terminology associated with slurs. Academics fail to assure cognitive consistency and accuracy and create conceptual confusion by using different names for the same perceptual feature. It is possible to keep the disparaging quality of slurs without being constrained by grammar in a number of ways. Terms like "scoping-out," "scopelessness," "non displaceability," "embedding failure," and "projectivity" are among these. There are other terms used to characterize non-derogatory uses of slurs, such as "non-derogatory use," "reclamation," "reappropriation," "appropriation," and "appropriation" (Cepollaro, 2020).

2.8 Roles and Power in Relation to Slurs

According to Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018), slurs are a type of hate speech that aims to shift the target's discourse position and create an unfair power imbalance between the speaker and the target. What sets oppressive slurs apart from other insulting terms is this disparity in power. They argue that by assigning roles, slurred speech aims to establish (or perpetuate) an unfair power disparity. Their second claim is that there is a correlation between the perceived injustice of the power imbalance associated with this job and the level of offense generated. Therefore, roles are social constructions that store information about rights, obligations, social standing (i.e., rank in relation to various roles), and acceptable and expected behaviors.

Goffman (1961) asserts that the fundamental building blocks of socialization are "roles": "Roles are how tasks in society are assigned and arrangements are made to accomplish them in order to reinforce social fulfillment." Individuals are allocated roles. The expectations of one's waking life influence one's interactions with others. Roles, which indicate relative status and authority, also frequently occur in pairs or groups. Power shifts along with roles. While positions including an imbalance of power are often acceptable and beneficial (parent and child, for example), there are other situations where an unfair power imbalance is established and sustained by violence (e.g., master and slave). Furthermore, Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) highlight the three elements of discourse roles:

● A role's discourse status indicates how important it is in relation to other roles. It is a reflection of the hierarchical structure of human society and

the fact that individuals with a pronounced difference in status participate in numerous social interactions.

● discourse rules govern expected moves, permissible moves, their expected effects, and rules of interpretation.

● Depending on the discourse role of the speaker, the same speech in an otherwise identical situation will have a different interpretation in the corresponding social position. Saying "I want $1000" to a bank teller, for instance, will be interpreted differently depending on the person's identity—as a client or a bank robber. Therefore, a speech-act that modifies a participant's discourse role is significant since it modifies the participant's status and the discourse norms. It also highlights the corresponding long-term social role. According to Popa-Wyatt (2016), it's important to distinguish between the discourse roles—short-term social roles—that are inside to the debate and the long-term social roles that are external to it. We cannot have a cogent account of how roles are performed without making such a distinction, We are unable to develop a cogent theory explaining how roles impact discourse. Allow us to use "In the Heat of the Night" as an example. The Sidney Poitier character Mr. Tibbs is brought to the police station after being detained in Mississippi in the 1960s on suspicion of murder. In addition to being an African-American living in the deep south during an era of overt racism, Mr. Tibbs plays four relevant external social roles: police officer, murder suspect, number one homicide expert with the Philadelphia police department, and second, he was briefly a murder suspect. Mr. Tibbs is introduced to the head of police as a murder suspect, and the fact that his race influences the investigation

PC: Got a name boy?

MT: Virgil.

PC: Virgil? (laughs) [I don't think we're going to have any trouble, are we Virgil?

MT: No.

PC: What d'you hit him with boy?

It ought to be evident that the police chief has the final say. As the talk goes on, it becomes clear that Mr. Tibbs works for the police:

PC: Just what you do up there in Pennsylvania, to earn that kind of money?

MT: I'm a police officer. (shows police badge)

PC: Oh. Yeah. (scratches head, sits down)

The discourse takes on a different tone at this point. The direction of the conversation is now set by the fact that he is a police officer and a homicide specialist. This is made especially clear when, following more discussion, the police chief asks him to do a favor and examine the slain man's body:
PC: Look, if they pay you $162.39 a week to look at bodies. Why can't you look at this one?

MT: Why can't you look at it yourself?

PC: Because I'm not an expert, officer.

Even though the conversation's tone has already shifted, Virgil Tibbs is addressed as an honorific for the first time as "officer." It's an obvious expression of reverence. According to Popa-Wyatt (2016), the request for a favor indicates a major change in the conversation's power dynamics.

This illustration demonstrates how the importance of external social roles shifts throughout a conversation. We must be aware of Mr. Tibbs's salient exterior social roles in order to interpret the discourse at any given time. A few external roles—murder suspect, member of a marginalized racial group, etc.—became less noticeable, while others—police officer, homicide specialist—became more noticeable. However, Mr. Tibbs maintained his three genuine exterior social roles: he was an African-American, a police officer, and an expert on homicides both before and after the talk. Therefore, we must distinguish between a participant's external social roles that remain outside of and during the dialogue and their corresponding shifts in prominence during the conversation in order to characterize the conversational kinematics the dialogue and the way that those changes in salience cause the conversational kinematics to change.

2.10 Slurs and oppressive speech
Speech can be used to disparage, harass, threaten, bully, badger, and degrade someone, as noted by Langton (1998). Speech can certainly be used to oppress if oppression is just defined as when someone is treated very harshly. This is because speech can be used in a variety of ways to treat people horribly. According to his proposal, speakers are considered

authoritative if they now hold local control over certain parts of the targets' life. He goes on to say that some speech forms, like pornography, have the ability to both subordinate and create subordination. To put it another way, the act of illocutionary subordination is actually an act of subordination itself, not just a perlocutionary act that results in subordination.

McGowan (2009) makes the case that the concept of conversational scoring actually eliminates the requirement for authority. According to Simpson (2013), the conversational score for a conversation C at time t is essentially an informal register of the participants' shared expectations and presumptions, which together determine which conversational moves would constitute "correct play" in Conversation at time, in accordance with intricate but consistently-behaved rules. Lewis (1979) notes that the conversational score changes over time to ensure that the spoken words are "correctly played." This is accomplished through a variety of "rules of accommodation," which are the tacit guidelines or procedures through which participants in a discussion modify the context of the discourse to make sure that what has been said is appropriate. These guidelines support preserving the conversation's consistency and flow even in the face of unforeseen or unusual statements. What constitutes appropriate play is thus determined by the combination of the conversational score and the conversational kinematics rules. Therefore, a statement that calls for an accommodation modifies the conversational score, which modifies the parameters of what is acceptable in the conversation.

According to McGowan (2009), there is a type of illocutionary act known as "the conversational exercitive." It is called conversational because the speech act enacts permissibility facts within the domain of conversation, and it is exercitative because the illocutionary type determines what is permissible within a specific domain of conduct. She contends that conversational exercises can be "covert" in that they don't have to be obvious to participants or require them to understand them in order to be effective. Crucially, unlike traditional exercitives, conversational exercitives do not demand for authority. This concept of a covert exercitive is expanded upon by McGowan (2009) to encompass any move in any activity that is governed by rules or norms; that is, each move in any game modifies the game's state., thus determining the permissible next moves. Permissible moves are simply defined by the rules of correct play.

According to Simpson (2013), who is mentioned by McGowan (2009), oppression can be considered an activity that is guided by rules. Therefore, a verbal move is an exercitive within the oppression game if it modifies what constitutes an allowed move in the oppression game by enacting a certain rule. She says that communication that is racist or sexist belongs in this category. Thus, speaking in a sexist or racist manner is part of the oppressive process. By including discourse roles as potential entities in the conversational score, it becomes possible to understand slurred utterances. These dictate the appropriate play in the discourse. The conversational score is updated to reflect this assignment due to accommodations: The target is now in the conversation.

With regard to the discourse roles, it would seem reasonable given our separation of roles in society and discourse from external roles to argue that slurs constitute oppressive speech because they have the illocutionary power to assign a subordinate role for the duration and goals of the discourse. Thus, the theory unequivocally validates the idea that, in the context of contemporary social (conversational) interaction, insults represent oppression (Simpson, 2013).

Silencing and Appropriation in Relation to Slurs2.11
The use of slurs is closely related to the ideas of appropriation and silencing. Slurs have been and still are instruments of oppression, stifling the opinions of disadvantaged people and maintaining unfavorable power relationships. This problem is made more complex by the appropriation of slurs by dominant groups, which emphasizes the importance of awareness, sensitivity, and polite conversation (Lawrence, 1993).

Silencing, as noted by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018), is truly two different occurrences. The target is first too scared to answer. Secondly, even in the event that they reply, their words will not be able to totally reverse the impact of the insult and may be disregarded. In addition, the discourse role has rules that, in constitutive words, allow participants to disregard the target's future statements, including those that silence the target's objections to the assignment itself. According to the roles assigned, the speech amounts to a threat of violence, and one of the perlocutionary effects is the target's dread, which causes them to strive to self-preserve by becoming silent. Consider, for example , Imagine an African-American guy who is being arrested by a racist police officer who calls him names.

If the man protests, it may be argued that he is a criminal because he was resisting arrest and confronting the officer. His entirely legitimate reaction is thus used against him. Thus, the target will not be heard in the second scenario and does not speak in the first. They are both displays of authority.

According to Scafidi (2005), cultural appropriation is the act of "taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission." When it comes to slurs, appropriation can happen when members of a dominant group appropriate the slur and use it inside their own group, frequently denoting something positive or eliminating its negative implications. This appropriation may cause marginalization to increase. Members of dominant groups frequently appropriate slurs without realizing or appreciating the term's historical meaning or power dynamics. This act of appropriation might lead to a false sense of equality or progress by further erasing the experiences of the excluded minority (Ross, 2015).

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) state that appropriation is a complex phenomenon. The felicity conditions for the role assignment do not always fail when a member of the target group uses a slur word since their group membership differs from the historical oppressor group's. This failure releases the slur word, opening the door for possible appropriation. Because of this, the felicity requirements must be broken in order to provide the space for appropriation. Thus, for instance, distinct roles with equal discourse privileges may be ascribed when an African-American says "Nigger" to another African-American. It is entirely feasible for in-group uses to cause offense if certain felicity requirements are satisfied. A gregarious white speaker of "Nigger" will probably offend because their group membership meets the favorable requirements for a speech act A speech-act in which roles are assigned with an unfair distribution of power. It is therefore possible to assign distinct pairs of responsibilities based on the two uses (in-group and out-group).

The contribution of Slurs to oppression 2.12
Slurs, or insulting and abusive words directed at certain people or groups, are a major factor in the continuation of oppression and the maintenance of power disparities. The use of derogatory language has real effects and feeds the cycle of marginalization and prejudice. There is a claim that slurring acts are discourse strategies intended to transfer power from the

target to the speaker. A slurring act's consequences would cease when the current discourse ended if it just had an impact on it (Adam, 2021).

According to Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018), the social roles of the members are influenced by the discourse, just as the discourse function is influenced by the social roles of the participants. The social role is nourished again by the discourse role. The perlocutionary impacts of the slurred syllables complete this input. The first of them consists of alterations in audience members' attitudes and behaviors around how they should handle contributors who belong to the target demographic. There is evidence that social situations influence how discriminating people are and can take precedence over an individual's professed worldview.

In a similar vein, Warner and DeFleur (1969) demonstrate that people with low levels of racial prejudice are more inclined to act discriminatorily if they live in a community with a high concentration of bigots and are aware that their actions will be publicized. The opposite is true in communities where bigotry is less prevalent: bigots conceal their views to avoid social rejection. Therefore, when a bigot uses derogatory language, they encourage others in their social circle to declare their bigotry as well. When there are enough bigots, they put pressure on even the non-bigots to be discriminating. This is how a slurring use's perlocutionary effect increases oppression by progressively raising the social pressure for and acceptance of, oppressive acts.

Racial slurs, for example, will therefore have different effects—that is, they will fail to encourage others to act in a discriminatory manner—in a culture that is racist than one that is not. Lance and Kukla (2013) explain how norms are shifted by speech acts. They present the idea of uptake. In this case, whether or not uptake occurs depends on the pragmatic context in which the statement is uttered. They designate the set of normative statuses that a speech act establishes as its "output." They stress that "a speech act can be, given its social context and standard discursive conventions, a different speech act than it would typically be, in virtue of its uptake."

Second, the bigot demonstrates to others the power they can have by slurring. According to this power theory, the bigot is showing power rather than speaking about it. Discourse power is acquired by the speaker. Those in the audience who don't belong to the target demographic but feel less

powerful than they would like will find this emotionally appealing. They realize that utilizing a slur can help them gain more authority. As a result, a perlocutionary impact is to incite others to want the authority that the bigot has taken. Growing acceptance is not the same as growing desire.

Conclusion

In summary, this study has thoroughly examined the complex nature of slurs, illuminating their sociolinguistic purposes, historical roots, psychological effects, and reappropriation processes. The research has shown that slurs are profoundly ingrained in social and cultural contexts, acting as tools of social control that uphold social hierarchies and promote stereotypes. The serious psychological and emotional harm that slurs create emphasizes how important it is to use language with more understanding and compassion. Furthermore, the analysis of reappropriation shows that, despite certain acknowledged limits, it has the ability to strengthen underrepresented communities and counter negative connotations. The study promotes more courteous and inclusive communication techniques and makes the case that laws and educational initiatives can lessen linguistic discrimination. By offering a sophisticated comprehension of the intricate interactions between language and social identity, this research contributes to broader efforts aimed at fostering a more equitable society.

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