

## Theme 4: Oppressive Practices & Norms: Speech Acts, Conversational Dynamics

Wednesday, 24 March 2021

13:55-14:00	Welcome
14:00-15:00	<b>Manfred Krifka:</b> The marking and effects of assertoric strength <i>10 min break</i>
15:10-16:10	<b>Nicholas Asher &amp; Julie Hunter:</b> Bias and epistemic content <i>10 min break</i>
16:20-17:20	<b>Stephen Barker:</b> Slurs and Conventional Implicature: The Power of Presupposition (3:20 pm GMT) <i>10 min break</i>
17:30-18:30	<b>Janice Dowell:</b> Silencing and Assertion: An Account of their Conversational Dynamics (12.30 pm EDT) <i>10 min break</i>
18:40-19:40	<b>David Beaver &amp; Jason Stanley:</b> Oppressive Resonance (12:40 pm CDT —1:40 pm EDT)
19:40-20:15	Optional round-table discussion

Thursday, 25 March 2021

13:55-14:00	Welcome
14:00-15:00	<b>Laura Caponetto:</b> Accommodated Authority: Flipping Langton's Picture <i>10 min break</i>
15:10-16:10	<b>Mihaela Popa-Wyatt &amp; Jonathan Ginsburg:</b> Slurs and Conversational Structure <i>10 min break</i>
16:20-17:20	<b>Elisabeth Camp:</b> Framing and Looping; Solidarity and Resistance (11:20 am EDT) <i>10 min break</i>
17:30-18:30	<b>Mary Kate McGowan:</b> Oppressive Speech and Accommodation: On the Role of Interlocutors (12:30 pm EDT) <i>10 min break</i>
18:40-19:40	<b>Gillian Russell:</b> Social Spheres (1:40 pm EDT)
19:40-20:15	Optional round-table discussion

Friday, 26 March 2021

13:55-14:00	Welcome
14:00-15:00	<b>Lucy McDonald:</b> How to Woo Things With Words (2:00 GMT) <i>10 min break</i>
15:10-16:10	<b>Lauren Ashwell:</b> Gendered slurs and the pretense of neutrality (10:10 am EDT) <i>10 min break</i>
16:20-17:20	<b>Amanda Kathleen McMullen:</b> Gendered Pejorative Utterances as Acts of Warning (10:20 am CDT) <i>10 min break</i>
17:30-18:30	<b>Lynne Tirrell:</b> Toxic Speech: A Virus Model (12:30 pm EDT) <i>10 min break</i>
18:40-19:40	<b>Robin Jeshion:</b> What's Wrong with Slurs (10:40 am PDT)
19:40-20:15	Optional round-table discussion

## ABSTRACTS: DAY 1

### **The marking and effects of assertoric strength**

MANFRED KRIFKA (ZAS Berlin)  
2:00 pm CET

TBA

### **Bias and epistemic content**

NICHOLAS ASHER (CNRS, IRIT, ANITI) & JULIE HUNTER (Institut de Recherche en Informatique de Toulouse)  
3:10 pm CET

In this talk we investigate a type of content which is a function of an interpreter's beliefs, beliefs which an author can anticipate in constructing a message with certain strategic ends. We develop a formal framework for modeling epistemic content and its strategic uses. We then take a look at how the biases that shape epistemic content can be manipulated to render interpreters blind to aspects of a message—in particular aspects that they might otherwise find unjust or unfair.

### **Slurs and Conventional Implicature: The Power of Presupposition**

STEPHEN BARKER (University of Nottingham)  
4:20 pm CET — 3:20 pm GMT

I outline a dual-content theory of simple sentences with slur terms, according to which simple slur-sentence of the form 'O is S' where 'S' is a slur term like 'limey' has a truth-conditional content, viz., that O is a member of the group of Fs referred to with 'S' and a conventional implicature of an attitude: disapproval of Fs. At the core of this proposal is a theory of conventional implicature that adopts the framework of Barker (2014), distinguishing between defensive expressive acts (characteristic of assertion) and non-defensive expressive acts (implicatures). This framework is used to sketch a theory of presupposition that utilizes an understanding of conversation that I call the intersubjective dimension. Basically defensive-expressive acts call forth in

the audience adoption of a defensive stance with respect to a mental state P and invite response to acceptance/adoption of that state. Assertion implies a kind of openness and implicit respect between speaker and audience (even if only partial). Whereas non-defensive acts require, mere recognition of acceptance of a state P, which, assumes P needs no defence. In the latter, case, if the mental state P is a negative attitude whose target is the audience or some third party, acceptance of the utterance as correct is inherently silencing about the worth of the target, and amounts to a partial enacting of a social order in which the target is treated as demeaned or sub-human. I use this kind of analysis to explain the difference between four kinds of sentence:

- (A) I hate migrants for whom the epithet ‘vermin’ is applicable.
- (B) Migrants are bad.
- (C) You are migrant vermin.
- (D) You migrant vermin are not allowed here.

(A) reports an attitude, (B) defensively expresses one, (C) non-defensively expresses an attitude through a predication (D) non-defensively expresses an attitude through a noun-phrase involved in some distinct predication. The difference in strength and offensiveness lies in presupposition analysed inter-subjectively through notion of a non-defensive expressive act (conventional implicature). The power of slurs resides in two factors: an actual or historical context of power imbalance and the linguistic power of presupposition.

## **Silencing and Assertion: An Account of their Conversational Dynamics**

Janice Dowell (Syracuse University)

5:30 pm CET — 12.30 pm EDT

Silencing occurs when a conversational participant has not been accorded an ordinary speaker’s standing to update the conversational record. Here I argue that silencing poses a distinctive problem for assertion in contexts of inquiry. In the standard model, an assertion met with silence is one that has not been rejected by any participant. In a case in which a potential speaker is silent because she has been silenced, though, her silence does not indicate assent. In such cases, assertions cannot be successful. The remedy for this distinctive problem of assertion requires a remedy to the conditions that give rise to silencing. I’ll close with a proposal for how to revise the standard model to allow it to represent the phenomenon of silencing and also the conditions needed for repair.

## **Oppressive Resonance**

DAVID BEAVER(University of Texas at Austin) & JASON STANLEY (Yale University)

6:40 pm CET — 12:40 pm CDT —1:40 pm EDT

The standard paradigm for analyzing meaning involves identifying “content”, a chunk of information that is seen as being (following Michael Reddy’s conduit metaphor) packaged into words. I will suggest that oppressive speech practices are more usefully analyzed in terms of their cultural resonances, and will outline a model in which these resonances help establish collective attunement both to those speech practices, and to the broader oppressive ideologies of which they are part.

## ABSTRACTS: DAY 2

### **Accommodated Authority: Flipping Langton's Picture**

LAURA CAPONETTO (Vita-Salute San Raffaele University)

2:00 pm CET

Rae Langton (2015, 2018a, 2018b) has recently argued that ordinary speakers can acquire informal authority via a mechanism akin to presupposition accommodation: a speaker acts as if they had authority and they can end up acquiring it provided that nobody objects. I here flip this picture and argue that the reverse of Langton's pattern is a common and interesting phenomenon as well: a speaker acts as if their hearer had a certain authority, and the hearer can end up obtaining it solely by playing along. After pointing out that this double dynamic of authority acquisition and conferral applies both to practical and epistemic authority, although with the due differences, I conclude by drawing some of its implications for women and other relatively disempowered groups who are socially hooked into deference and self-doubt.

Langton, R. (2015), "How to Get a Norm from a Speech Act", *The Amherst Lecture in Philosophy*, 10: 1-33;

Langton, R. (2018a), "The Authority of Hate Speech", J. Gardner, L. Green, and B. Leiter (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Law*, vol. 3, Oxford: OUP, 123-152;

Langton, R. (2018b), "Blocking as Counter-Speech", D. Fogal, D.W. Harris, and M. Moss (eds.), *New Work on Speech Acts*, Oxford: OUP, 144-164.

### **Slurs and Conversational Structure**

MIHAELA POPA-WYATT (ZAS Berlin) & JONATHAN GINSBURG (Université Paris Diderot)

3:10 pm CET

In this talk we investigate a so-called carry-over effect: how conversational effects of oppressive speech reverberate into future social interactions. We look at the interplay between conversational structures and social structures and their intertwining dynamics. We discuss differences in three configurations: weaponized talk, solidarity talk, policing talk.

### **Framing and Looping; Solidarity and Resistance**

ELISABETH CAMP (Rutgers University)

4:20 pm CET — 11:20 am EDT

Labels, memes, and symbols provide potent frames for interpreting and constituting social kinds. Such frames often play an oppressive function, flattening opportunities for individual difference. But they can also provide tools for self-understanding, social community, and resistance. We explain why frames have these distinctively potent cognitive and communicative effects, identify variations in how they can function individually and collectively, and explore options for deploying them in beneficial rather than pernicious ways.

### **Oppressive Speech and Accommodation: On the Role of Interlocutors**

MARY KATE MCGOWAN (Wellesley College, Massachusetts)

5:30 pm CET — 12:30 pm EDT

It is familiar from speech act theory that speech can do things. That is, we can perform actions (like betting, apologizing, and enacting law) simply by uttering words. One of the things that

speech can do is oppress. When an utterance enacts a permissibility fact (or a norm) that oppresses, so does the utterance that enacts that norm. This paper offers a model of oppressive speech that requires neither that the speaker intend to oppress nor that the speaker have authority over the persons who are oppressed. On this model of oppressive speech, the "power to oppress" resides in the social context and not in the authority of the speaker. This paper further explores the role that interlocutors play in the impact of such oppressive speech acts. It is here argued that, although interlocutor accommodation of oppressive speech is not required for speech acts to oppress, such accommodation nevertheless has a significant effect on the duration and impact of that oppressive speech act.

## **Social Spheres**

GILLIAN RUSSELL (ACU Melbourne & University of St. Andrews)  
6:40 pm CET — 1:40 pm EDT

This paper adapts Lewis' "Ptolemaic Astronomy" from *Counterfactuals* for use in thinking about social hierarchy and subordination.

## **ABSTRACTS: DAY 3**

### **How to Woo Things With Words**

LUCY McDONALD (St John's College, University of Cambridge)  
2:00 pm CET — 1:00 pm GMT

While flirting has been explored in detail by psychologists and sociologists, philosophers have paid this phenomenon little to no attention. This is lamentable, since a philosophical analysis of flirting would have theoretical and ethical benefits. For instance, as a playfully deceptive communicative practice, flirting constitutes an interesting counter-example to idealisations of co-operativity in philosophy of language. A definition of flirting would also make clearer the difference between flirting and harassment, preventing harassers from minimising their wrongdoing as 'only flirting'.

In Part 1 of this paper I build a philosophical model of flirting. I consider but ultimately dismiss three models of flirting as a locutionary, perlocutionary and illocutionary act, respectively. I then argue that flirting is not an act at all, but rather a conversational game involving presuppositions of intimacy and insincere blocking manoeuvres. In Part 2, I use this model to show how flirting differs from harassment. I show that, since flirting is quite a complex activity, the threshold for behaviour to qualify as flirting is actually much higher than many harassers think it is.

### **Gendered slurs and the pretense of neutrality**

LAUREN ASHWELL (Bates College)  
3:10 pm CET — 10:10 am EDT

Some gendered slurs for women – words like "slut" and "bitch" – appear to lack neutral correlate terms – words that apply to all and only the targets of the slur but in a non-offensive way. Instead, at least some of what is offensive about the use of these terms is retained by any putatively neutral correlate term. In this talk, I look further at the role closely associated descriptions play in narratives about those who are the targets of these slurs. While they do not have a close semantic relationship with the slur as they are usually assumed to, as their offensiveness is less explicit than the slur they provide a pretense to neutrality of the functioning of the slur in general. I also discuss the relationship between assumed neutrality and reclamation, and some of

the difficulties for reclaiming these words.

## **Gendered Pejorative Utterances as Acts of Warning**

AMANDA KATHLEEN MCMULLEN (University of Arkansas)

4:20 pm CET — 10:20 am CDT

[[Please be advised that offensive language is mentioned below.]]

Kate Manne (2017) has persuasively argued that we should understand ‘misogyny’ as patterns of policing women’s behavior, including punishing women whose behavior does not conform to patriarchal norms and warning other women against engaging in that behavior. I argue that one linguistic means of policing women is by using gendered pejorative language such as ‘slut’, ‘whore’, or ‘skank’ to refer to a woman or predicating one of these terms of her. We can call an utterance ‘She’s a slut’ or ‘That slut stole my boyfriend’ a gendered pejorative utterance. Either of these utterances plausibly functions to reproach the woman of whom the term is predicated or to whom the speaker refers. What is perhaps more surprising, and the focus of my presentation, is that such an utterance, in conversation, functions as, or constitutes, a covert (in McGowan’s (2012) sense) warning to women conversational participants that are not targeted. This constitutive theory contrasts with the rival claim that one of these utterances merely has (perlocutionary) effects warnings tend to have, e.g. deterrence or defiance. Seeing how gendered pejorative utterances constitute acts of warning requires us to appreciate how using a gendered pejorative term is accompanied by undertaking a commitment to some norm, how that norm relates to the conversation and its participants, and that women hearers recognize that the norm applies to them—irrespective of their own endorsement or rejection of that norm.

## **Toxic Speech: A Virus Model**

LYNNE TIRRELL(University of Connecticut) trigger 5:30 pm CET — 12:30 pm EDT

The concepts of epidemiology are helpful for understanding varieties of toxic speech that spread through a society as well as highlighting ways to protect against the harms of such speech. In the USA, after 9/11, anti-Muslim speech acts were given wide uptake and often repeated. They were not only more common but also more accepted, more part of the normatively sanctioned discourse of many segments of US society. Ever since Trump’s frequent use of “Chinese virus,” we’ve seen more people take up anti-Asian slurs, and take these as license to commit acts of violence against Asian-Americans. In earlier work, I’ve discussed toxic speech on a model of poisons, but this talk will briefly sketch what we learn from looking at a viral model. Both approaches are needed. Talk of speech or images “going viral” is common enough. What does a viral analysis of toxic speech teach us, philosophically, about the power of language to harm? Here, the confluence of epidemiology with inferentialism is serendipitous. The harm is primarily in the practices, but of course individuals are harmed, so we must look both at practice and individual events. What might epidemiology suggest about the ways to stop the spread? Finally, what are some of the open questions raised by such an approach?

## **What’s Wrong with Slurs?**

ROBIN JESHION (University of Southern California)

6:40 pm CET — 10:40 am PDT

While many forms of speech harm and oppress, speech acts with weaponized uses of slurs are frequently singled out for special, deeper social censure. This paper aims to illuminate why this is so by revealing how one central wrong in such acts structurally parallels one of the deepest

moral wrongs in interrogational torture.