Loaded Words and Expressive Words: Assessing Two Semantic Frameworks for Slurs

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In this paper, I assess the relative merits of two semantic frameworks for slurring terms. Each aims to distinguish slurs from their neutral counterparts via their semantics. On one, recently developed by Kent Bach, that which differentiates the slurring term from its neutral counterpart is encoded as a 'loaded' descriptive content. Whereas the neutral counterpart 'NC' references a group, the slur has as its content "NC, and therefore contemptible". On the other, a version of hybrid expressivism, the semantically encoded aspect of a slurring term that distinguishes it from its neutral counterpart is, rather, expressed. A speaker who uses the slurring term references the group referenced by the neutral counterpart and, in addition, expresses her contempt for the target. On this view, while the speaker's attitude may be evaluated for appropriateness, the expressivist component of slurring terms is truth-conditionally irrelevant. The reference to the group, and only the reference to the group, contributes to truth conditions. I'll argue that hybrid expressivism offers a more parsimonious analysis of slurs' projective behavior than loaded descriptivism and that its truth conditional semantics is not inferior to the possible accounts available for loaded descriptivism. I also meet Bach's important objection that hybrid expressivism cannot account for uses of slurring terms in indirect quotation and attitude attributions.

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In this paper, I assess the relative merits of two semantic frameworks for slurring terms. Each aims to distinguish slurs from their neutral counterparts via their semantics. On one, recently developed by Kent Bach (2017), that which differentiates the slurring term from its neutral counterpart is encoded as a 'loaded' descriptive content. Whereas the neutral counterpart 'NC' references a group, the slur has as its content "*NC, and therefore contemptible*". On the other, a version of hybrid expressivism, the semantically encoded aspect of a slurring term that distinguishes it from its neutral counterpart is, rather, *expressed*. A speaker who uses the slurring term references the group referenced by the neutral counterpart and, in addition, expresses her contempt for the target (the group and also possibly a particular individual in the group) on account of the target being an NC. On this view, while the speaker's attitude may be evaluated for appropriateness, the expressivist component of slurring terms is truth-conditionally irrelevant. The reference to the group, and only the reference to the group, contributes to truth conditions.

Bach offers his account as an improvement on reigning versions of semantic descriptivism, and as a competitor to hybrid expressivism, especially with respect to its ability to explain slurs' projective behavior. Hybrid expressivism offers a parsimonious analysis of slurs' projective behavior. Bach's account, I'll argue, is considerably less so.

One striking feature of Bach's account is that certain sentences containing slurs are neither true nor false and are so at least in part because of general purely linguistic features of sentences containing slurs. If cogent, the account has the resources to deliver the morally satisfying result that a sentence like "Jews are Kikes" is not true. Though Bach champions the result as a key advantage of his theory over hybrid expressivism, he does not spell out an overarching truth conditional semantics. I attempt to assess his view by constructing possible truth conditional semantic theories, and conclude that none delivers satisfying results without being *ad hoc*.

Finally, I attempt to meet three objections presented by Bach. One is that hybrid expressivism mistakenly gives priority to expressions of contempt over assertions of contemptability. Another is that it is unable to account for certain uses of slurring terms in indirect quotation and attitude attributions. The last is that it implausibly entails that all slurs and their neutral counterparts are co-extensive.

1. *Loaded Descriptivism: Projective Behavior*

Bach distinguishes two basic types of slurs, *group slurs* and *personal slurs*. For him, group slurs break down (roughly) into racial slurs ('chink', 'goy', 'kike', 'nigger', 'honkey'), political slurs ('commie', 'Nazi'), and religious slurs ('raghead', 'kike', 'heathen') while personal slurs encompass a wide range including those based on intelligence ('retard', 'moron'), character ('brown-noser', 'asshole'), sexuality ('queer', 'faggot',

'dyke', 'slut', 'lecher'), substance abuse ('boozer', 'acid freak'), and profession ('scab', 'pimp', 'whore').[1] His semantics applies across the board, to all these expressions.

Bach's novel theory differentiates slurs from their neutral counterparts in many ways that mirror that of Hom and May (2013). Like them, it differentiates semantically insofar as slurs and their neutral counterparts have distinct semantics, by which I mean that they are governed by different semantic conventions, different rules of use. It differentiates descriptively insofar as the distinguishing semantic feature of slurs is encoded as descriptive content. Yet Bach's motivations and handling of truth conditions mark important departures.

For Hom and May, 'kike' semantically encodes the descriptive content *ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation because of being Jewish*. Because it is a moral truth that no one ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation for being Jewish, on their view 'kike' has an empty extension. But not just 'kike'. "Pimp" and even "fucking Nazi"[2] have empty extensions. For them, slurs *as a class* have null extensions: having an empty extension is essential to what makes a slur a slur. In fact, one of their underlying motivations or initial uncontested data points is that all slurs necessarily have null extensions.

This, Bach rejects, and not just the point about necessity. On his view, whether a slurring term has an empty extension depends upon moral facts. It depends upon whether anyone is worthy of contempt on account of being an NC. For Bach, 'kike' includes both 'the property of being Jewish and the property of being contemptible in virtue of being Jewish' (Bach 2017: 6). So it is extensionless, while 'pimp' is not.

Bach advocates a distinctive way in which these two properties are encoded in slurs. In general, a slur has as its content "*NC, hence contemptible*". Thus, the meaning of a slur involves a categorizing component, equivalent with that of its neutral counterpart, conjoined with an additional evaluative component. The novelty in Bach's theory resides in how the semantic 'conjoining' operates. It appears to be explicitly designed to sidestep the problems created by Hom and May's handling of slurs' projective behavior.[3]

For Bach, 'kike' in

(1) Jake is a Kike

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[1] I selected these examples from Bach's full appendix of slurs, including his typology. As Bach notes, many of the expressions have multiple uses and belong in more than one category (witness 'kike'). Even with this qualification, I do not endorse Bach's classification. Many of the expressions he categorizes as slurs, I regard as falling into different categories of pejoratives. I am here just adopting his typology to illustrate aspects of Loaded Descriptivism.

[2] Hom and May's PEJ operator ensures that 'fucking Nazi' counts as a slur. It is somewhat unclear if it does for Bach.

[3] I will not go into those problems here. I give an abbreviated account of the problems in the appendix to Jeshion (2013a), "Embracing Corruption: A Response to Hom and May". Sennet and Copp (2015) offer a comprehensive survey.

functions in *some* ways akin to the way that 'bachelor' functions, expressing the conjunctive property of being an unmarried male. Just as being a bachelor requires being both a male and being unmarried, so too, for Bach, being a Kike requires being both Jewish and being contemptible in virtue of being Jewish. (Bach 2017: 6) The extension of 'bachelor' contains all and only those individuals who are both male and unmarried, and thus is *true of* just those individuals.[4] Symmetrically, the extension of 'kike' is determined by whether there are individuals who are Jewish and contemptible by virtue of being Jewish. Because there are no such individuals, 'kike' has an empty extension. There is no one it is *true of*.

There is, however, a key difference with 'bachelor'. In

(2) Jake is a bachelor

the two properties of being male and being unmarried that determine the term's extension and the range of what it is true of operate together to contribute a single content. Thus, (2) encodes *a single proposition*, one that is essentially semantically equivalent with that expressed by

(3) Jake is an unmarried male.

By contrast, according to Bach, (1) encodes two distinct propositions, those expressed by

(4) Jake is Jewish

and

(5) Jake is contemptible in virtue of being Jewish,

which are truth conditionally independent of one another. So while 'bachelor' models the two conditions on being a kike, what determines the extension of 'kike', and what it is true of, it fails to model the way that slurs contribute to propositional contents of sentence.

To expose how slurs do so, Bach appeals to sentences involving nonrestrictive relative clauses like

(6) Buffalo Bill, who was born in Buffalo, was a great showman.

(6) express two propositions, a primary *at-issue* content, expressed by

(7) Buffalo Bill was a great showman

and a secondary, supplementary content, expressed in the relative clause

(8) Buffalo Bill was born in Buffalo.

Importantly, (6) does not encode the single conjunctive proposition

(9) Buffalo Bill was a great showman and was born in Buffalo

that is true if and only if Buffalo Bill was a great showman and born in Buffalo. For Bach, this is the situation with slurs, only the two contents

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[4] With 'bachelor', I am of course oversimplifying: unavailable unmarried men, say priests, don't count as bachelors. Nothing hangs here on the precise descriptive content of 'bachelor'.

are 'not given separate linguistic expression' (Bach, 7). Instead, what's expressed by (4) is primary, while that of (5) is secondary, functioning, he says, as a 'side comment' that is 'loaded into the slur'. What differentiates a slurring term from its neutral counterpart is the encoded 'loaded' descriptive content, hence the apt name *Loaded Descriptivism*.

Bach's semantic analysis of slurs is truly novel insofar as it posits that the meaning of a single term contributes twice, and separately, to the truth conditional propositional content of sentences in which it occurs. What justifies positing such semantic structure? Bach advances two reasons for modeling the contribution of slurs on analogy with sentences involving non-restrictive relative clauses. One concerns accounting for the projective behavior of the offensive element in slurs. As is well-known, what is 'offensive' in slurs projects out from many linguistic environments, occurring within the scope of negations and modals, and in the antecedents of conditionals in declaratives, as in (10) and (11), modeled on examples from Bach. In most instances, this 'offensive' element is *speaker-oriented* (Potts 2005).

(10) Jake is not a Kike. He only looks like one.
(11) If Jake is a Kike, he's stingy.

According to Bach, non-restrictive relative clauses exhibit the same projective behavior. He offers the following examples,

(12) It is not true that Buffalo Bill, who was born in Buffalo, was a great showman.
(13) If Buffalo Bill, who was born in Buffalo, was a great showman, he was popular.

noting that in (12) and (13), we rightly assume that the speaker asserts the secondary content encoded in the relative clause. Presumably, Bach would flesh out the dual contents of (10) and (11) thus, where I am representing the secondary speaker-oriented side comment parenthetically.

(14) Jake is not a Jew (Jews being contemptible in virtue of being Jewish). He only looks like one.

(15) If Jake is a Jew (hence contemptible), he is stingy.

Sentences involving slurs in subject rather than predicate position would also receive the dual contents. So on loaded descriptivism

(16) Kikes don't celebrate Easter.

is semantically equivalent to

(17) Jews, who are contemptible on account of being Jewish, don't celebrate Easter.

According to loaded descriptivism, all declarative sentences with a slur in either subject or predicate position will encode both primary and secondary contents. I will say that such sentences possess a *dual proposition structure*.

An initial difficulty is that the projective behavior of slurs ranges more widely than these dual proposition structure examples reveal. What is offensive in slurs projects not only in complex declarative constructions but as well in interrogatives, imperatives, and vocatives:

(18) Why were you talking to those Kikes?
(19) Stay away from those Kikes.
(20) Kike!

To maintain a uniform analysis to handle the projective behavior, Bach's account requires introducing a secondary contribution of slurs in addition to that which they contribute to the encoded non-declarative. Keeping parity with (10) and (11), the slurs in (18)–(20) ought to contribute a speaker-asserted side comment of a declarative content along with the primary content in the interrogative, imperative, vocative:

(21) Why are you talking to those Jews (who are contemptible in virtue of being Jewish)?
(22) Stay away from those Jews (who are contemptible in virtue of being Jewish).
(23) Jew (hence contemptible)![5]

This awkward result highlights the *prima facie* implausibility of appealing to a distinct secondary content to explain the projective behavior of slurs. After all, the speakers in (18)–(20) do not seem to be encoding declarative contents *at all*.

Another problem is that a sentence like "Kikes are contemptible" ought to strike us as tautological or analytic truths. But this is far from clear. They do not elicit the "duh, you called them *Kikes*!" response in the way that "Kikes are Jews" does.

Bach's second reason for appealing to the semantics of non-restrictive relative clauses concerns parallels in their discourse denial structure. Suppose your interlocutor assertively utters (6) and you know that while Buffalo Bill was indeed a great showman, he was not born in Buffalo. Wishing to register a correction is knotty because a blanket assertion of "that's not true" would fail doubly: it would naturally be understood as a rejection of the primary content, which you endorse, and would not be understood as a rejection of the secondary content, which you deny. Though the sentence encodes two distinct propositions, given its syntactic structure, your 'that' is naturally construed as referencing just its primary content. Now suppose your interlocutor assertively utters (1), and you know that Jake is Jewish. Wishing to issue a denial of the smearing element, "that's not true" will again fail doubly: it will naturally be taken as a denial that Jake is not Jewish, not anything

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[5] Notice that the secondary content cannot be within the scope of the question. Such a move would misrepresent the bigot's utterance. One who asks (18) is not inquiring why you are talking to those Jews that are contemptible in virtue of being Jewish. Someone who asks "Is there a Chink in the kitchen?" is not making the bizarre yet seemingly innocent inquiry whether there is in the kitchen anyone who is Chinese and contemptible on account of being Chinese.

else possibly encoded in the slur. To Bach, the striking parallels offers strong justification for modeling the semantics of slurs on sentences containing non-restrictive relative clauses.

This rationale likewise raises questions. True, bare, blanket denials with a simple "no" or "that's not true" will not isolate the smearing element in the slur-utterance, just as they do not with the content of the relative clause. The reason, though, is because there exists an independent descriptive content in both sentences naturally regarded as the default object of such denials. It does not *support* accounting for the smearing element of the slur with a secondary descriptive content. In fact, pressing further on the comparison exposes important disanalogies.

For one, the content in non-restrictive relative clauses are amenable to denial with a more specific negation-containing denial, say, "No, he was not born in Buffalo" or "Well, no, he was not born in Buffalo", with 'well' functioning as an acknowledgement of the truth in the primary content (7). This is possible because the existence and distinctness of the two contents is represented syntactically and semantically. If Bach's comparison is apt, then, a denial like "Well, no, Jews are not contemptible on account of being Jewish" to (1), as well as to (10), (11), (14), (15), should immediately strike us as the right sort to issue to the smearing element in the slur. But this is far from apparent. Certainly the form of the denial suggests that the speaker has simply advanced an incorrect belief about Jews, not that they have *done something* derogating in using the slur. True, Bach could maintain that this isn't the only sort of push-back a recalcitrant hearer would want to issue. The speaker would additionally be open to censure for the performative, to what he *did* in using the slur. But if Loaded Descriptivism is correct, the "Jews are not contemptable" denial should nevertheless still strike us as obviously apt, and it isn't.[6]

Another disanalogy concerns the fact that, for sentences containing slurs, there is no special reason why reference to the group, the alleged primary content according to Loaded Descriptivism, is in fact *primary* in the sense of being that which is the subject of discourse, the possible subject of dispute. With sentences containing non-restrictive relative clauses, the syntactic form itself reveals its primary content *as* primary. Not so for slur-containing sentences, where there is no syntactic representation of the two distinct contents at all. The point and its significance emerge when we consider contexts in which the group membership is not at all at issue in the sense of being a possible subject

[6] In addressing objections regarding discourse denials, Bach makes a curious claim at odds with the loaded descriptivist semantics. He claims that someone who uses 'kike' in a sentence like (1) does not *assert* but only *presupposes* that Jews are contemptible on account of being Jewish. (Bach 2017: 14). If the semantics are given as Bach initially details them, with 'kike' contributing an additional descriptive 'side comment' modeled on the semantics of sentences with non-restrictive relative clauses, the speaker must be making an assertion. Presuppositional accounts of slurs have a wholly different semantic structure.

of dispute to the discussants, while the smearing element is. Imagine neo-Nazis showing up at a public Jewish parade, saying

(24) The Kikes are marching down Fifth Avenue.

Here, everyone knows—and knows that everyone knows—that those he is pointing to are Jews and that they are marching. Only the smearing element of the slur is salient. Thus, an utterance of "no" or "that's not true" ought to seem obviously *apropos* as a direct denial of the alleged asserted content that Jews are contemptible in virtue of being Jewish – for in this context, it has no competitor-contents. But it does not.

Similarly, "no" or "that's not true" should seem apt in reply to a question like (21) and an imperative like (22). If they contain a side-comment declarative content, as I argue above loaded descriptivism ought to countenance to preserve uniformity in handling the smearing element, such denials should seem on target. In fact, they should seem especially apt in the absence of competitor declarative contents. But they do not. They come off as strange.

2. *Loaded Descriptivism: Truth Conditional Semantics*

Where does this leave us with respect to the truth value of sentences containing slurs? Certainly positing dual proposition structure to slur-containing declarative sentences will complicate their overall truth-conditional semantics. Bach regards the ensuing complications as one of the theory's strengths. Indeed, he champions his loaded descriptivist semantics as providing a novel and attractive illustration why we 'shouldn't have to decide' on the truth of sentences like (1). Speaking of that sentence, Bach writes:

> Is this true or false? Is it or is it not the case that Jacob is a Kike? On the one hand, you might say, "yes, he is a Kike", since the word 'kike', notwithstanding its derogatory force, does manage to distinguish Jews from non-Jews. On the other hand, you might say, "No, though Jewish, he is not a Kike" (perhaps because you agree with me that being a Kike requires being contemptible for being Jewish). In the recent debate about slurs, some lean one way, some the other. In my view, one shouldn't have to decide – having to say 'yes' or 'no' to a statement made with a sentence like (1) is a forced choice that one should resist making.

> …according to Loaded Descriptivism, the problem with assessing (1) for truth or falsity, and why we resist doing this, is its misleadingly simple predicative form. Just recall our non-semantic question...: what's the difference, if any, between being a Jew and being a Kike? From the perspective of Loaded Descriptivism, this is a misguided question. On the one hand, one just has to be a Jew; on the other, being a Kike requires that being Jewish inherently involves being contemptible. Since there are actually two separate propositions to be considered, it is a mistake to suppose that a sentence like (1) has a single truth-value. Like a sentence containing a nonrestrictive relative clause but in a compressed way, it expresses two independent propositions, not one conjunctive proposition. (Bach 2017: 7–8)

Bach's thought appears to be that the reason why a sentence like (1) lacks truth value is that it possesses a dual proposition structure. Bach concludes that this 'undercuts' debates extending from Hom and May's (2013) on the truth values of sentences containing slurs, and even on whether slurs like 'kike' have a null or non-null extension (Bach 2017: 7–8).

Things are trickier than they might appear, however. Bach frames his 'forced-choice' point specifically about sentences like (1), yet advances loaded descriptivism's semantics to apply *generally*, to all slur-containing sentences. What remains unclear, then, is how this impacts loaded descriptivism's truth-conditional semantics. To evaluate the cogency of the theory and plausibility of construing (1) as lacking truth-value, we need answers to the following: What is the underlying rationale for the 'forced-choice' claim about (1)? Do all slur-containing sentences fail to have a single truth value, or only those sharing additional structure to (1)? What are the truth conditions for all slur-containing sentences? [7]

Bach does not directly address these questions. He says enough, however, to steer us toward constructing the most plausible answers. My goals here are partly clarificatory, partly interpretive, and partly critical. I'll first detail the space of options for loaded descriptivism's truth-conditional semantics. I'll then assess them both interpretively, according to their capacity to account for Bach's professed commitments, and philosophically.

As I see it, based on his remarks above, Bach has the following options for the truth conditional semantics of loaded descriptivism:

Conjunction Theory: A slur-containing sentence with dual proposition structure is true if and only if its primary and secondary contents are true. Otherwise it is false.

Total Truth-Value Gap Theory: All slur-containing sentences with dual proposition structure are neither true nor false.

Symmetric Truth-Value Gap Theory: Slurs-containing sentences with dual proposition structure lack truth value if and only the primary and secondary contents come apart. Where they are the same, the truth value of the sentence is conjunctive.

Primary Dominant Truth-Value Gap Theory: Slur-containing sentences with dual proposition structure lack truth value if and only if the primary content is true and the secondary content is false. Otherwise the truth value of the sentence is conjunctive.

Let's illustrate the truth-conditional semantics of each option for four sentences having the same syntactic form as (1), with the slurs all oc-

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[7] Ideally, we also would want an account of how loaded descriptivism's truth-conditional semantics impacts non-declaratives like interrogative and imperatives, where uniformity requires (I argued), in addition to the question and instruction, a secondary assertive content. Do they too have a truth value for their assertive content?

cupying the same predicate position. Assume that no one is worthy of
contempt on account of religious affiliation or ethnicity, but that ex-
ploitatively selling the sexual services of women and children makes
one worthy of contempt. Assume also that Jake is Jewish, Blake is not,
Jayden exploitatively sells the sexual services of women and children,
while Brayden does not. Then the truth-values of the individual pri-
mary and secondary contents of each sentence is as given below.

(1) Jake is a Kike. Primary: T; Secondary: F
(25) Blake is a Kike.   Primary: F; Secondary: F
(26) Jayden is a pimp.   Primary: T; Secondary: T
(27) Brayden is a pimp.   Primary: F; Secondary: T

We can summarize how our candidate theories deliver the truth condi-
tions for each sentence thus:

Conjunction Theory: (26) is true. (1), (25), (27) are false.

Total Truth-Value Gap Theory: (1), (25), (26), (27) are truth-valueless.

Symmetric Truth-Value Gap Theory: (26) is true, (25) is false. (1),
(27) are truth-valueless.

Primary Dominant Truth-Value Gap Theory: (26) is true. (25), (27)
are false. (1) is truth-valueless.

Now, which theory best squares with Bach's claims about loaded de-
scriptivism? Clearly, Bach's invocation of the 'forced-choice' rationale
on (1) marks a definite dismissal of the Conjunction Theory. He will
reject any theory on which (1) possesses a determinate truth value.

Does this mean he's committed to the Total Truth-Value Gap The-
ory? There are good reasons to think so. His reference to 'misleadingly
simple predictive form' in the quote above suggests that his rationale
for saying (1) lacks truth value is simply its dual proposition structure
alone. The theory has the virtue of being non-*ad-hoc*, an attractively
general account of why (1) lacks truth-value. The interpretive prob-
lem is that Bach never explicitly signs onto a Total Truth-Value Gap
theory. Moreover, he makes striking claims suggesting he rejects it. He
states outright that loaded descriptivism

> does not entail that slurs are true of their targets or that they are not. In
> fact, it correctly allows that some slurs can be, and indeed are, true of their
> targets. For example, an asshole, in virtue of what makes him qualify as
> such, really is contemptible. Calling him an asshole may be rude or crude,
> but you don't misrepresent him by calling him that…What makes an ass-
> hole an asshole makes him contemptible. Nothing makes a Jew a kike, re-
> gardless of what anti-Semites may think. Whereas group slurs generally
> misrepresent their targets, many personal slurs often represent their tar-
> gets accurately, however rudely. (Bach 2017: 13–14)

Bach is here underscoring that loaded descriptivism, unlike Hom and
May's descriptivist semantics, leaves open whether slurs, *as slurs*, inher-
ently misrepresent their targets or have an empty or nonempty extension.

Bach assures us that the world is populated with assholes. Now, if
you say to an asshole

(28) You are an asshole

have you spoken truly? Is (28) true? This he does not explicitly pronounce on. Yet, we're told, 'asshole' has a non-empty extension and is sometimes true of its targets. And you have engaged in no misrepresentation in calling an asshole an asshole. It seems highly implausible, then, that for Bach (28) should count as truth-valueless.

To Bach, 'asshole' possesses exactly the same semantic structure as 'kike', a point I'd dispute. But let us bypass this and substitute a term that, we agree, is a slur, and has a non-empty extension – 'pimp'. If (28) is true on loaded descriptivism, then, given the assumptions sketched above, (26) is too. If we can speak truly in calling an asshole an asshole, we can speak truly in calling a pimp a pimp. When primary and secondary contents are both true, the whole is true and thus the Total Truth Value Gap Theory is ruled out as codifying the truth conditions of Bach's loaded descriptivism. This demonstrates that the dual proposition structure of slurs cannot be Bach's sole reason for denying slur-containing sentences such as (1) a truth value.

I've been arguing along an interpretative dimension: that Bach himself appears unlikely to accept total truth value gaps given that he allowed that certain slurs like 'asshole' and 'pimp' have non-empty extensions, are *true of* certain individuals, and that sentences containing them involve no misrepresentations of such individuals. Now I wish to ask, *should* Bach embrace the Total Truth Value-Gap Theory? Is it a viable truth conditional semantics for loaded descriptivism?

The chief problem stems from allowing that slurs have extensions and can be true of individuals yet every sentence containing a slur lacks truth value. A slur can be true of a person P yet we're unable to express that, truly, by *using*, as opposed to *mentioning*, it. While 'pimp', we suppose, is true of P, one cannot express that, truly, by saying "P is a pimp". A lawyer can speak truly, albeit pedantically, by saying "I have evidence to convict this person who 'pimp' is true of", but not by saying "I have evidence to convict the pimp". This, I submit, is not a happy consequence.

Let's turn then to the Symmetric Truth Value Gap Theory. It can be seen as resting on a slightly different rationale for denying (1) truth value: not dual proposition structure alone but such structure together with a conflict in primary and secondary content truth values. This too would be a non-*ad hoc* rationale, rooted exclusively in features of the (posited) semantic structure of slurs. It also has the virtue of accounting for Bach's appeal to a 'forced false choice' between a true and false sub-content. To evaluate the Symmetric Truth Value Gap Theory's candidacy, consider not just (1) but also sentences like (27) with primary content false, secondary true. Surely Bach should judge them false. If you can speak truly in calling an asshole an asshole you can speak falsely in calling a saint an asshole. And so long as (26) counts as true, (27) should certainly count as false, not as truth-valueless. 'Pimp' has

an extension and the speaker of (27) is just mistaken about Brayden's occupation. Is there any reason to say that we are confronting a misbegotten forced false choice? There is none. What was said was *false* solely in virtue of the fact that Brayden is not in that business. If this is correct, the Symmetric Truth-Value Gap Theory is ruled out, (1)'s truth value gap cannot be solely grounded on a conflict between primary and secondary contents' truth values.

This leaves us with the Primary Dominant Truth-Value Gap Theory which offers a conjunctive account of truth conditions for all sentences except those like (1) with primary content true, secondary false, which are truth-valueless. The philosophical problem with this theory is that it appears thoroughly *ad hoc*. The theory isolates sentences like (1) as special, with no underlying rationale for why they, and only they, lack truth value. It is also a poor interpretive analysis, failing to cohere with Bach's claim that the 'forced choice' in (1) is rooted in general features of its dual proposition structure.

Whether loaded descriptivism offers an improved descriptivist analysis of slurs turns in part on the extent to which it delivers a plausible and clearly motivated truth conditional semantics. We've considered four accounts. The Conjunction Theory, Total Truth Value Gap Theory, and Symmetrical Truth Value Gap Theory we've ruled out on interpretive grounds. The Conjunction Theory is plainly incompatible with Bach's claim that (1) lacks truth value. The Total Truth Value Gap Theory and the Symmetrical Truth Value Gap Theory appears at odds with Bach's commitment to certain slurs having extensions, being true of certain individuals. The Total Truth Value Gap Theory is also implausible on philosophical grounds for artificially barring slurs from encoding truths (or falsehoods) while allowing that some slurs are *true of* individuals. The Primary Dominant Truth Value Gap Theory is *ad hoc*. None looks wholly unproblematic.

Finally, let's have a look at how the non-conjunctive theories evaluate sentences like:

(29) Jews are Kikes   Primary: True, Secondary: False
(30) Jews are not Kikes.   Primary: False, Secondary: False
(31) Exploiters of women and
      children's sex are pimps. Primary: True, Secondary: True
(32) Exploiters of women and
      children's sex are not pimps. Primary: False, Secondary: True

Mirroring the patterning above, the Total Truth Value Gap Theory takes all to be truthvalueless. Consequently, (29) is classified alongside (30) and (31) in lacking truth value, which is hardly a morally satisfying result, at least not one that the theory could advertise as an explanatory virtue. The Symmetrical Truth Value Gap Theory groups (29) along with (32) as truthvalueless, which seems random. The Primary Dominant Truth Value Gap Theory offers a more satisfying result, with (29) truthvalueless, (31) true, (30) and (32) both false, yet, as noted earlier, stands

in need of a linguistic justification. On any of these theories, it is difficult to see how Loaded Descriptivism marks a clear improvement on the truth conditional semantics of competitor semantic descriptivist views.

3. *Hybrid Expressivism: Projective Behavior*

Hybrid expressivism differentiates between slurs and their neutral counterparts by incorporating an independent non-truth conditionally relevant semantic component, the expression of contempt toward the target group. On my favored view,[8] slurs function semantically in the same way that their neutral counterparts function when given contemptuous intonation and when fronted by expletives or certain negative adjectives. (1) receives roughly the same semantic analysis as utterances of (33) and (34).[9]

(33) Jake is a dirty Jew.
(34) Jake is a Jew^C.

'Kike' has a group-referencing component, picking out the same group as its neutral counterpart, 'Jew'. It is this component, and only this component, that contributes to determining the truth conditions of sentences it occurs within. (1), (33), and (34) are all truth conditionally equivalent to "Jake is a Jew".

Unsurprisingly, then, 'kike' has the same extension as 'Jew'. Some regard this as a fatal flaw of the theory. But if one recognizes that pejoration, especially the distinctive type of pejoration manifested in slurs, is also pulled off by intonationally marking the neutral counterpart with expressions of contempt or attaching contempt-flagging adjectives like 'dirty' to neutral counterparts, the impetus to immediately discredit hybrid expressivism drops away. For it is far from clear that by marking 'Jew' with contempt, one has shifted its referent.

'Kike' differs from 'Jew' insofar as it semantically encodes speaker-contempt. The semantics posits an expressive component in the form of a rule that 'kike' be used to express one's contempt toward Jews on account of being Jewish. Slurs are thereby classified (in part) alongside other expressives like 'yahoo', whose semantics is also given by a rule (very roughly) to use it to express pleasure in a significant event. Thus, the expression of contempt should not be assimilated to any kind of descriptive meaning, assertion, or presupposition that Jews are contemptable on account being Jewish.

[8] I have fleshed out the semantics and pragmatics of my own version of hybrid expressivism in Jeshion (2013b), (2016), (2017), (ms). Though the account differs in some respects from those developed by others, here I introduce only those features common to all. Other expressivists include Kaplan (2005), Saka (2007), Copp (2001), Potts (2005), (2007), Gutzman (2013). Richard (2008) offers a broadly expressivist analysis yet denies that slurs are truth conditionally equivalent to their neutral counterparts.

[9] There are some differences in the pragmatic analysis of how they cause offense. But I do not take these up here.

One immediate attractive consequence of hybrid expressivism is that it makes sense of the non-tautologousness of "Kikes are contemptible". This follows from the fact that contempt is encoded as an attitude, not descriptively. True, the speaker both expresses and predicates contempt to Jews. But that doesn't make its assertive content tautological. Compare: "Ouch, that hurts!" is not tautological though "Painful things hurt" is.[10]

Because it fully detaches the group-referencing component from the expressive component, hybrid expressivism offers an attractive account of the projective behavior of slurs. Both (10) and (11)

(10) Jake is not a Kike. He only looks like one.
(11) If Jake is a Kike, he's stingy.

encode exactly the same expression of contempt which projects out of the negation and modal. Loaded descriptivism, we saw, introduces its secondary content "Jews being contemptible on account of being Jewish" to handle the projection in these declaratives. It ran into problems, however, once we widened the scope of the projection behavior, so that uniform treatment implausibly required that an assertion be coupled together with questions, commands, calls. Hybrid expressivism offers a far more parsimonious treatment, smoothly accounting for (18)–(20)

(18) Why were you talking to those Kikes?
(19) Stay away from those Kikes.
(20) Kike!

by appeal to the expression of contempt, requiring no additional asserted content at all.

4. *Hybrid Expressivism: Indirect Quotation, Attitude Attributions, and Truth*

Bach advances three main problems for Hybrid Expressivism. The first concerns expressivism's account of the "import of slurs". He claims it gets the order of explanation backwards:

> Using a slur expresses contempt….not as a matter of meaning but because it imputes contemptibility to members of the target group. Yes, there is a big difference between calling someone a Jew and calling them a kike, but the difference consists in what is imputed (contemptability) and only derivatively in what (contempt) is thereby expressed. (Bach 2017: 10)

The thought is that expressions of contempt from the act of using a slurs are derivative, accounted for by reference to the encoded semantic content of being contemptible.

I find this intuitive judgment of explanatory priority perplexing. Proponents of loaded descriptivism and hybrid expressivism will large-

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[10] Expressively encoded content may be reinforced without redundancy "That fucking fucker is such a fuck" expresses a heightening of the speaker's emotional state. Cf. Potts (2007).

ly agree that, typically, in using slurs speakers convey contempt *and* impute contemptability. But I see no way to establish, pre-theoretically, that contemptability is more primitive than the expression of contempt, or the reverse.

Embedded in this claim about which is more primitive may be a concern that hybrid expressivism cannot explain how speakers convey contemptability via the expression of their own contempt. The idea is that the expression of a mere subjective emotion could not elicit or impute the objective assessment of contemptability. Yet this misconstrues the nature of contempt. Contempt is an affective attitude, an emotive stance, that ranks its objects as lesser persons *qua* persons, relative to *interpersonally* shared moral norms. Because these norms are inescapably binding, by expressing one's own contempt with a slur, one effectively represents the person or group as contemptable.[11]

The second problem Bach isolates concerns slurs' behavior in attitude attributions. He claims that expressivist theories are unable to account for how incorporating slurs into attitude attributions can add to their accuracy. I illuminate the alleged trouble by first examining instances of indirect quotation and later confront attitude attributions. Suppose that Jen said

(1) Jake is a Kike

and I report on what she said with this instance of indirect quotation

(35) Jen said that Jake is a Kike.

With (35), the slur enables me to convey Jen's anti-Semitic attitudes about Jews and does not entail any such attitudes of my own. There's nothing infelicitous with my following up the report with "I was so disgusted". According to Bach, because expressivism "predicts that expressiveness always scopes out of embedded contexts", it "is not equipped to account for all that is being reported." (Bach 2017: 11) Expressivism appears to get things doubly wrong: because the semantics requires the encoding of the speaker's own contempt, (35) communicates an anti-Semitic attitude to me; and because it does not encode descriptive content of being contemptible, the report fails to attribute to Jen the anti-Semitic attitude she communicated with (1). Loaded Descriptivism looks far better on this score, for my report semantically encodes only something about Jen, that she said that Jake is a Jew, hence contemptible.

The argument proves too much. For if this is a good argument against a hybrid expressivist theory of slurs, it is a good argument against an expressivist semantics for any term at all, including those like 'bloody', 'freak'n', 'fucking', and 'goddamned' that are widely re-

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[11] See Mason (2003) for a rich analysis of the structure of contempt, including how it is governed by interpersonal moral norms. Cf., also Bell (2013). I offer a fuller explanation of why expressions of contempt convey contemptability in Jeshion (2017).

garded as *requiring* expressivist treatment for their uses as intensifiers.[12] Suppose that Jen said

(36) The cats are terrified of that goddamned dog.

Then, by exactly the same argument, when I accurately report what Jen said with this instance of indirect quotation,

(37) Jen said that the cats are terrified of that goddamned dog

I am only able to express my own attitudes toward the dogs, nothing about Jen's. But this is implausible. Following up (37) with "But I really love that dog, I don't know why she hates it so" is not infelicitous.

Whatever complexities arise from specifying the semantics of bare expressives in indirect quotation shouldn't make us question an expressivist semantics when these terms occur in unembedded sentences.

I don't have the space here to offer a full account of the semantic contribution of slurring terms in indirect quotation and attitude attributions, but I will say enough to turn back this objection. When expressives occur in the embedded clause of indirect quotation, as in (35) and (37), the sentence alone typically admits both a *speaker-oriented* and an *attributee-oriented interpretation*. In the former, with the slur or the bare expressive, the speaker expresses her own attitudes, in the latter the speaker captures the attitudes of the one whose words she is reporting. In taking up Bach's challenge, we have been considering interpretations in which the attitudes expressed with 'kike' in (35) and 'goddamned' in (37) are exclusively attributee-oriented. But the sentences readily admit speaker-oriented interpretations as well. (35) could be felicitously followed up with "But of course that PC-queen Jen used 'Jew'", (37) with "I have no idea why she continues to love that fucking dog."

For speaker-oriented interpretations, the expressive component of slurs' meaning is governed by the standard rule to use it to express one's contempt. Yet within the indirect report, the group-referencing and expressive components diverge in which point of view they capture. The group-referencing component of 'kike' encodes what the attributee said, that Jake is a Jew, and the expressive component enables the speaker to express her own contempt toward Jews. The bare expressive in (37) functions similarly. For attributee-oriented interpretations, the group-referencing and expressive components of the slur align, capturing both what the attributee said and how she said it. Yet precisely because expressives standardly encode the attitudes of the speaker, indirect reports involving them require that the occurrence of the term be treated quotatively, as an instance of mixed quotation, where a *part* of the indirect report is construed quotatively. In (35), the whole slur or even just its expressive component can be understood as within quotes.

[12] See Potts (2005), (2007), Gutzman (2013).

This correctly functions to insulate the speaker from her report being taken as an expression of her own attitudes.[13]

Bach acknowledges the possibility of appealing to mixed quotation to explain the occurrences of slurs within indirect quotation. He locates the main problem as one involving attitude reports, illustrating the phenomena with a locution involving 'thought' as the verb in the attitude ascription and an 'according to…' operator:

(38) Dick thought that Henry was a Kraut and Zbig was a Pollack
(39) According to Dick, Henry was a Kraut and Zbig was a Pollack.

Here, in contrast with our examples of indirect quotation, the sentences themselves much more strongly suggest an attributee-oriented interpretation as the default. (39) in particular seems even to resist a speaker-oriented interpretation. The slurs encode how Dick thinks of Henry and Zbig, not how the speaker does. Hybrid expressivism, Bach tells us, is not equipped to account for what is being reported.

But it can. To see why, notice first that the primacy of the attributee-oriented interpretation is not a general feature of propositional attitude ascriptions. Indeed, it is noteworthy that Bach did *not* attempt to illustrate the problem with belief ascriptions like

(40) Dick believes that Henry is a Kraut and Zbig is a Pollack

which readily admits a speaker-oriented interpretation, attributing to Dick only beliefs that Henry is Jewish, Zbig Polish. Sentences containing other propositional attitude verbs – 'knows', for instance—also naturally admit speaker-oriented interpretations. The fact that propositional attitude ascriptions do not generally default to attributee-oriented interpretations is a tip-off that there is something special going on in (38) and (39).

What distinguishes (38) and especially (39) is that they bring us inside the internal mindset—the point of view—of Dick. They do so in a way reminiscent of the devices of free indirect discourse, and I will propose treating (38) and (39) in a way that is parasitic on how slurs in free indirect discourse operate.

Free indirect discourse is a third-person narrative form in which aspects of the perspective, voice, of a character are presented within the narration itself. Though it functions to capture the inner life of the character in the way that ordinary indirect speech does, it does not rely on phrases like 'he thought' and 'she wondered' to do so. Just as indirect quotation can be construed as a linguistic device to encode

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[13] There is nothing *ad hoc* in this account. Mixed quotation is pervasive, a phenomenon we need to explain other varieties of indirect reports. Note also that the fact that indirect reports involving slurs manifest pervasive, systematic ambiguity between speaker- and attributee-oriented contexts is predicted by expressivism. Indirect quotations typically aim to preserve the truth-conditionally relevant content of what is being reported. Uses of slurs and bare expressives within them enable speakers to both insert their own attitudes or, via implicit quotation, more accurately convey those of their attributees.

what someone said without resorting to explicit quotation, free indirect discourse can be seen as a narrative device to encode what a character thinks and feels without resorting to explicit or implicit 'quotation' of a thought content. Consider the following straightforward discourse:

> Dick was on a mission that demanded extreme caution. He strode into the bar and scanned the crowd warily. Immediately, he spotted his next contact, Henry, in uniform and hunched over a beer. He is a Kraut!, Dick thought. Zbig ambled in moments later, brawny and moustached. Dick watched. Zbig's thick Eastern European accent unnerved the waitress when he barked orders for a vodka. And he, Dick thought, is a Pollack.

and its transposition into free indirect discourse:

> Dick was on a mission that demanded extreme caution. He strode into the bar and scanned the crowd warily. Immediately, he spotted his next contact, Henry, in uniform and hunched over a beer. He was a Kraut! A goddamn Kraut! Zbig ambled in moments later, brawny and moustached. Dick watched. Zbig's thick Eastern European accent unnerved the waitress when he barked orders for a vodka. And he, a Pollack!

Free indirect discourse jettisons the explicit attributions "Dick thought" in the ordinary discourse and shifts the tense of the contained clause ('*is* a Kraut') to that of the narration ('*was* a Kraut!'). Though this leaves open the possibility that the relevant passages could be construed as part of the *narrator's* perspective, the discourse primes the reader to presume Dick's point of view so that we naturally interpret them as if we've been slipped inside Dick's mind.

Free indirect discourse has important advantages over indirect quotation. Most pertinent here: it enables the author to use interjections, vocatives, swearwords, and exclamations—any expressions that cannot be used in subordinate clauses—to flesh out the inner world of the character. Our free indirect discourse narrative could continue:

> Zbig turned and caught his eye. Dick froze. Uh…Oh god. No. Fuck! Fucking fuck!

There is no clear way to otherwise capture so specifically our character's mental state and feelings here, as well as that represented by "A goddamn Kraut!", within an ordinary discourse limited to indirect quotation of contents that are grammatical as subordinate clauses.

Return to (39): "According to Dick, Henry was a Kraut and Zbig was a Pollack". I think it is no coincidence that the sentence that most forcefully demands we interpret it with an attribute-oriented perspective effectively includes part narration 'According to Dick' and a content that is in the same tense as the narration, "Henry *was* a Kraut", not "Henry *is* a Kraut". By evoking the structure of free indirect discourse, it encourages us to treat the 'according to' operator as a device that takes us inside Dick's stance in just the way we shift from narrator's to character's stance in free indirect discourse. The narrator of our toy story is not encoding her own attitudes of contempt, only Dick's.

Exactly how do the slurs and the bare expressives in free indirect discourse convey the character's specific mental state? I won't broach this fascinating (and intimidating) topic here. But what's clear is that free indirect discourse forces us to interpret as if we've been slid inside the character's mind. Any analysis of Dick's mental state regarding what he infers about Henry has to construe it as a thought-feeling complex. One that treats Dick's thought about Henry as "He is German, and worthy of contempt on account of being German!" seems wooden at best.

The last problem Bach advances is that hybrid expressivism entails that anyone who is a Jew is a Kike. It does indeed, but this isn't necessarily a failing of the theory. One can be swept into thinking this consequence is disastrous if one's not careful about how one frames the questions. It might appear innocuous to kick off discussion of our semantic questions by asking what Bach describes as the non-semantic question, "what's the difference between being a Jew and being a Kike?" In my view, this prejudicially misframes the linguistic issues at stake. It is in *many* ways analogous to what has gone wrong when, in investigating the semantic differences between

(41) Is he a homosexual?
(42) Is he a goddam homosexual?

(1) Jake is a Jew.
(33) Jake is a dirty Jew.

we kick off discussion by asking the (so-called) non-semantic question "what is the difference between being a homosexual and being a goddamned homosexual, a Jew and dirty Jew?" This isn't the right kind of question to ask.

True, hybrid expressivism entails that Jews are Kikes.[14] Certainly, we may—should—be uncomfortable with *saying so*, for making such a claim *feels* like an expression of anti-Semitism. Why else would someone say *that*? Yet we're engaged here in a specifically philosophical context, accounting for the linguistic properties of slurs. In this highly circumscribed context, it is worth reminding ourselves that though hybrid expressivism entails that all Jews are Kikes, that amounts to no more than that 'Jew' and 'Kike' have the same extension. Furthermore, comparatively, it hard to find much comfort in loaded descriptivism's determination that "Jews are Kikes" lacks truth value.

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[14] I offer a full analysis of why a semantics of slurs has this consequence in Jeshion (ms).

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