SIMONE CARRUS
Vita-Salute San Raffaele University
carrussimone@gmail.com

SLURS: AT-ISSUENESS AND SEMANTIC NORMATIVITY

abstract

In the first part of the article, we present the main approaches to analyze slurs' content and we investigate the interaction between an assertion containing a slur and a denial ('It's not true that P' / P is false') showing to what extent a "neutral counterpart account" works better than a "dual account". Additionally, the analysis offers the opportunity to discuss the usefulness of the notion of "at-issueness" for a debate on the lexical semantics of slurs. In the second part, we use our apparatus to analyze a real case of non-standard use of 'frocio' ('faggot'). Our conclusion is that even if a family resemblance conception of category membership could account for these uses, it cannot account for the related semantic normativity problem.

1. Introduction: The Derogatory Content of Slurs

One of the main points of interest about slurs ('nigger', 'faggot', 'wop', 'kike', etc.) is the linguistic nature of their derogatory content. At the state of the art, we cannot find a completely uncontroversial account: among other things, we are still wondering if their Derogatory Force (Hom, 2008) plays a truth-conditional role. In the literature, we can find at least two families of theories. On the one hand, we have the truth-conditional accounts: the proposal by Hom (2008) is probably the most representative of this field. It has been followed by the account proposed in Hom & May (2013) and, with some significant variations, by the work of Croom (2011, 2014, 2015). On the other hand, we have the non-truth-conditional accounts: starting from Macià (2002), then with Potts (2007a, 2007b), Schlenker (2007), Williamson (2009), Jeshion (2013b), etc., these scholars defend the idea according to which the derogation has nothing to do with the truth-conditional and/or at-issue content.[1]

Most researchers shares the idea according to which every slur has a neutral counterpart (NC): 'nigger' - 'Afro-American', 'faggot' - 'homosexual', 'kike' - 'Jew', 'wop' - 'Italian', etc. However, on this point we find the first substantial difference between a truth-conditional approach and a non-truth-conditional one: according to the former, slurs and the corresponding NCs would denote different sets of entities; according to the latter, slurs and NCs would be equivalent concerning the denotation.

Let us consider an example of assertion containing a slur.

[1a] Antony: "Mark is a faggot".

According to Hom & May (2013), the derogatory content of 'faggot' has a double articulation: it characterizes the truth-conditional component, and then is conveyed by a conversational implicature. For this reason, henceforth I will talk of a *dual account*. According to the non-truth-conditional accounts, the truth-conditional content of 'faggot' is the same as that of the

---

1 According to Potts (2015, p. 169), the "at-issue" content corresponds to what Frege (1892/1980) calls the 'sense' and what Grice (1975) calls 'what is said'. Potts suggests that talking about "truth-conditional content" is confusing, because even non-at-issue (traditionally "pragmatic") contents like presuppositions and implicatures can generally affect the truth-conditions of an utterance. However, given that several scholars do not adopt Potts's taxonomy of meanings, in this paper we will talk about truth-conditional contents and truth-conditional theories. Furthermore, in paragraph §2.3, we suggest that if the notion of "at-issueness" concerns the relation between a proposition and the "Question Under Discussion" in a discourse, its relevance at the lexical level may seem controversial.

NC ('homosexual') and the derogatory content is *pragmatic* and/or not *at-issue*. Henceforth, I will talk of a *neutral-counterpart account* (NC account).[2]

In table 1, the analysis of [1a], according to the two approaches:

Table 1	[1a] Antony: "Mark is a faggot"	
	Dual account	**NC account**
	Truth-conditional	Truth-conditional
	"Mark has the properties of a faggot"	"Mark has the properties of a homosexual"
	Non-truth-conditional	Non-truth-conditional
	"Faggots exist"	"Homosexuals are despicable"

Two reading notes:

- concerning the dual account: the lexical content of 'faggot' is assumed to be something like 'despicable because of being homosexual'.
- concerning the NC accounts: according to expressivism, the derogatory non-truth-conditional content is not propositional. It would correspond to a negative affective state.

2. At-issueness and Projective Behavior

2.1. The Persistence of Offensiveness in Non-assertive Structures

In the literature, the projection of the derogatory content of slurs has been strongly highlighted. According to many scholars, it would be evident that (at least a part of) the content of a slur embedded in a complex structure (negation, quote, question, conditional) shows a different behavior respect to the content of generic predicates and even pejoratives ('fucker', 'asshole', 'idiot', etc.). Williamson (2009), for instance, notes that concerning the occurrences of 'boche' (slur for 'Germans'), "the xenophobic abuse is preserved in the negations" (p. 146).

The phenomenon has been clearly defined, but we find in the literature several ways to refer to it. In Potts (2007a), among the features of expressives, we find the "nondisplaceability". Hedger (2012) talks about "scoping-out" whereas Camp (2013) talks about "projecting-out". Finally, in Hom & May (2013), a paragraph on the topic is generically entitled "The persistence of offensiveness".

As an example, let us consider the negation of [1a]:

[2] Antony: "Mark is not a faggot".

The common intuition is that this utterance, although it is the negation of [1a], would continue to convey a derogatory content against homosexuals.[3] Cepollaro (2015) suggests that, given this view, the persistence of offensiveness in non-assertive structures seems to benefit the NC account. However, as we can infer from the next table, the dual account also has an explanation for this phenomenon.

Table 2	[2] Antony: "Mark is not a faggot"	
	Dual account	**NC account**
	Truth-conditional	Truth-conditional
	"Mark has not the properties of a faggot"	"Mark has not the properties of a homosexual"
	Non-truth-conditional	Non-truth-conditional
	"Faggots exist"	"Homosexuals are despicable"

The explanations are slightly different:

- as we said, a dual account recognizes two kinds of derogation. The non-truth-conditional kind would depend on the fact that, using a slur, the speaker conversationally implicates his commitment to the non-null extension of the slur. In [2], just like in [1a], the speaker would implicate (that he is assuming) the existence of individuals despicable because of being homosexual;
- the NC account proposes that occurrences of slurs make derogatory the utterances in which they are embedded because they convey a derogatory content via presupposition (Schlenker, 2007; Cepollaro, 2015) or implicature (Potts, 2007a, 2007b; Williamson, 2009; McCready, 2010).
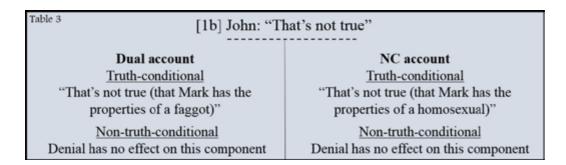
2.2. The Case of Denial

Following the presentation of the projection phenomenon, Camp (2013, p. 1) writes: "if we avoid repeating the offensive term by responding to [1] with something like - That's not true. / That's false. - then normally, we still manage to deny only that [Mark is homosexual]". Therefore, the derogatory content of slurs persists in negations like [2] and, moreover, it cannot be blocked through denial.

[1a] Antony: "Mark is a faggot".
[1b] John: "That's not true".

According to Camp, we are still faced with the projective behavior: denial would target the descriptive component (the fact that Mark is a homosexual), without modifying the derogatory content. Again, it could seem that the projection of the derogatory content can be better accounted for in a non-truth-conditional account. Let us see if this is the case. This conversational phenomenon can be divided in two parts: (1) the negation of the evaluative content; (2) the negation of the descriptive content. It is straightforward that:

i. if John interprets Antony's utterance literally, and
ii. if John's communicative intention is to oppose to the evaluative derogatory content,

as a competent speaker, he will realize that both the formulas 'That's not true' and 'That's false' are not apt. That is, John will not opt for denial. So, let us give a linguistic explanation for this fact. Check the table:

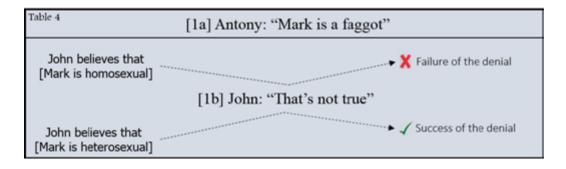| Table 3	[1b] John: "That's not true"	
Dual account		**NC account**
Truth-conditional		Truth-conditional
"That's not true (that Mark has the properties of a faggot)"		"That's not true (that Mark has the properties of a homosexual)"
Non-truth-conditional		Non-truth-conditional
Denial has no effect on this component		Denial has no effect on this component

From a NC perspective, the linguistic issue that John must face is clear: the derogatory content has "pragmatic" and/or "not-at-issue" nature and cannot be blocked by a denial. From a dual perspective, the issue is far less clear, but we can agree that the result is the same. Indeed, it is reasonable that a non-bigot speaker who wants to oppose the derogation conveyed by [1a] focuses on the non-truth-conditional content. Because, in some sense, the truth-conditional content appears to be nothing more than a concept-token ("*Mark* is despicable because of *his* homosexuality") of the concept-type represented by the non-truth-conditional content ("*Homosexuals* are despicable because of *their* homosexuality"). The attempt to preserve Mark from a negative evaluation of his homosexuality would be irrational if not combined with a refusal of the general negative evaluation of homosexuality.

Thus far, it seems that both the accounts we have considered predict that answering to Antony's derogatory utterance through denial would be inappropriate. In this sense, the non-deniability of the evaluative component does not support the non-truth-conditional theories *over* the dual account, because the projection of a non-deniable content is also predicted by the dual account.

That said, in the quotation opening this section, we read that with a denial, opposed to an assertion containing a slur, we "manage to deny" the membership of the subject in the set denoted by the NC. The use of the expression 'manage' presupposes an attempt to do something. This sounds odd because speakers ordinarily do not *try,* they know well how to use a denial. In this sense, if we want to understand what Camp meant, we must probably look at the information about the target available to the speaker.

Consider table 4. If John believes that Mark is homosexual, the interpretation of a dialogue like [1a-b] will proceed as suggested above. No attempts: John will not opt for the denial. The point seems to be that speakers assume that 'faggot' refers to homosexuals.

Table 4	[1a] Antony: "Mark is a faggot"
John believes that [Mark is homosexual]	✗ Failure of the denial
	[1b] John: "That's not true"
John believes that [Mark is heterosexual]	✓ Success of the denial

Let us now imagine that John believes that Mark is not homosexual. Something changes, indeed in this latter case:

i.   the use of the denial is allowed, and so ordinarily,
ii. even non-bigot speakers like John tend to object to a certain piece of content (e.g. homosexuality) intentionally allowing the categorical derogation to remain standing.

Here is what Camp (2013) probably means when she writes that, through denial, we "manage to deny" just the membership in the set denoted by the NC. She refers to contexts in which the speaker using the denial (John) entertains a specific belief ("the target is not a member of the set denoted by the NC").

In any case, here is also the puzzle for the dual account supporters: if the truth-conditional content of 'faggot' corresponds to *more than* homosexuality (evaluative + descriptive content), why can we use a denial to negate *just* the homosexuality (only descriptive content) of the target? The possible answers depend basically on what we are licensed to infer from *deniability*. As an example, one may wonder if deniability is a good diagnostics for truth-conditional relevance.

2.3. Deniability and At-issueness

According to Potts, deniability is useful to distinguish "entailments" from "nonentailments": "The meanings divide into two subclasses, entailments ('commitments') and nonentailments; the main factor in the split is the notion of deniability. [...] Nonentailments are deniable [...]. In contrast, entailments are not deniable" (Potts, 2005, p. 27). However, as Potts (2012) clarifies, truth-conditional contents and entailments are not the same. And even if Camp (2013) chooses not to address the question of the "theoretical status" of the evaluative content, the puzzle that she pointed out seems to depend on that status. Indeed, she quotes McCready (2010), according to whom, in general: "In ordinary denial, the truth of any at-issue part of a sentence can be called into question" (p. 7). And, in particular: "the negative part of the meaning of Kraut, and, by extension, pejoratives in general is CIE content [Expressive Conventional Implicature], and not part of the at-issue meaning" (p. 10). So, according to McCready (2010), as well as to Potts (2005, 2007a, 2007b), what the previous tables show is that the evaluative content of slurs is not at-issue. It seems that the "at-issue content" corresponds to the *most important* content conveyed via an utterance. "'At-issue entailment' sets up a useful contrast with CIs, which are secondary entailments that cooperative speakers rarely use to express controversial propositions or carry the main themes of a discourse" (Potts, 2005, p. 4). Consider [3]:

> [3] I spent part of every summer until I was ten with my grandmother, who lived in a working-class suburb of Boston.

With the purpose of clarifying what he means with "at-issue content", Potts (2005) highlights that, in [3], there are two assertions, but one of them plays "a secondary role relative to the information conveyed by the main clause" (p. 28). Therefore, first of all, it seems that "at-issueness" concerns the relation between propositions and the "main theme of a discourse". Indeed, Simons *et al.* (2010, p. 323) give the following definition of the notion:

a) A proposition *p* is at-issue iff the speaker intends to address the Question Under Discussion (QUD) via ?*p* (thus, the question *whether p*).
b) An intention to address the QUD via ?*p* is felicitous only if:
    i.   ?*p* is relevant to the QUD, and
    ii. the speaker can reasonably expect the addressee to recognize this intention.

Now, if at-issueness is a matter of primacy concerning a (potentially implicit) QUD, it seems that co-text and context are fundamental to establish if a content is at-issue. Accordingly,

> identifying whether a particular proposition is at-issue according to the definition [...] requires judgments on whether one question is relevant to another [...] and judgments on whether a speaker can reasonably expect the addressee to recognize a particular intention (Tonhauser, 2012, p. 241).

Not only at-issueness is a notion that has to do with the QUD in a conversation, but also with "competent, cooperative addressees" able to "identify" (*ibidem*) the main themes of a discourse.

Concerning the previous example [1a], one may wonder if it is possible to *identify* the at-issue content, given that we do not know anything about the context. Consider:

A. Antony could be asserting just that Mark is a homosexual (from a homophobic perspective). Than the evaluative content would be secondary. Otherwise,
B. Antony could be asserting that Mark is despicable because of being homosexual. In this case, the evaluative content would be primary and thus, one can suppose, at-issue.

Here is an exemplification of the case B:

> [4a] John: "Why are you so hostile to Mark?"
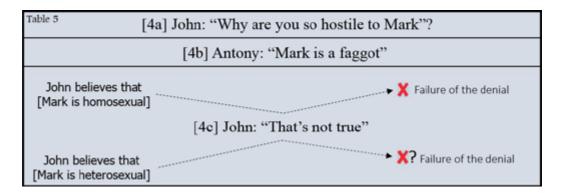> [4b] Antony: "Mark is a faggot".

Given the explicit QUD in [4a], it seems clear that the evaluative content of [4b] is at-issue. A first conclusion is the following: if at-issueness does not strictly concern the lexical content of slurs (as we saw, the at-issue content depends on a sort of conversational salience), one may wonder if this "theoretical status" is really useful for the debate. In addition, as a collateral outcome, the same skepticism may affect the deniability test. Consider, as an example, that even the supporters of presuppositional accounts use the argument of deniability against truth-conditional accounts. Yet, according to Potts (2005), even presuppositions (and conversational implicatures) are deniable.

So let us analyze the deniability of [4b]:

> [4b] Antony: "Mark is a faggot".
> [4c] John: "That's not true".

Probably, the most natural interpretation of [4c] is the one according to which the argument of the denial is the proposition 'I am so hostile to Mark because Mark is a faggot'. In other terms, the interpretation according to which John is discussing the reason of the hostility. However, we are not interested in this case. Indeed, for this interpretation, whether 'faggot' and 'homosexual' are coreferential has no relevance.

Then we proceed to analyze [4a-c] as we did for [1a-b]. See table 5.

Table 5	[4a] John: "Why are you so hostile to Mark"?
	[4b] Antony: "Mark is a faggot"

John believes that [Mark is homosexual] ⤳ ✗ Failure of the denial

[4c] John: "That's not true"

John believes that [Mark is heterosexual] ⤳ ✗? Failure of the denial

If John, believing that Mark is homosexual, wants to block the derogatory content expressed by Antony, denial ([4c]) works as usual. Thus, it continues to sound inappropriate (while being a potential failure). Imagine that John believes that Mark is *not* homosexual. Our previous analysis predicts that John will answer through denial in order to target the proposition 'Mark is a homosexual'. Yet, something is wrong. Although it is clear that John *is allowed* to use [4c] in that way, the prediction is somewhat surprising because (1) the denial should target the at-issue content and (2) the at-issue content of [4b] is something like 'Mark is despicable because of being homosexual'. The QUD in [4a-c] is not the sexual orientation *per se*, but rather the evaluation of the sexual orientation. However, the alternative is to accept different analysis of the same proposition (compare table 5 to table 4). In sum:

i.   the contribution 'faggot' offers to the at-issue content of an utterance is context-dependent;[4]
ii. the evaluative component can be at-issue;
iii. even if this content is at-issue, denial will sound inappropriate.

Then, in conclusion, it seems that according to speakers the evaluative content of slurs is not *a matter of truth.* However, it is controversial that the notion of at-issueness can help us to better understand the relation between slurs' lexical content and the truth of the utterances in which they are embedded.

In any case, in the following section, we will use the apparatus presented so far (theories, projection and denial) in order to investigate a real case of non-standard use of slurs (e.g. 'faggot' used to derogate a heterosexual man).

3. Non-standard Uses

Croom (2015) argues against the co-referentiality thesis. If we accept his argument, we should actually acknowledge that the supposed NCs of the slurs are not NCs. Briefly, the idea is that since slurs and NCs are ordinarily used to denote different sets of entities they thereby differ in their meaning. 'Faggot', as an example, would refer to individuals in the world on the basis of a set of properties that *can or cannot* contain the property of "being homosexual". In this framework, the undeniable relevant role played by the property of being homosexual in the standard use of 'faggot' is explained by the notion of "conceptual

---

4   An anonymous reviewer expressed her/his concern about this conclusion. In particular, s/he suggested that the at-issue content of a word cannot be context-dependent because it should depend on its lexical meaning. I agree. It is precisely that kind of concern that makes me worry about how a "question under discussion" conceived as "the primary goal" and/or "the immediate topic" of a conversation (Roberts, 1996) can be useful for investigating the lexical content codified by an isolated word.

anchor": "which may be understood as the most relevantly salient (rather than necessary) default descriptor that helps communicative agents ground the apt application of S(lur) towards its prototypical (rather than essentially categorical) targets" (Croom, 2015, p. 35). According to Croom, we need such a theory essentially to account for those uses that Jeshion (2013a) calls *nonliteral*:

> Let us distinguish these basic uses from two broader uses that I will dub "nonliteral." One involves applications to only those members of the group referenced by the slur that are stereotype-conforming. The other involves applications to those perceived to be exhibiting properties in the stereotype of the slur's neutral counterpart, yet who are not members of the group (p. 324).

In particular, Croom presents four sources of supporting evidence showing that slurs and NCs are in fact not co-referential and then, one can suppose, showing that so-called non-literal uses do not constitute an independent category:

i. the discussion provided by Szekely (2008); here the author reports that the slur 'faggot' was in fact used to apply to some but not all male homosexuals;
ii. the discussion provided by MacDonald (1999); here the author discusses how slurs were used in his linguistic community and reports that 'nigger' was in fact used to apply to some but not all African Americans;
iii. the discussion provided by Troyani (2013); here the author reports that the slur 'guido' was in fact used to apply to some but not all Italian-Americans;
iv. the discussion provided by the comedian Chris Rock in his famous routine completely based on the conceptual clash "Niggas vs. Black People".
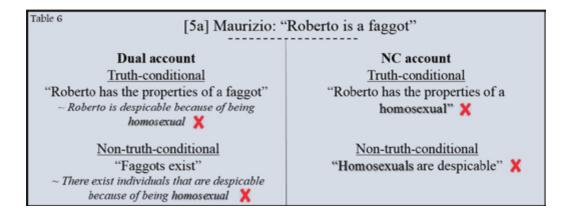
For sake of brevity, I shall not go into details; however, Croom's discussion raises the following issue, to which we shall now turn: if a speaker makes a non-standard use of a slur, will we find differences in the ways in which the addresses use denials? Let us consider a recent episode. "I wanted to poke fun at Mancini for the fact that he enters the field as for a wedding party. I meant '*fighetto*', not that thing about sex!".[5] The quote is from the newsweekly *Chi*: in the article, Maurizio Sarri, current coach of *Società Sportiva Calcio Napoli*, tries to explain why he addressed Roberto Mancini, former coach of Football Club Internazionale Milano, with '*frocio*' ('faggot'). '*Fighetto*' is a derogatory Italian term used to mean something between 'snooty' and 'posh'.[6] Consider the following exchange:
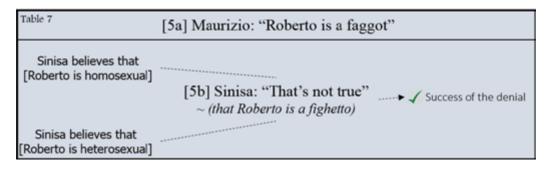
> [5a] Maurizio: "Roberto is a faggot".
> [5b] Sinisa: "That's not true".

In the previous paragraphs, we assumed that to exhibit the typical property of the NC (being homosexual, being Jew, being Italian, etc.) is the critical factor for being target of the corresponding slur ('faggot', 'kike', 'wop', etc.). Nevertheless, what Maurizio Sarri is claiming is that the meaning of 'faggot' in [5a] is something like "snooty person who enters the field as for a wedding party". Let us see how the two theories account for this use.
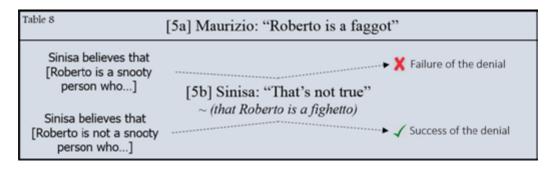
---

5 My translation; for the original quote, see: http://bit.ly/1TdHlyC.
6 Sometimes these attributes come together with something like "effeminate". This connection is a good candidate to explain this non-standard use of 'faggot'.

Table 6

[5a] Maurizio: "Roberto is a faggot"

Dual account	NC account
Truth-conditional	Truth-conditional
"Roberto has the properties of a faggot"	"Roberto has the properties of a
~ *Roberto is despicable because of being homosexual* ✗	homosexual" ✗
Non-truth-conditional	Non-truth-conditional
"Faggots exist"	"Homosexuals are despicable" ✗
~ *There exist individuals that are despicable because of being homosexual* ✗	

Table 7

[5a] Maurizio: "Roberto is a faggot"

Sinisa believes that [Roberto is homosexual]

[5b] Sinisa: "That's not true"
~ *(that Roberto is a fighetto)* ----▶ ✓ Success of the denial

Sinisa believes that [Roberto is heterosexual]

In table 7, we focus on the relevance of the beliefs that Sinisa may entertain about Roberto's homosexuality. Given that we are assuming that Sinisa interprets Maurizio's utterance in the way Maurizio suggested a posteriori, that is, as the attribution to Roberto of the property (or set of properties) of *being a snooty person who enters the field as for a wedding party*, one could conclude that those beliefs do not influence the potential use of denial.

Now, let us focus on the relevance of the beliefs that Sinisa may entertain about the *actual* predication.

Table 8

[5a] Maurizio: "Roberto is a faggot"

Sinisa believes that [Roberto is a snooty person who...] ----▶ ✗ Failure of the denial

[5b] Sinisa: "That's not true"
~ *(that Roberto is a fighetto)*

Sinisa believes that [Roberto is not a snooty person who...] ----▶ ✓ Success of the denial

Here, the point is that Sinisa may deny the assertion by Maurizio either because he believes that Maurizio is saying something false or because, whatever he thinks about Roberto, he wants to protect his friend from the derogatory content conveyed by Maurizio. Table 8 sums up the two cases and we see that in [5a-b], exactly like in [1a-b] (see table 4), if the speaker:

i. is interested in generically denying the evaluative content, with no interest in denying the descriptive content, he will not use the denial formula (failure);

ii. wants to negate the descriptive content, he may successfully use the denial (success).

At this point, it will be clear that both the theories we discussed run into some problems. Briefly, according to what Maurizio claimed, sexual orientation would not be at issue in [5a] and if that was correct, it would follow that:

i. the fact that the speaker (Sinisa) believes or not that the target (Roberto) exhibits the typical properties of the NC is irrelevant for the effectiveness of the denial (table 7). Indeed, in this case it is improper to say that Sinisa *manages to deny* only that Roberto is homosexual;

ii. in general, both the NC account and the dual account appear unsatisfactory (table 6).

Let us now subsume this explanatory weakness under a more general semantic normativity problem. Following Marconi (1997), we know that Sarri, like everyone else, should

> accept (and is regarded as socially obliged to accept) the consequences of his assertions taken in the sense in which semantically authoritative speakers take them, independently of whether such a sense coincides with the sense he intended them to have (p. 129).

Therefore, given our theories, we expect that the projected content smoothly enter into the common ground. The audience of Maurizio, even if confronted with the utterance at a different time, should tend to react to that content (derogatory towards homosexual people). But what happened in this case? The interpretation of Sarri's words divided public opinion:

i. on the one hand, some people interpreted Sarri's utterance according to the predictions of the accounts we have considered, thus they attributed to him the commitment to a homophobic content like 'Homosexuals are despicable';[7]

ii. on the other hand, some people interpreted Sarri's utterance as lacking any reference to homosexuality.[8]

Note that, although the victim prompted the standard interpretation ("He used racist words [...] shouting, saying *frocio*, finocchio; [...] in England, if anyone used those words, he would be banished from any kind of field")[9] even the institution in charge has decided for the second non-standard interpretation: "The decision by the Sport Judge formally clarifies the absence of any racist or homophobic connotation in coach Sarri's words".[10] A significant part of the linguistic community recognized that Sarri's intended meaning reflects an existing use, and it is likely that Sarri used the slur, "not just with the *intention* of using it as everybody else in the community does but under the *assumption* that [he was] using it as everybody else does" (Marconi, 1997, p. 216). For these reasons, non-standard uses of 'faggot' cannot be conceived as occurrences of a *private*

---

7 "Sarri fell back into it. After two years, again with homophobic insults". My translation; for the original, see: http://bit.ly/1QSADqP.

8 "Stop hypocrisy: Sarri is not a homophobic and Mancini is not gay." My translation; for the original, see: http://bit.ly/2mFcwrw.

9 Mancini during the after match press conference. My translation; for the original, see: http://bit.ly/1SeR1qY.

10 My translation; for the original, see: http://bit.ly/1UFRinw.

language (Wittgenstein, 1953). On the other hand, Croom (2015) suggested that it is strongly controversial to consider these uses "figurative": Croom proposes to account for non-standard uses of slurs by adopting a family resemblance conception of category membership (Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Wittgenstein, 1953). Accordingly, in any use of 'faggot', HOMOSEXUALITY would work as a "conceptual anchor". However, Croom's proposal may not be conclusive:

i. it does not take into account Sarri's claim – supported by part of the linguistic community and by the judge – according to which in his use of '*frocio*', sexuality was *not* salient, rejecting the accusations of homophobia;
ii. opponents can say that, if HOMOSEXUALITY is the conceptual anchor "that helps communicative agents ground the apt application of ['faggot'] towards its prototypical targets" (Croom, 2015, p. 35), it remains somehow salient even in non-standard uses.

The supposed optionality of the "conceptual anchor" cannot account for the fact that there are at least two distinct linguistic sub-communities with different opinions about the application conditions of the term.

> The communicative intentions behind that which we communicate must be specific, determinate, and definite if they are to be calculable; [...] If an individual speaker comes to associate with the use of a particular expression a set of conditions dissimilar to that which another competent speaker associates with it, there is no problem if both are constant in their distinct associations; this is what we normally attribute to idiolect or ambiguity (Lepore, 2015, p. 7).

The reported case is just a clear example of a linguistic fact concerning 'faggot': there exists a non-standard association between the word and a set of conditions of application no less clear, constant and public than the standard one. We can account for this fact in two different ways:

i. if we assume the classical theory of concepts and then we assume that belonging to the target class is a necessary condition for the application of the slur 'faggot', then we should recognize that Sarri's use of 'faggot' features another word, different from the slur 'faggot' in that it has another meaning. The term 'faggot' would be semantically ambiguous under this reading;
ii. otherwise, if we assume the family resemblance theory, according to which none of the semantic traits associated to 'faggot' is necessary for its application, we should recognize that Sarri's use of the slur 'faggot' was not really different from any standard use of the slur.

4. Conclusion   In the literature (in particular, see McCready, 2010 and Camp, 2013), it has been said that the denial ('It's not true that P' / 'P is false') is a linguistic formula capable to highlight the projection of the slurs' derogatory content. In this article, we have investigated the interaction between an utterance containing a slur and a denial.

In the first part of the article (§2), we briefly presented our apparatus. We introduced the two main approaches to analyze slurs meaning (dual account *vs.* NC account), showing how both theories account for the projection in negations (table 2) and for the inappropriateness of answering back to the derogatory content of slurs through denial (table 3). However, as Camp (2013) suggested, the fact that we can use denial to deny the membership of the target in the set denoted by the NC constitutes a puzzle for truth-conditional approaches. In this regard, if some scholars proposed to explain this phenomenon by way of the notion of at-

issueness (Potts, 2005; McCready, 2010), we think that it is important to consider that that notion apparently has to do with the "topics of discussion" (Roberts, 1996) rather than with the lexical content of isolated words. In particular, we would tend to assume that, differently from at-issue contents (see Simons *et al.*, 2010; Tonhauser, 2012), the lexical content of a term should not be something that (a) speakers *identify in context* through (b) a *cooperative behavior*. We also tried to show that the at-issue content of (even) an atomic proposition containing a slur is context-dependent.

Leaving aside this line of speculation, in the second part of the article (§3), we used the apparatus to analyze non-standard uses of slurs (e.g. 'faggot' used to derogate an heterosexual man). Considering the public opinion reactions to a recent incident (see the article: "Inter's Roberto Mancini: Napoli manager Maurizio Sarri called me a faggot"[11]), we argued that both the NC account and the dual account would predict that Sarri cannot possibly be right in claiming that his use of 'faggot' was not homophobic, because of the crucial role attributed to the typical trait of the supposed NC (in that case, homosexuality).

In this sense, non-standard uses seem to pose an unsolved (but *politically* relevant) semantic normativity problem. On the one hand, there is a linguistic sub-community, according to which each occurrence of the slur would be derogatory towards homosexuals. On the other hand, there is a linguistic sub-community (consisting *at least* of Sarri and the judge but possibly many more speakers), according to which *'frocio'* could be used with no reference to homosexuality. So, when observing the existence of these conflicting readings, one may wonder whether the judge made the right decision concerning the Sarri-Mancini incident. We suggested two different ways to deal with the problem. If one assumes that being gay is a necessary trait for the application of 'faggot' in standard uses and that Sarri's use reflects an existing use, then one should recognize that the Italian derogatory term '*frocio*' is semantically ambiguous. On the other hand, if we assume that none of the semantic traits associated to the term is necessary for its standard application, we should recognize that when a slur like 'faggot' (as well as other slurs) is applied to individuals who do *not* belong to the target class the speaker still runs the risk of being derogatory to the target class itself. In any case, the judge's decision is controversial because it is very doubtful that a use of 'faggot' which do not refer to homosexuality really exists. So, if we choose the first option (classical theory of concepts), the meaning-related source of the conflict between the two communities needs further explanation.[12] If we choose the second option (family resemblance theory), the anti-homophobic prohibition on the use of 'faggot' seems to rest on the idea according to which all the possible uses of the slur are strongly "related" (Wittgenstein, 1953).

REFERENCES

Anderson, L., & Lepore, E. (2013). What did you call me? Slurs as prohibited words. *Analytic Philosophy*, 54(3), 350-363.

Camp, E. (2013). Slurring Perspectives. *Analytic Philosophy*, 54(3), 330-349.

Cepollaro, B. (2015). In Defense of a Presuppositional Account of Slurs. *Language Sciences*, 52, 36-45.

Croom, A. (2011). Slurs. *Language Sciences*, 33, 343-358.

Croom, A. (2014). The Semantics of Slurs: a Refutation of Pure Expressivism. *Language Sciences*, 41, 227-242.

Croom, A. (2015). The Semantics of Slurs: a Refutation of Coreferentialism. *Ampersand*, 2, 30-38.

---

11   *The Guardian* online: http://bit.ly/20dbz59.
12   The hypothesis of an "edict of prohibition" (Anderson & Lepore, 2013) seems appropriate for this approach.

Frege, G. (1892). On sense and reference. In P. Geach & M. Black (Eds.). *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*. Oxford: Blackwell, 56-78.

Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hedger, J. (2012). The Semantics of Racial Slurs: Using Kaplan's Framework to Provide a Theory of the Meaning of Derogatory Epithets. *Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations*, 11, 74-84.

Hom, C. (2008). The Semantics of Racial Epithets. *Journal of Philosophy*, 105, 416-440.

Hom, C., & May R. (2013). Moral and Semantic Innocence. *Analytic Philosophy*, 54(3), 293-313.

Jeshion, R. (2013a). Slurs and Stereotypes. *Analytic Philosophy*, 54(3), 314-329.

Jeshion, R. (2013b). Expressivism and the Offensiveness of Slurs. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 27, 231-259.

Kaplan, D. (1999). The Meaning of Ouch and Oops: Explorations in the Theory of Meaning as Use, manuscript.

Lepore, E. (2015). On the Perspective-Taking and Open-Endedness of Slurring, manuscript.

Macià, J. (2002). Presuposición y significado expressivo. *Theoria: Revista de Teoria, Historia y Fundamentos de la Ciencia*, 3(45), 499-513.

Marconi, D. (1997), *Lexical Competence*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mac Donald, M.P. (1999). *All souls: A Family story from southie.* New York: Ballentine.

McCready, E. (2010). Varieties of Conventional Implicature. *Semantics & Pragmatics*, 3, 1-57.

Panzeri, F., & Carrus, S. (2016). Slurs and Negation. *Phenomenology and Mind*, 11, 170-180.

Potts, C. (2007a). The Expressive Dimension. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 33, 165-197.

Potts, C. (2007b). The Centrality of Expressive Indices. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 33(2), 255-268.

Potts, C. (2015). Presupposition and Implicature, in S. Lappin & C. Fox (Eds). *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory* (2nd ed.). West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Putnam, H. (1970). Is semantic possible?. In H. Putnam (2003), *Mind, Language and Reality. Philosophical Papers*, 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Putnam, H. (1975). The Meaning of 'meaning'. In H. Putnam (2003), *Mind, Language and Reality. Philosophical Papers*, 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roberts, C. (1996). Information Structure: Towards an Integrated Formal Theory of Pragmatics. In J.H. Yoon & A. Kathol (Eds.). *Papers in Semantics*, 49. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 91-136.

Rosch, E., & Mervis, C. (1975). Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories. *Cognitive Psychology*, 7, 573-605.

Schlenker, P. (2007). Expressive Presuppositions. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 33, 237-245.

Simons, M., Tonhauser, J., Beaver, D., & Roberts, C. (2010). What projects and why. *Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, 21, 309-327.

Szekely, L. (2008). Offensive Words (track 1). In *Chewed Up*, Los Angeles: Image Entertainment.

Tonhauser, J. (2012). Diagnosing (not-)at-issue content. *Proceedings of Semantics of Under-represented Languages of the Americas (SULA)*, 6, 239-254.

Troyani, S. (2013). Guido culture: The destabilization of Italian-American identity on Jersey Shore. *California Italian Studies*, 4(2). http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1m95s09q.

Williamson, T. (2009). Reference, Inference and the Semantics of Pejoratives. In J. Almog & P. Leonardi (Eds.). *The philosophy of David Kaplan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 137-158.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.