

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

Thursday, 25 March 2021

13:55-14:00	Welcome
14:00-15:00	Laura Caponetto: Accommodated Authority: Flipping Langton's Picture <i>10 min break</i>
15:10-16:10	Stephen Barker: Slurs and Conventional Implicature: The Power of Presupposition (2:10 pm GMT) <i>10 min break</i>
16:20-17:20	Jonathan Ginsburg & Mihaela Popa-Wyatt: Conversational Spillover Dynamics <i>10 min break</i>
17:30-18:30	Mary Kate McGowan: Oppressive Speech and Accommodation: On the Role of Interlocutors (11:30 am EST) <i>10 min break</i>
18:40-19:40	Gillian Russell: Social Spheres (12:40 pm EST)
19:40-20:40	Optional round-table discussion

Friday, 26 March 2021

13:55-14:00	Welcome
14:00-15:00	Manfred Krifka: The marking and effects of assertoric strength <i>10 min break</i>
15:10-16:10	Nicholas Asher & Julie Hunter: TBA <i>10 min break</i>
16:20-17:20	Elisabeth Camp: Framing and Looping; Solidarity and Resistance (10:20 am EST) <i>10 min break</i>
17:30-18:30	David Beaver & Jason Stanley: Oppressive Resonance (10:30 am CST) <i>10 min break</i>
18:40-19:40	Lynne Tirrell: Toxic Speech: Social Epidemiology (12:40 am EST—11:30 am EST)
19:40-20:40	Optional round-table discussion

Thursday, 27 March 2021

13:55-14:00	Welcome
15:00-16:00	Lucy McDonald: How to Woo Things With Words (2:00 GMT) <i>10 min break</i>
16:10-17:10	Lauren Ashwell: Gendered slurs and the pretense of neutrality (10:20am EST) <i>10 min break</i>
17:20-18:20	Amanda Kathleen McMullen: Gendered Pejorative Utterances as Acts of Warning (10:20 am CST) <i>10 min break</i>
18:30-19:30	
19:30-20:30	Optional round-table discussion

ABSTRACTS: DAY 1

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 Conventional Implicature: The Power of Presupposition

STEPHEN BARKER (University of Nottingham)

3:10 pm CET — 2:10 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.

Conventional Spillover Dynamics

JONATHAN GINSBURG & MIHAELA POPA-WYATT (Université Paris Diderot & ZAS Berlin)
4:20 pm CET

TBA

Oppressive Speech and Accommodation: On the Role of Interlocutors

MARY KATE MCGOWAN (Wellesley College, Massachusetts)
5:30 pm CET — 11:30 am EST

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 — 12:40 pm EST

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

ABSTRACTS: DAY 2

The marking and effects of assertoric strength

MANFRED KRIFKA (ZAS Berlin)
2:00 pm CET

TBA

TBA

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

TBA

Framing and Looping; Solidarity and Resistance

ELISABETH CAMP (Rutgers University)

4:20 pm CET — 10:20 am EST

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 Resonance

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

5:30 pm CET — 10:30 am CST — 11:30 am EST

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.

Toxic Speech: Social Epidemiology

LYNNE TIRRELL (University of Connecticut)

6:40 pm CET — 12:40 am EST

TBA

ABSTRACTS: DAY 3

How to Woo Things With Words

LUCY McDONALD (St John’s College, University of Cambridge)

3:00 pm CET — 2:00 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)

4:10 pm CET — 10:10 am EST

TBA

Gendered Pejorative Utterances as Acts of Warning

AMANDA KATHLEEN MCMULLEN (University of Arkansas)

5:20 pm CET — 10:20 am CST

[[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.

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