Philosophy of Language

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Edited by

Brian Thomas

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To my parents, Jackie and Joe

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PREFACE

First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of the San Diego State Philosophy Department. If it were not for the academic enthusiasm and support from the faculty and graduate students of the San Diego State Philosophy Department, the conference and this project would not have been possible. A special thank you to George Schieck and Courtney White for dedicating time and energy to ensure the conference weekend was a success in all aspects. I would also like to thank the contributors for offering your work to be included in this collection. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Steve Barbone for going above and beyond with continued words of encouragement, advice, and dedicating his time and energy guiding me during this process.

The contents of this work contain some of the research presented at the 4th Weber Graduate Philosophy Conference held at San Diego State University in October of 2014. The theme of the conference was Philosophy of Language and included any research in progress or completed. Presenters and participants from all over the country and the world were invited to take part in the two-day event. Research presented here includes research on Wittgenstein's Proposition, Self-Directed Irony, an analysis of Metaphors and much more. This collection of essays is meant to present a glimpse of the diversity of research and questions being conducted in the field of Philosophy of Language.

— Brian Thomas
San Diego State University

CHAPTER ONE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SLURS: THE TRIPARTITE STRUCTURE OF SLURS' OFFENSIVENESS

DAVID DAISE
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract: This contribution engages the debate attempting to explain why slurs are offensive. Although most theories assert that slurs are offensive because of an intrinsic feature of the word itself, I develop the Prohibitionist view argued by Luvell Anderson and Ernie Lepore to claim that slurs are offensive due to the interpretive formulation attached to instances of their use.

Introduction

During a 2014 post-game press conference, Richard Sherman, NFL cornerback, asserted: "[thug] seems like it's the accepted way of calling somebody the N-word nowadays […] because they know…."[1] So it seems that 'thug' conveys the offense and meaning of a slur despite not being socially prohibited, not having offensive literal content, and not presupposing offensive content.[2] Sherman explains this offense by referring to the speaker and interpreting their intention to make a false attribution. This is not an explicitly formulated theory, merely an illustrative example to demonstrate that the possibility for the offense spawned from the appearance of slurs necessarily depends on a process of

[1] "Seattle Seahawks Cornerback Richard Sherman: I'm Not a Thug." NFL.com. N.p.,n.d. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.
[2] Sherman goes on to imply that the offense stemmed from the exclusive use of the term in reference to black athletes. Therefore, it does seem to be a presupposition in the sense that it implicitly involves attributions specific to race.

interpreting it and the meaning associated with that interpretation. Therefore, a slur's offensiveness necessarily depends on contingencies in the relationship among the speaker, the context of utterance, and the hearer. A sufficient explanation for the offensiveness of slurs should address the explanatory significance of all facets of this tripartite relationship because of the ambiguity of the locus of offense. Prohibitionism attempts to circumvent this structure of a slur being offensive by virtue of some feature of its content by reversing the order of explanation and claiming that slurs are prohibited words and offensive as a result of their prohibition. However, this social prohibition requires that we all have a clear sense of and consensus about the rules of uttering slurs. Thus, it does not specify the mechanism by which slurs have meaning. I will provide a metalinguistic account that pulls from the implications of the prohibitionist view and incorporates the intuitions behind the views that prohibitionism rejects. The result is the view that slurs are offensive because of certain sufficient but not necessary interpretive formulations that constitute their meaning to the individuals who articulate them. In this process of articulation, we refer to contextual factors to determine both whether a name for a group is a slur and how offensive it is relative to other names. These articulated reasons for the offensiveness of slurs can then lead to a social prohibition at which point the interpretive formulation that led to its being a slur falls out of the everyday use but is deferred to in cases of ambiguity or disagreement. In addition to being a better representation of our experiences encountering slurs, this view provides a framework to describe the offense related to ambiguous instances of slurring when the prohibition-offense paradigm is not clearly delineated. I will begin with an overview of the discourse on slurs before focusing on prohibitionism and then presenting my own view.

Slurs Defined

Slurs are expressions that target specific groups and are generally considered more offensive than their co-referential and offensively neutral counterparts. An account of a slur's offensiveness generally attempts to account for the discrepancy between the offensiveness of slurs and the inoffensiveness of their neutral counterparts. Additionally, an account will employ an either conventional or functional conception of slurs, which respectively entails conceiving of a slur as either one of the group of conventional derogatory expressions for a specific group or an expression that functions to derogate a particular group by virtue of how it is used. Despite this distinction, the two conceptions are not necessarily mutually

exclusive and a slur word can simultaneously act to slur. Alternatively, the conventionally understood group of expressions can function to demean a group but not lose their status as slurs if they function otherwise, or a slur can be any word or expression that functions to demean on a group basis, and the conventional group of expressions are slurs only when they function accordingly. For example, 'it' is unquestionably an anti-trans slur in the latter sense of acting to slur but also an innocuous gender-neutral pronoun.[3] These distinctions between a slur and its neutral counterpart and a slur and an act of slurring provide the dimensions to the questions that an account of slurs' offensiveness needs to answer: Why is a slur more offensive than its neutral counterpart? Is a slur word offensive when it is not acting to slur? Can a slur word not act to slur? These questions only exemplify some of the broad concerns of the discourse on slurs but do not represent it in its entirety.

Most proposals argue that a slur's offensiveness involves both semantic and pragmatic factors, but some argue that a slur's differing literal semantic content from their neutral counterparts is alone responsible for the differences between the two. According to a form of externalism, a slur's offensiveness is a function of these differences in semantic content.[4] The different literal content can have pragmatic effects regarding the use of a slur, but in that event, the use is offensive because of the sense in which the pragmatic effects constitute the content of the slur. This view posits that a slur and its neutral counterpart "differ not only extensionally, but also intensionally."[5] Accordingly, the sense in which a slur refers to its target group is conceptual and attributes discriminatory or otherwise negative concepts to the target group. These negative conceptual attributions are the foundation for the notion that the offensiveness of a slur is an expression of a discriminatory attitude associated with an ideological outlook. This descriptivist view does not explicitly limit offensiveness to the word itself but it does involve the notion that slur words convey derogatory conceptual content. The sense in which the word *conveys* content or describes the target group in a certain manner locates the slur word as the origin of the collection of negative concepts about the target group that could possibly apply on the basis of that word. That is not to say that each use necessarily evokes the entire collection of concepts or that the slur word is offensive because of the possibility that a hearer will think that the speaker has discriminatory attitudes but merely that slurs

[3] Dan Savage, "About That Hate Crime I Committed at University of Chicago." Web log post. *The Stranger*. Slog, 7 June 2014. Web.
[4] Christopher Hom and Robert May, *Moral and Semantic Innocence* (2013), 296
[5] Ibid.

themselves reflect offensive beliefs that a bigot would hypothetically purport to be true.

While a descriptivist view only commits to the idea that a slur word is representative of a conceptual framework with offensive conceptual attributions, the expressivist view cites the speaker as the source of a slur's offensive content. This view employs a functional definition of a slur; however, its function in this context is the conventional function in which the speaker deploys it. That is, the expressivist view holds that the conventional function of slurs is to demean on the basis of being a member of the target group. Therefore, we can understand a slur as offensive in virtue of the speaker's intention to derogate. Additionally, the intention to derogate is so intimately connected to the slur word that the discriminatory attitudes become part of the meaning of the slur itself. The offensive content is not merely the conceptual framework posited by the slur, but also its expression of the speaker's negative attitudes about and intention to derogate the target group.

The inferentialist view also attributes meaning and offensiveness to a slur's content but through sentential roles rather than the expression of the speaker's attitude. Inferentialism, similar to Expressivism, appeals to slurs being a form of expression; however, society operates as the arbiter of successful use. The inferentialist's claim is that "the meaning of a word or expression is a matter of its various actual and possible sentential roles" within a linguistic community.[6] Sentential roles determine meaning in the sense that there is the view that meaning is primarily communicative and thus a function of the likely inferences that a hearer will draw from an utterance or expression. Accordingly, slurs have the likely inferential role of demeaning the target group in that using a slur reveals the expressive commitment of the speaker. In the context of slurs, this expressive commitment is to the viability of the type of talk connected to the view of the inferiority of the target group. That is not to say that every use of a slur is connected to negative attitudes, but slurs exist within and have a necessary connection to a set of oppressive social practices that function to give them power. Accordingly, a slur's offensiveness is not semantic but the result of historical social relations that led to the viability of the notion that the target group is inferior by virtue of its group membership and only offensive when these historical social relations are the case.

These views reflect a broad spectrum of possible explanations for the locus of a slur's offensiveness and their associated commitments: the

[6] Lynne Tirrell, *Derogatory Terms: Racism, Sexism, and the Inferential Role Theory of Meaning* (1999), 46.

literal semantic content, the expressed attitudes of the speaker, and the functioning of slurs within a social context. Prohibitionism is the view that "slurs are prohibited words, and so, a violation of their prohibition might provoke offense."[7] Therefore, it conforms to the inferentialist's understanding of a slur's offensiveness as the result of extrinsic, contextual factors and not the semantics of the slur itself even while the views differ about the salient extrinsic factors. However, prohibitionism differs from the other accounts above in that it makes a distinction between the content of slurs as a linguistic category and the reason that they are offensive. Prohibitionism argues that our inability to give a wholly stable account of the linguistic content of slurs in relation to the relatively broad consensus among non-bigoted members of the linguistic community that they are offensive should lead us to question whether their content is at all responsible for their offensiveness. Consequently, the offensiveness of a slur is the offensiveness of a flouted prohibition.

More Than a Prohibition

Prohibitionism employs a deflationary strategy that is actually more ample than it initially appears and reveals a novel, metalinguistic dimension of slurs' offensiveness. While the views it critiques argue that slurs are offensive due to possessing offensive content, prohibitionism claims, "a violation of [slurs'] prohibition might provoke offense."[8] Although it seems to intend the social prohibition against slurs to be an explanatory principle for their offensiveness more generally, it does not distinguish between slurs as a linguistic category encompassing certain terms and slurs as utterances that elicit a certain form of offense. The former category can incorporate 'it' as an anti-trans slur despite its general context-dependence but cannot explain why 'thug' is comparably offensive. In defense of prohibitionism, we can say that there is a social prohibition against referring to a trans person as 'it' among those who are familiar with such a prohibition but not one against referring to an African-American as a 'thug'. However, Sherman does not claim that 'thug' is a slur but merely that it is comparably offensive to or generally like a slur, implying that there is an affective weight or experience particular to being called a slur. Thus, it is not clear that prohibitionism has the resources to explain a distinct experience to slurs' offensiveness.

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[7] Luvell Anderson and Ernie Lepore, *What Did You Call Me? Slurs as Prohibited Words* (Draft) (2013), 5.
[8] Luvell Anderson and Ernie Lepore, "Slurring Words." *Noûs*, 2011: 5.

While the slur-like offensiveness of ‘thug’ might pose a problem for the prohibitionist framework, prohibitionism is significant because it provides an explanatory advantage over the views it critiques with regard to the relationship between a slur and its offensiveness. Specifically, prohibitionism highlights that offense necessitates the mediation of an act of awareness or interpretation of social factors related to a slur and its target group. Prohibitionism only falls short in neglecting to consider the state of affairs relevant to its proposal.

Prohibitionism argues that slurs are offensive in the event that one cares about a violation of the prohibitive edicts surrounding their use, but it is not clear why the belief structure of an individual in relation to the social factors surrounding the use of slurs is limited either to accepting or to rejecting a social rule. The fact that there is no consensus regarding what precisely the rules or confines concerning this social prohibition are implies that we cannot think of the issue unilaterally. That is to say, if offense results from a concern for a social prohibition being flouted, then it would seem that we need to address the nature of this concern before we can say that we have provided an account of the offensiveness that results from it. The violation of an ambiguously defined social prohibition alone does not explain what is offensive about the use of a slur or what our perception of offense is in response to. Rather, the reason why or belief that a social prohibition exists and is important explains why violating it is offensive. Prohibitionism implies that reasoning or belief plays a role in a slur’s offensiveness and attempts to limit the viable explanations to exclude semantic or pragmatic accounts. However, this view neglects the fact that we are inclined to believe that there is a prohibition *because* of the reasons that these views posit. For example, Sherman and the people who called him ‘thug’ would agree that they did not violate a social prohibition but he felt offense to the extent of being called a slur, so the difference in reported offensiveness has to refer to a different feature of the utterance than its permissibility for explanation. Despite the lack of necessity with regard to the explanation, the fact that we respond by becoming offended based within an explanatory framework means that we couldn’t entirely ignore its relevance. Therefore, it is not just that there is a social prohibition against using slurs; rather, there is a social prohibition against using slurs such that we can and do articulate particular causal explanations for why the object of the social prohibition is offensive. Slurs are not offensive solely because a rule has been flouted; our understanding of why they are offensive is also a factor.

In the sense that meaning can reflect the significance derived from or response elicited by an utterance, the offensiveness of slurs is a form of

response to what the slur means. That is, it can be functionally understood as a form of response to the significance that we attach to or derive from slurs. This interpretive response is not arbitrary; it is, in fact, constrained by social conventions, but those conventions can also be flouted. Generally speaking, our interpretive responses tend towards social conventions purely by virtue of social convention by definition being what people in societies generally tend toward. However, the capacity to break with socially dominant convention implies that our response is distinguishable from the convention. The relevant significance or responses are not restricted to semantic content but incorporate contextual features pertinent to how we determine meaning in a particular instance of interpretation as in inferentialism's assertion that "derogatory terms for African-Americans cannot be significantly distanced from the history of the enslavement of Africans in the United States and the mistreatment of blacks at the hands of whites since then."[9] Contextual features could include the identity of the speaker/hearer, the tone or location of the slur, the beliefs that the speaker/hearer has about the target group, the social status of the target group, the historical or contemporary treatment of the target group, awareness of discrimination against the target group, and other features relevant to forming beliefs about the target group and how they should be regarded. The contextual features relevant to an interpretation are constrained by certain conventions but not wholly determined by them.

Given this expansion of the prohibitionist view, we need to consider three factors in our assessment of the offensiveness of a slur: (1) the slur, (2) the contextual factors that constrain the interpretation of the slur, and (3) the response that follows from the interpretation of the slur. A content-based approach locates offense as a feature of (1) the slur and/or (2) the meaning that follows from contextual factors; locating offense in (1) roughly corresponds with semantic approaches and in (2) with pragmatic approaches. The prohibitionist approach locates the offensiveness of a slur in (3). Accordingly (1) corresponds to the utterance of a slur, (2) corresponds to the existence of a social prohibition against uttering slurs, and (3) corresponds to the belief that violating this social prohibition is offensive. The addition of (3) reflects the instability of attributing offense without specifying an interpreter to fix the relevant contextual factors. With regard to prohibitionism, the only relevant contextual factor is the question of whether the violation of the social prohibition is offensive or not and the interpreter's belief about the importance of the social prohibition answers it. However, we should note that we can apply the

[9] Tirrell, "Derogatory Terms: Racism, Sexism, and the Inferential Role." 46.

other views to this triadic framework. For example, the expressivist view holds that slurs are offensive because they express negative attitudes about the target group. Instantiated into the tripartite structure above, the expressivist view holds that (1) is the slur, (2) is the slur's expressing negative attitudes about the target group, and (3) is the offense that arises as a result of how one thinks about this expression of negative attitudes. Accordingly, we can characterize the expressivist view as claiming that, in a particular instance, (I), one might view a slur as offensive when one views it as the expression of negative attitudes about the target group. That is, if one cannot interpret (I) as expressing negative attitudes about the target group, then it is either not offensive or offensive for some other reason. In short, there is no offense outside of an interpretive or explanatory framework.

The three factors relevant to the assessment of the offensiveness of slurs are co-dependent in that they mutually constrain and determine each other. The sense in which each factor determines the other is specific to both the factor and the relationship in question. So, for example, similar to the case of conventional implicature, the slur word itself determines the likely or possible meanings or sentential roles. These likely or possible meanings or sentential roles in turn determine how individuals interpret them. In both cases, the relationship is not causal or necessary but includes some possibilities and excludes others. For example, 'it' can be an anti-trans slur or a gender-neutral pronoun. As such, it can fill certain sentential roles by virtue of functioning in either capacity; so, as a gender-neutral pronoun, it can function as a third-person singular subject or object but not as a first-person singular or plural subject or object. These linguistic possibilities are constrained by conventional language rules that can be broken but only when certain contextual factors are present. These contextual factors, then, are considered when interpreting an appearance of 'it'. Therefore, when a parent is out with their baby and a stranger asks, "How old is it?" the parent may seek clarification that the stranger is referring to the child but, given sufficient contextual factors, the reference will be clear and potentially inoffensive. The reference is only potentially inoffensive because, in addition to being a gender-neutral pronoun, 'it' is an impersonal form and some consider it demeaning or inappropriate to refer to any person in the same manner of reference as an object.[10] However, this reference to the baby as an object is distinct from a slur because it does not satisfy the neutral counterpart requirement. Although we might say that 'he' or 'she' could be a neutral counterpart, the stranger would have to know the sex of the baby so this is more a function of the

[10] Thanks to Vincent Colapietro for this consideration.

real or perceived knowledge of the stranger than a feature of the term itself. The real or perceived knowledge of the stranger could be a contextual factor constraining the interpretation of the utterance's being offensive or inoffensive, but this would still not be a case of the neutral counterpart's being specific to the term. Additionally, this example does not capture the sense in which 'it' is more offensive specifically in reference to a trans person.[11] Generally speaking, referring to a baby as 'it' does not seek to or is not used to demean the baby by virtue of the baby's group membership in the same way that it does for a trans person. That is to say, it is not specifically generalizing all babies while it is specifically generalizing all trans people. The reference to babies in this example does lead to questions concerning mental capacities and the perception of offense that I will briefly address below, but suffice it to say that this example demonstrates some of the non-causal but determinative factors relevant in the interpretive response of offense to an utterance.

This interpretive offensiveness framework has the further benefit of being able to account for ambiguously offensive slurs. Expressivist, inferentialist, and externalist conceptions of slurs' offensiveness cannot account for ambiguous cases where more than one or none of the accounts offer feasible explanations. Prohibitionism is established on the basis of slurs not conveying offense within the paradigms of these accounts, but it does not have the resources to resolve further ambiguities that arise out of its explanatory framework. Specifically, it neglects the mechanism by which a violated prohibition is deemed offensive. While paradigm cases of slurs or slurring are relatively incontrovertible according to the prohibitionist story, the extent to which we can claim a social rule exists in any objective sense is less certain in cases of disagreement or novel articulation. Is the name of Washington DC's professional football team a slur or an innocuous part of a city's tradition? Dan Snyder, the owner of the team, does not explicitly reject that the name is a slur; rather, he argues that it does not offend most Native Americans and is part of a beloved tradition and thus should not be prohibited.[12] Conversely, Jackie Pata, executive director of the National Congress of American Indians, Ray Halbritter, nation representative and CEO of Oneida Nation Enterprises, and fifty Democratic Senators have asked that the name be changed because it is a recognized racial slur.[13] It is not clear how prohibitionism would explain

[11] Dan Savage argues that 'it' is "arguably the *worst* anti-trans slur." [his emphasis].
[12] Dan Snyder, "Letter from Washington Redskins Owner Dan Snyder to Fans." *Washington Post*. *The Washington Post*, n.d. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.
[13] Halbritter went so far as to claim that it is a "dictionary defined racial slur" chosen by the team's segregationist leader for that reason: "Senate Democrats

this name controversy as it exemplifies a case where there is not disagreement over whether or not the name is a slur but whether or not it should be prohibited, with one side arguing that it should be prohibited because it is a slur and the other arguing that it should not be prohibited because of contextual factors regarding its history as the team's name. This is a difficult case for prohibitionism because it involves what is undeniably a slur that causes offense to at least some members of the target group but is not prohibited. That is, the slur is not prohibited but still causes offense. The name is repeated during coverage of the team and on a wide variety of merchandise while simultaneously being a slur. However, my view, that offense is a function of the interpreted significance of a term, can explain both the offense and its rejection as the result of interpreting the term in context. One side interprets the slur as derogatory towards Native Americans and thus offensive. The other side interprets the slur as part of an important tradition to the team's fans and thus inoffensive. From both sides of this controversy, we can see that the context determines how the name is interpreted and the response that results from that interpretation.

Objections and Replies

Two potential problems that arise from my account are how to understand offense against people without the intellectual capacities to articulate an interpretive formulation and offense that does not have articulated formulations.[14]

Regarding the potential for unarticulated offensiveness, an articulated interpretive formulation can likely alter the nature of the experience correlated to the utterance of a slur. The coining of 'sexual harassment' as an example of hermeneutical injustice provides an instructive parallel to this concern.[15] In the sense that the creation of a specific term clarified the offensive nature of a certain class of acts, it is possible that the designation of a term as a slur clarifies its distinctive offensiveness. Accordingly, it is possible that a slur is not offensive per se until it has an interpretive formulation as a reference to the experience. For example, Fricker characterizes the experience of pre-terminological sexual harassment as one of being "unable to make sense of her ongoing mistreatment," which

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Urge NFL to Endorse Name Change for Redskins." *Washington Post*. *The Washington Post*, n.d. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.

[14] Thanks to Claire Griffin for raising the former concern and Elís Miller for raising the latter.

[15] Miranda Fricker, "Powerlessness and Social Interpretation." *Episteme* 3.1-2 (2006): 96-108. Web.

in turn "prevents her from protesting it, let alone securing effective measures to stop it."[16] Despite the injustice related to the experience, the inability to make sense of mistreatment or protest against it seems distinct from offense if only because offense seems to necessitate an object. In turn, requiring an object seems to imply that the object of offense has to be defined, at least insofar as to have a name.[17]

The latter question of the requisite intellectual capacities for offense calls for further study, as it requires answers to certain preliminaries. Certain communicative capacities, such as language recognition and the ability to recognize body language, seem necessary to correspond to offense as it is currently formulated but an exact answer to this concern is ultimately outside of the scope of this paper. However, it is worth mentioning that it seems to highlight an oversight within the literature.

Conclusion

Slurs are undoubtedly an unwieldy phenomenon, and determining a structure for understanding them and how they lead to offense does not result in a tidy explanation. Accordingly, in the attempt to represent the variety of cases where slurs are deemed offensive, we have to acknowledge that these are *reported* cases. As such, the only structure that can wholly account for a slur's offensiveness has to account for the individual's role in deeming them offensive. I have attempted to do just that by adopting and expanding the implications of the prohibitionist view. Slurs are not offensive simply because they are prohibited; they are offensive because of the formulated interpretations that go with calls for their prohibition. Prohibitionism requires relative agreement about what the social rules are and how we respond to them. I do not want to reject this possibility but merely aim to clarify that there is at least the perceived validity of the other views as a missing step in the prohibitionist story. In the same sense that prohibitionism allows that a group can prohibit a name according to the explanations for offensiveness that it rejects, it is possible that my view is part of the progression in the life of a slur towards the establishment of a prohibition.[18]

[16] Fricker, "Powerlessness and Social Interpretation," 97.
[17] The inability to experience offense seems a further injustice within the framework for hermeneutical injustice.
[18] Anderson and Lepore, "Slurring Words," 7.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE LEXICULTURAL PROPAGATION OF CONCEPTS

THOMAS DYLAN DANIEL
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract: The term 'lexicultural realm' refers to the mix of various threads present within a linguistic feat such as writing or speaking. A lexicultural realm is a kind of abstract, mental space within which these feats have extension and duration. Reading involves placing oneself into this kind of realm, and writing involves creating such a space. Recognition of the sense in which this process involves corporeality is key to understanding how language works to allow individuals to relate to each other and to the society within which they use language as well as to the very possibility of truth. When Einstein said he had seen further than other men because he was able to stand on the shoulders of giants, this is the phenomenon he was referring to.

The world is changing rapidly. With the internet, information is passed more readily than ever before from one place to another. Language, specifically binary code, makes this phenomenon possible. To philosophically approach language after such a remarkable linguistic innovation, which can simplify almost any message to 1s and 0s, it is necessary to creatively and concisely survey a number of different areas of overlap between language and its object. The concept of a lexicon is a valuable abstraction to this end. The word itself refers to the sum total of words in a language, a sort of master vocabulary. The lexicon, in any language, is shaped by the needs of the people who speak the language. Linguistic innovation defines the domain of the lexicon and is itself necessitated by a culture's interaction with its environment. Neither term alone is sufficient to describe the way by which each is shaped by the

other. This essay will explore a new term, 'lexiculture,' as a means of describing the interplay between lexicon and culture in an attempt to bundle them together so that these factors can be used in tandem to talk about language in terms that are not incomplete or ambiguous with respect to the question of their origin. The lexicultural propagation of concepts is the phenomenon to be found at the center of the various abstract and concrete meaning-related factors, which all collaborate to produce the groundwork for the particular linguistic feat that occurs. The justification for this view will be derived from cognitive neuroscience, anthropology, linguistics, and in addition, philosophy.

In the propaganda, which is typically circulated to convince young children to spend their time reading books, an intriguing theme is developed. The central idea is that the act of reading a story can take a person outside of the physical space he or she currently inhabits and, as if by magic, transport him or her to a different place. This can be a difficult thing to grasp for an inexperienced reader. However, fictive works can be seen to produce an abstract world, which is then experienced by the reader as the work is read. Works of philosophy, history, and nonfiction have the same type of impact according to neuroscience, even if the places they contain are closer to home in some sense. To an extreme degree, the potential contents of a work of literature owe to the development and dissemination of the lexicon of a language.[1] As this comprehensive inventory of terms morphs over time, some words are added and others fall out of usage – the phenomenon that occurs is in every sense a fluctuation in capacity. The fundamental capabilities of the language change over time. This is a result of the changing of culture as well as the ends to which the language is employed.

Akkadian was gradually replacing the written language originating in ancient Babylon as Sumerian in everyday use.[2] Writing did not start as a grassroots phenomenon and gradually take hold; rather, a group of wealthy and powerful religious leaders began developing a system of symbols to use to preserve their religion and their dominance via their language. After all, the very usefulness of a word lies in its referring to things by virtue of a unique situation, namely the cultural environment within which it finds itself. Instead of retaining its original *telos*, or end, exemplified in the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments carved into a stone block, written language has developed a plethora of new uses, including the

[1] Imagination is also necessary for this kind of textual engagement. However, the vocabulary of the communicator is the limiting factor here, and this is controlled by lexical development and dissemination.

[2] A very similar tale can be told about the development of Sanskrit in ancient India.

internet.[3] The five thousand year history of written language includes its inception as a vehicle by which authority expressed and propagated itself as well as its current role in politics and its widespread availability. The greater trend regarding writing is the gradual emergence of a communal role in lexicon control evident in shortcuts taken by average users of services such as text messaging. This is a departure from the initial role of writing as a means to curb or slow the inevitable change a language undergoes through usage.

The historically recent interaction between lexicon and culture in written language can also be formulated as a sudden increase in the number of people using language for advanced computation. The role of the lexicon lies in defining what can be said; however, it is also tied to the development of the culture within which it exists. Growth does not only take place on the level of academia, but it is rather frequently seen to occur in heavily populated lower class communities and then propagate throughout society using a vehicle such as pop music or television. The recent trend in linguistics and anthropology, for this reason, is a closer and closer relationship between the two. This marriage is occurring because of the ultimate impossibility of divorcing language and culture from one another.[4] Antonio Damasio's interpretation of modern neuroscientific discoveries[5] will be an indispensable tool for illuminating precisely what is taking place in a person's brain when language is used to communicate.

Damasio is interested in the philosophy Spinoza wrote hundreds of years ago because he sees myriad parallels between Spinoza's pantheism, his conception of the body, and the revelations made possible by neuroscientific perspectives available and scientifically verified today. To paraphrase Damasio's view, psychical realities of mind and perception are very much corporeal phenomena. Seeing this word printed upon the page

[3] In fact, all computation is language based. Written equations make possible the very act of writing this paper on a laptop as well as the evaluation process via which the ideas this paper contains will be critiqued and reviewed.

[4] As the authors of the piece referenced here acknowledge, greater integration between previously divorced anthropological fields is necessary to the continued and increasing success of anthropology in producing successful models of human behavior. The hint at insufficiency even of the combined model produced by synthesizing the cognitive and symbolic branches of anthropology argues compellingly for a need to incorporate linguistics. Waltraud Kokot, Hartmut Lang, Eike Hinz. "Current Trends in Cognitive Anthropology," *Anthropos* 77. (1982): 329-350.

[5] Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain.* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2003).

causes a physical change in the primary visual cortical region of the brain of the person who sees it. This brain consists of a number of different centers wherein consciousness is produced as an interrelation between maps of body states; hence the visio-spatial cortical representation of an object is in direct or indirect neural contact with the consciousness of the individual who perceives it. The phenomenon is very complex, but one way of summing it up is to say that continual self-perception and repeated interaction and interrelation between neurons in a human mind produce a self as a means to the hypothesized end of homeostasis preservation of the organism to whose self we refer.[6]

The self, formed from layer upon layer of conscious perception and emotional processes is the culprit responsible for the continual production of self. Following Damasio, the mind can no longer be treated as an abstraction, which is capable of existing independently of the physical processes or circumstances within which it occurs.[7] When we conceive of the perception by a reader of a written word, we must understand the reader's brain to have physically changed and to have mapped the new body state. It then uses a complex array of memory and feeling to contrast these maps and a reaction becomes visible, i.e., a response manifested in a new body state, which is then mapped and appropriated for use by the self. The repetition of this process throughout the course of a life ideally leads a person to make good decisions based upon empirical evidence and thereby persist in maintaining a state of health.

However, it is likely that more evidence must be presented from the standpoint of linguistics to provide a convincing account of my vision of Damasio's neuroscience in a linguistic setting. Aldous Huxley contributes the observation that the mind is a filter.[8] In *The Doors of Perception,* Huxley gives an account and analysis of an experience with the drug mescaline that broke up the routine of his consciousness and led him to conclude that the mind was a kind of pattern recognition machine. Given the minimal amount of bodily process, which requires conscious control and attention by the self, Huxley's conclusions about perception are likely to be relevant as we unpack that self in relation to others.

Benjamin Lee Whorf complements Huxley's view with his conception of language as a tool. He focuses on differences between Hopi and

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[6] Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York NY: G.P. Putnam, 1994).

[7] Ibid., *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain.* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2010).

[8] Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception: Heaven and Hell*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

English, specifically the way that subject *and* object are implicated in the usage of a single verb. This seems to fall from an implicit awareness of context allocated for by the Hopi language and not the English. Significantly, "the Hopi actually have a language better equipped to deal with […] vibratile phenomena than is our latest scientific terminology."[9] Language is constituted by a reality like that of a hammer: it has a function, a purpose, which is essential to its existence. A study of Hopi, in particular, conveys a linkage between a culture and its language in a way that more widespread languages like English are unable to reproduce. The need for generality in a language spoken worldwide is ultimately responsible for its tendency toward the universal, whereas Hopi is spoken by a relatively small community in a relatively isolated cultural area and is hence more capable of specialization. The benefits of one language over another are largely circumstantial, and it is certainly not my intention to make an argument for the superiority of one language or another in this paper. However, in a survey of multiple languages, the development of lexicon can be repeatedly tied to the environment within which the people who speak a given language live and these different characteristics find different uses.

This environmental view of language does not only arise in Whorf. The vision Chomsky suggested of a generative grammar via which the process of acquisition takes place might be better described with a different analogy.[10] Language acquisition by infants indirectly implies that the role of language is to create a communal[11] space within which vocabulary is developed. To take part in the community, language must be embraced. This is, in many ways, reminiscent of swimming lessons for children and babies. A child does not know how to swim before it learns; yet it cannot be told or instructed in how to remain afloat in the water. For this reason, a swimming teacher is physically present to support their bodies as the young swimmers initially experience the water. The teacher cannot express the content of the experience of the swimmer with language, for it would be unnecessary to have a physical presence in the pool with the young ones. The space occupied by community is the pool in this analogy – filled with meaning rather than water. Navigating this meaning involves

[9] Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality.* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1956),17.
[10] Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*. (The Hague: Mouton, 1957).
[11] This is to say language exists communally in the sense that language only exists within physical bodies such as the mind of the speaker or upon the page. It only has value insofar as it can be interpreted.

getting into the pool and learning to do it for oneself, according to Chomsky's theory of language acquisition.

To take the pool analogy a step further, it could be said that there are many different ways of navigating through the water. These varied techniques could be thought of as different styles of swimming. This is especially true between languages, given Whorf's understanding of different languages described above. However, it is also important to note that each person who uses a particular language does so in a fundamentally different way from each other – we all teach ourselves. Speaking the same language as another person involves the sharing of limits with regard to what that particular language is capable of expressing. Thus a lexical filter is communal, creating a link between two or more essentially unique perspectives. The point, which underlies this discussion, is that language is, by nature, something people use and not something that uses them. The language a given person speaks can impact the things he or she is able to talk about, just as the options of a carpenter who only possesses a saw are limited. However, much like technologically advanced saws have developed alongside fasteners such as screws and nails and adhesives, language is constantly being adapted to suit new needs as they arise. This is made known by Kenneth Burke: "the various tribal idioms are unquestionably *developed* by their use as instruments in the tribe's way of living." [12] Language is always a means to an end, always under construction, always modified to suit the needs of the people using it in the context within which they need it to help them navigate and produce meaning.

Lexical development among a group reflects the use that the group puts the lexicon to, but Burke added that this use is not always honest. In an echo of Nietzsche's criticisms of Christianity, Burke observes that "the Bible solves the problem by putting 'God' into the first sentence – and from this initial move, many implications 'necessarily' follow."[13] This particular observation is used by Burke to highlight a usage of language, which essentially consists of circular logic. His idea is that the Bible prevents a reader from questioning the existence of God by making it an axiom in the first sentence. This is the mechanism via which Whorf's descriptive analysis can function. A word has a given meaning, and its use has consequences. The basic structure is assembled upon a foundation, consisting here of 'God,' which then serves the purpose of a foundation

[12] Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 44.
[13] Ibid., 46.

upon which the rest of the rhetorical[14] construct can be built. Without 'God' in the Bible, there would be little to tie the work together. Hence, to study philosophy of language is to study the method of production of communal meaning as it is both shaped by its usage in communicative enterprises and as the decisions made in the ordering of this system continue to have consequences. There is a two-edged sword at work here.

To clarify this, one meaning of the word 'true' is the sense in which it can be used to describe the arrow, which hits the mark. True statements are thought to be honest ones, which also can be seen to hit the mark in that their goal is to avoid skewing the reconstructive interpretation by the party receiving the statement. The difficulty philosophy finds here is that skewing the reconstructive interpretation is the primary function of speaking in the first place; the only use a word has ever had is to represent information. Using a word in the first place is only done because of the speaker's desire to aid in the audience's task of extracting meaning from the statement – otherwise, there would be no reason to attempt to communicate linguistically.

Cognitive neuroscience, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, and other fields share the same language, and an increasingly complex lexicon is produced between them as their research is completed, interpreted, reviewed, and disseminated. The development of this lexicultural interaction is the end result of the explorations of scientific fields. After all, an unwritten cure for cancer would need to be rediscovered to revolutionize the medical field and save even one person from dying. Similarly, the key to beginning a new research project is a full grasp of the meaning communicated by others to treat relevant projects. The set of conceptual relations between the terms discussed can then be studied, explored, and reconfigured for further experimentation and development. The results of this process are then made accessible using the appropriate tools from the relevant lexical domain before being disseminated for dialectical evaluation in a peer review process, which generally results in modification, commendation, or irrelevance. These processes might be reimagined as the construction and interaction of minds in contact with one another in lexicultural, rather than merely physical, realms.

The entrance of one mind into another is not possible, of course, but the maps we linguistically produce put forth a set of instructions, which attempt to lead additional minds to comprehend particular relationships between concepts. Lexicultural propagation is the process by which a person is able to see the results produced by the studies of another without

[14] Intended meaning of a written work.

doing all of the work it took to get there. This propagation thus allows people to learn from books without having to take part in the same process of experimentation the author underwent. The scientific studies and authors used to demonstrate the current developments, which potentially lead modern minds to an understanding of this embodiment, have far-reaching consequences for the way in which language is studied and interacted with. Cognitive neuroscience has yielded a fundamentally different outlook, which impacts its direct subject, the mind, but also the things which the mind interacts with. The spaces between sciences, languages, people, and environments must, as a result of these developments, be described in ways that yield a higher resolution and enable us to more completely describe them. Lexiculture, then, refers to a medium through which, including language as well as culture, abstract concepts can be communicated from one mind to another.

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