

Chapter 9

The Semantics and Pragmatics of Three Potential Slurring Terms



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Abstract In this chapter, I propose a lexical semantics with interlaced pragmatic elements for three potential slurring terms: *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger*. These controversial lexical items are worthy of attention because each can be used without the utterance being either intended or interpreted as a slur or even felt to be a slur. To specify the differing potentials of such terms, I postulate a cocktail of interlaced semantic and pragmatic components. I first hinted that pragmatic components be included in lexicon entries in Allan (Linguistic meaning. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1986/2014: 170–174) and subsequently confirmed the idea and developed it substantially in Allan (The lexicon-encyclopedia interface. Elsevier, Amsterdam, pp. 169–218, 2000; Natural language semantics. Blackwell, Oxford, 2001; Salience and defaults in utterance processing. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2011; Cambridge handbook of pragmatics. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 227–250, 2012). Something similar, at least in spirit, is proposed in Copestake and Briscoe (Lexical semantics and knowledge representation. Springer, Berlin, pp. 107–119, 1992), Copestake and Lascarides (Proceedings of the 35th annual meeting of the association for computational linguistics (ACL97). Association for Computational Linguistics, Stroudsburg, PA, pp. 136–143, 1997) and more recently in Carston (Thoughts and utterances: the pragmatics of explicit communication. Blackwell, Oxford, 2002: Chap. 5) and Wilson and Carston (Pragmatics. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, pp. 230–259, 2007). What I am proposing in this new chapter is that the triggers for the potentially diverse interpretations of the terms *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger* are specified in the lexicon for the various identifiable classes of contexts in which such words are used.

Keywords Camaraderie · Context · Contronym · Dysphemism · Orthophemism

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9.1 Introduction

Cliff Goddard is a leading proponent of Anna Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguage, which applies to lexical semantics across languages, taking account of (ethno)pragmatics, and relevant cultural issues. Cliff is also a scholar of several languages other than English. I do not know whether he has studied any of the words discussed in this chapter (a couple of his students have), but he has touched on the topic in Goddard (2015). I dedicate this chapter to Cliff and wonder if he can convert my analyses into NSM—a task which I am incompetent to achieve.

The words *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger* are, when applied to humans, typically deprecated because they are used as insults. But like many such slurs they are sometimes adopted by people who are potentially targeted in the insult and subverted to become markers of in-group solidarity. Consequently, their representation in a lexicon must be able to predict the probable intended sense according to the context of use. In the present short chapter, I show how this can be done for just these three terms with a proviso that there must be similar mechanisms at play for the rest of the vocabulary in a language.

A first question to ask is why the salient connotation¹ of such terms is dysphemistic (offensive), such that they are typically deprecated. In 1935, Allen Read wrote:

The ordinary reaction to a display of filth and vulgarity should be a neutral one or else disgust; but the reaction to certain words connected with excrement and sex is neither of these, but a titillating thrill of scandalized perturbation. (Read 1977 [1935]: 9)

Osgood et al. (1957) discovered a general tendency for any derogatory or unfavourable denotation or connotation within a language expression to dominate the interpretation of its immediate context. In the same vein, MacWhinney et al. (1982: 315) found that

sentences with profane and sexually suggestive language elicited responses quite different from those [without....] Sentences with off-color language possess a memorability that is quite independent of their role in conversation.

Instantiating these observations is a true story emailed to me in 1989 by Cynthia R.: “The highest award in boy scouting is, or was in the sixties, The Silver Beaver. It was the cause of endless (suppressed) merriment when Grandfather received this coveted award.” What makes dysphemisms like *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger* cognitively prominent is their affective force: they typically evoke stronger emotional response than most other vocabulary because of their combined connotation and denotation. There is no better description of this than Allen Read's “titillating thrill of scandalized perturbation”. But there is an additional factor that makes them more marked than other vocabulary: they are stored differently in the brain from other

¹The connotations of a language expression are pragmatic effects that arise from encyclopaedic knowledge about its denotation (or reference) and also from experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about the contexts in which the expression is typically used (Allan 2007: 1048).

vocabulary. Thus, people with certain kinds of dementia and/or aphasia can curse profusely, producing what sound like exclamatory interjections as an emotional reaction; however, when called upon to repeat the performance, they are unable to do so because they have lost the capacity to construct ordinary language. The fact that dirty words, abusive words, and slurs pour forth in these particular mental disorders and from people with Tourette syndrome is only possible because they are stored separately (or at least accessed differently) from other language (Finkelstein 2018; Jay 2000; Valenstein and Heilman 1979: 431). As I have said, this is a contributory factor to their cognitive salience, but the latter arises principally from the emotional impact evoked by their combined denotation and connotation.

That words like *bitch*, *cunt* and *nigger* are undoubtedly saliently dysphemistic is evidenced from dictionary entries.

Bitch in British (bɪtʃ)

noun

1. a female dog or other female canine animal, such as a wolf
2. *offensive, slang* a malicious, spiteful, or coarse woman
3. *slang* a complaint
4. *slang* a difficult situation or problem
5. *slang* a person who acts as a subordinate or slave to another person

verb *informal*

6. (*intransitive*) to complain; grumble
7. to behave (towards) in a spiteful or malicious manner
8. (*transitive*; often followed by *up*) to botch; bungle.

(<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/bitch>)

Cunt in British (kʌnt)

noun *taboo*

1. the female genitals
2. *offensive, slang* a woman considered sexually
3. *offensive, slang* a mean or obnoxious person.

► **USAGE:** Although there has been some relaxation of the taboo against using words such as *fuck* in conversation and print, the use of *cunt* is still not considered acceptable by most people outside very limited social contexts. Though originally a racily descriptive word in Middle English, it has been taboo for many centuries and continues to be so.

(<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/cunt>)

Nigger in British (ˈnɪɡə)

noun *offensive, taboo*

1. a. a Black person

- b. (*as modifier*) *nigger minstrels*
 2. a member of any dark-skinned race
 3. nigger in the woodpile.

► [American] USAGE: originally simply a dialectal variant of *Negro*, the term *nigger* is today acceptable only in black English; in all other contexts it is now generally regarded as virtually taboo because of the legacy of racial hatred that underlies the history of its use among whites, and its continuing use among a minority of speakers as a viciously hostile epithet

(<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/nigger>)

Although dictionaries vary somewhat, the quotes above are typical. Given the salient dysphemism, how can such terms be used as an expression of camaraderie?

The answer is hinted at in some words of the final quote: “the term *nigger* is today acceptable only in black English”. This is because the speaker identifies as a person who has attracted or might attract the slur *nigger*: in other words, he or she trades on the hurtful, contemptuous connotation and subverts it (cf. Hornsby 2001: 134). Within many minorities and oppressed groups, a term of abuse used by outsiders is often reclaimed to wear as a badge of honour to mark identification with and camaraderie within the in-group. Used as an in-group term of address, *nigger* has much in common with the British and Australian address term *mate* (see Rendle-Short 2009) or American *bud(dy)* even though neither *bud(dy)* nor *mate* has the negative connotations of *nigger*. To this end, many (male)² African Americans have adopted the term *nigger*, often respelled *nigga* (which remains homophonous), to use to or about their fellows (Allan and Burridge 1991, 2006; Asim 2007; Croom 2013; Folb 1980; Kennedy 2000, 2003; McWhorter 2002, 2010; Rahman 2012, inter alia).³ This is a classic example of polysemy and so, although one cannot say *Ordell is a nigger₁ and so is Beaumont [a nigger₂]* because it violates the Q-principle of both Horn (1984) and Levinson (2000), it is perfectly possible for one African American to say to another *That honkey called me a nigger₂, nigger₁*.⁴

JULES: You remember Antwan Rockamora? Half-black, half-Samoan, usta call him Tony Rocky Horror.

VINCENT: Yeah maybe, fat right?

JULES: I wouldn't go so far as to call the brother fat. He's got a weight problem. What's the nigger gonna do, he's Samoan. (Tarantino 1999: 18)

The context, i.e. the situation of utterance and what is said through the co-text, determines that this use of *nigger* is clearly not a racial slur. For a start Jules is black and he's addressing a white guy while speaking of a shared acquaintance who is a half African American half Samoan and who counts as one of Jules' in-group of

²It is reportedly rare among females.

³There is at least one example of this in President Obama's autobiography when, in an exchange of banter, his friend Ray addresses him as 'nigger'; see Obama (2004: 73).

⁴Assuming *nigger₂* is the slur and *nigger₁* is not.

black ‘brothers’. Secondly, Jules thinks well enough of Antwan to be kindly euphemistic about his size. So when he says “What’s the nigger gonna do, he’s Samoan”, he is using *nigger* as a colloquial descriptive. Colloquial language uses informal and intimate styles (cf. Joos 1961); it includes, but is not identical with, slang (see Allan and Burrige 2006). So we have *nigger* used as an in-group marker, here referring to a man described as ‘Samoan’, although he is also described as ‘half-black’. Jules clearly has no malice towards this black brother of whom *nigger* is surely used in the sympathetic spirit of camaraderie. Another example:

So, Mr. President, if I’m going to keep it 100: Yo, Barry, you did it, my nigger. You did it. (Larry Wilmore to President Barack (= Barry) Obama at the 2016 White House Correspondents’ Dinner, cited by black journalist Jonathan Capehart in the *Washington Post*, May 2, 2016, ‘Why Larry Wilmore is not ‘my n———’) ⁵

Larry Wilmore’s attribution was controversial. His use of *nigger* was mostly referred to in the media as “the N-word” and otherwise written *n—* or *nigga*. Jonathan Capehart disapproved not because an African American was addressed as *nigger* by another African American, but because the addressee was the President of the USA whom Capehart believes should not be treated so familiarly on a public occasion. But it is clear that Wilmore was intending to be colloquial and familiar, witness “keep it 100” and “Yo, Barry”. It certainly did not appear that Obama was offended. All these comments are tempered by the context in which *nigger/nigga* occurs and is spoken or written of.

The same kind of argument goes when women or gay men address each other as *bitch* in amity. Lisa Jervis, editor of the magazine *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, wrote in 1996 how the word was not meant as an insult but because “a confrontational stance is powerful”. This was reiteration of the stance in Jo Freeman’s *Bitch Manifesto* of 1970:

Bitches seek their identity strictly thru themselves and what they do. They are subjects, not objects. [...] It is a popular derogation to put down uppity women that was created by man and adopted by women. Like the term “nigger,” “bitch” serves the social function of isolating and discrediting a class of people who do not conform to the socially accepted patterns of behavior.

(<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/bitch.htm>)

There is a meme widely distributed over the internet: “My best friend can’t stop being my best friend. The bitch knows too much.” Tongue in cheek it may be, but it clearly maintains the banter of camaraderie.

For instances of *bitch* (and also *cunt*) used as an insult, see the following:

[H]e called me a slut, cunt, worthless bitch, I slapped him at some point, then he followed me to the porch, where I’d gone to cry, to tell me how I spread my legs for anyone who walks by, and how I have no respect for myself because no one taught me to respect my

⁵<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/05/02/why-larry-wilmore-is-not-my-n/>. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IDFt3BL7FA> (*my nigger* occurs at 22:04 min).

body when I was a teenager. [...] This is not the first time he's called me a slut/whore/cunt/bitch/etc. He accused me of cheating 2 weeks ago (I'm not, nor will I ever because of family history with cheating) with a coworker. [...] I put a hand out and said "If you lay one finger on me, I will scream and call the police." This is when he proceeded to call me a f*cking cunt, bitch, and a piece of shit (he'd called me worthless earlier in the week, again not for the first time). (<http://forums.thenest.com/discussion/12002898/husband-called-me-a-c-t-b-ch-sl-t>, September 2013)

The author slapped her husband because she was upset by the fact that he was insulting her: it was not only the perlocutionary effect of his words, but there can be no doubt from the wife's report and our own onlooker observation, it was the illocutionary intention of the husband. Terms like *slut*, *whore*, *cunt*, *bitch*, etc., imply that the wife was being accused of sexual promiscuity.

Below is a report mentioning a slur by Barbara Bush (wife of Republican 41st US President George H. Bush) on the 1984 Democrat Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro. Note that the topic of the article is the Bush's pooch Millie.

To borrow words Barbara Bush once used to describe Geraldine Ferraro, Millie Kerr Bush is something that rhymes with rich. (*Time Australia*, March 6, 1989: 62)

The original report of the slur reads, in part:

But if some people were surprised to hear white-haired, gentle-looking Barbara Bush calling Mrs. Ferraro a "four million dollar—I can't say it, but it rhymes with rich," some others were not so shocked. (Joyce 1984)

This is understood to mean that Barbara Bush called her husband's political opponent a bitch, thus slurring Ferraro. Obviously, the *Time Australia* reporter understood her to mean "bitch", otherwise it would make no sense to apply Bush's words to a female dog. However, Bush used a euphemistic dysphemism, because it would have reflected badly on her had she explicitly spelled out the slur. Joyce (1984) writes: "Mrs. Bush later apologized for the remark". Such an apology does not indicate that Barbara Bush revised her opinion of Geraldine Ferraro, only that she later regretted making the insult public, thereby staining her own character.

It is widely acknowledged that *cunt* is the most tabooed word in English. Interestingly, the same is not true of its cognates in closely related languages: French *con* and Spanish *coño* have the same origin—Latin *cunnus* "cunt, promiscuous woman"—but their extended uses are much less dysphemistic. For instance, French *vieux con* (literally, "old cunt") is more likely to be jocular than insulting—comparable with British *old bugger*. (On Spanish *coño* see Allan and Burridge 2006: 52).

As with the other terms I have been discussing, *cunt* can be used orthophemistically in, for instance, academic studies like this one. Dismissing a prosecution for using offensive language, Australian magistrate Heilpern J explained: "Channel 9 has recently broadcast a show (Sex in the City) that includes the words *fuck off* and *fucking* as well as *cunt*" (Police v Butler 2003, NSWLC 2 before Heilpern J, June 14, 2002). In other words, *cunt* is not criminally unacceptable. And, of course, *cunt* may be used as an expression of bantering camaraderie—as can *silly*, *ass*, *idiot*, *bastard*, and *fucker*, as in "[laughs] you're a gross

cunt [laughs]” (Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English J 2) and the following (Welsh 2001: 129), from the novel *Trainspotting* (using the Leith dialect of Edinburgh, Scotland).

- Granty ... ye didnae hear? ... Coke looked straight at Lenny.
- Naw. Wha ...
- Deid. Potted heid.
- Yir jokin! Eh? Gies a fuckin brek ya cunt ...
- Gen up. Last night, likes.
- Whit the fuck happened ...
- Ticker. Boom. Coke snapped his fingers.—Dodgy hert, apparently. Nae cunt kent about it. Perr Granty wis workin wi Pete Gillegghan, oan the side likesay. It wis aboot five, n Granty wis helpin Pete tidy up, ready to shoot the craw n that likes, whin he jist hauds his chist n cowps ower. Gilly gits an ambulance, n they take the perr cunt tae the hospital, but he dies a couple of ooirs later. Perr Granty. Good cunt n aw. You play cairds wi the guy, eh?
- Eh ... aye ... one ay the nicest cunts ye could hope tae meet. That’s gutted us, that hus.

A newspaper report of Phil Grant’s fatal heart attack, even if equally sympathetic, would—as a matter of social appropriateness—necessarily use very different language.

The phenomenon of subversion of slurs is not so strange when we compare it with the existence of contronyms⁶ in the vocabulary, e.g. *bound* ‘fastened to a spot’ versus ‘heading for somewhere’; *cleave* ‘adhere to’ versus ‘separate’; *consult* ‘offer advice’ versus ‘seek advice’; *dust* ‘remove fine particles’ versus ‘cover with fine particles’; *fast* ‘moving quickly’ versus ‘fixed, unable to move’; *give out* ‘provide, supply’ versus ‘stop for lack of supply’; *hold up* ‘support’ versus ‘impede’; *overlook* ‘supervise’ versus ‘neglect’; *sanction* ‘approve’ versus ‘boycott’; *trim* ‘decorate’ versus ‘remove excess from’; etc. There are many more, including some that are controversial, for instance *infer* is used to mean both ‘imply by saying’ and ‘understand from what is said’; *rent* and *let*⁷ can be ambiguous between ‘allow the use of something in return for being paid’ and ‘use something in return for payment to the owner’. What contronyms show is that speakers and writers and their audiences can happily operate using a word or phrase with contrary meanings relying on context to disambiguate—which is exactly what normally applies with terms of abuse and their contronymic subversions.

The slurs *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger* are typically dysphemistic but they are differently dysphemistic. I suggest that the dysphemisms *cunt* and *nigger* are both superlatively offensive, say, to degree 0.9 on a scale from 0 to 1, while *bitch* is

⁶Also called *contronyms* and *autoantonyms*, among other things.

⁷There are also the verb *let* ‘allow’ as in *Let me pay* and the noun *let* ‘hindrance’ as in tennis (when during service a ball is hindered by the net cord).

Table 9.1 Credibility metric for a proposition

CRED = 1.0	Undoubtedly true:	$\Box p$, I know that p
CRED = 0.9	Most probably true:	I am almost certain that p
CRED = 0.8	Probably true:	I believe that p
CRED = 0.7	Possibly true:	I think p is probable
CRED = 0.6	Just possibly true:	I think that perhaps p
CRED = 0.5	Indeterminable:	$(\Diamond p \geq 0.5) \text{ XOR } (\Diamond \neg p \leq 0.5)$
CRED = 0.4	Just possibly false:	It is not impossible that p
CRED = 0.3	Possibly false:	It is not necessarily impossible that p
CRED = 0.2	Probably false:	It is (very) unlikely that p
CRED = 0.1	Most probably false:	It is almost impossible that p
CRED = 0.0	Undoubtedly false:	$\Box \neg p$, I know that $\neg p$

(simply) offensive, say, to degree 0.6. Used in expressions of camaraderie, such terms nevertheless risk being assessed as slightly offensive, say, to degree 0.1.

Because most so-called facts are propositions about phenomena as interpreted by whomever is speaking, we find that so-called experts differ as to what the facts are (for instance, on the economy or what should be done about narcotics). Whether ordinary language users judge a proposition true or false depends not only on its pragmatic halo,⁸ but also on how credible it is and this is reflected in the way that they use and understand language. There is a credibility metric such as that in Table 9.1, in which complete confidence that a proposition is true rates 1, represented CRED = 1, and complete confidence that a proposition is false rates CRED = 0; indeterminability is midway between these two, CRED = 0.5. Other values lie in between. \Box is the necessity operator, \Diamond the possibility operator, and XOR symbolizes exclusive disjunction. In reality, one level of the metric overlaps an adjacent level so that the cross-over from one level to another is more often than not entirely subjective; levels 0.1, 0.4, 0.6, 0.9 are as much an artefact of the decimal system as they are independently distinct levels in which I have a great deal of confidence. Nonetheless, I am certain that some variant of the credibility metric exists and is justified by the employment of the adverbials (*very*) *probably*, (*very*) *possibly* and *perhaps* in everyday speech.

I have established that the salient senses of *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger* are dysphemistic. At first sight a salient meaning should be almost the opposite of a default meaning. Something that is salient jumps out at you; by contrast a default is the fall-back state when there is no contextual motivation to prefer any other. On a second look, what qualifies a state to become the default is its salience in the

⁸In any normal situation *Sue arrived at three o'clock* is treated as true if she arrived close to three o'clock; Lasersohn (1999) refers to this slackness as a "pragmatic halo". A pragmatic regulator is an adverb such as *precisely* or *exactly* in *Sue arrived precisely at three o'clock* or *Sue arrived at exactly three o'clock* which restricts the slack in the interpretation. Unlike Lasersohn, I do not believe the slack is erased, but it is certainly restricted.

absence of any contextual motivation to prefer another. Giora (2003: 34, 37) defines salience as what is foremost in the mind based on “such factors as familiarity, conventionality, and frequency of occurrence”. Clearly this applies to salience on a particular occasion. Can it also apply to the condition of comparative decontextualization that is encountered with a lexicon entry? Typically, meanings in a lexicon are given so as to apply to as wide a range of contexts as possible and these are what I describe as default meanings, namely those that are applied more frequently by more people and normally with greater certitude than any alternatives. Thus, default meanings are largely similar to salient meanings except that the latter, according to Giora, are foremost in the mind of an individual: “Salience [...] is relative to an individual. What is foremost on one’s mind need not necessarily be foremost on another’s” (Giora 2003: 37). We might here distinguish between a linguist’s model of the mental lexicon as an abstraction or generalization over the hypothetical lexicon of a typical individual and the real-life internalized lexicon of a particular individual in which certain meanings may indeed be salient because of that individual’s unique experience. The upshot of this perambulation is that what I describe as the representation and ranking of default meanings in the lexicon are based on my own intuitions about the relative saliency of those meanings—which Giora would refer to as “graded salience” (Giora 2003: 10); but I propose that my intuitions need to be replaced by objective rankings obtained after examining data from a wide variety of corpora and from questioning language users.

In the sections that follow, I will specify the differing potentials of such nouns⁹ as *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger* in a sequence of interlaced semantic and pragmatic components.

9.2 A Lexicon Entry for *Bitch*

Primarily, a bitch is a female domestic dog, more precisely a female of genus *Canis*. Its figurative uses derive from this. What makes a bitch different from other female mammals is that a bitch in oestrus has the reputation for being unconstrainedly willing to mate, often with several partners; many dog-owners believe that the bitch needs to be protected from male dogs at this time and rather than have all this (perhaps apocryphal) trouble, they have the bitch spayed. In other words, when in heat, a bitch is a nuisance, and therefore a cause of complaint to people and that is what leads to the figurative meanings.

We might capture this literal sense in (1) and more formally in (2).

- (1) If *x* is a female canine, then *x* is (properly called) a *bitch*.
- (2) $\forall(x)[\lambda(y)[\text{FEMALE-SEX}(y) \ \& \ \text{CANINE}(y)](x) \triangleright_{\text{properly}} \textit{bitch}(x)]$

⁹I will not consider the use of *bitch* as a verb.

Where x is the referent¹⁰ labelled *bitch* and *female canine* means ‘female of the genus *Canis*’. *FEMALE-SEX* predicates y as being of female sex; in formulae such as (2), italicized *bitch* indicates the form of the lexicon item, as it also does in (1) and $\triangleright_{\text{properly}}$ symbolizes ‘is properly called’. The lambda operator is introduced in $\lambda(y)$ [*FEMALE-SEX*(y) & *CANINE*(y)](x) to capture the fact that x must be both female and canine, i.e. $x \in F \cap C$ (x is a member of the intersection of things that are female and things that are canine). Otherwise, $\forall(x)$ [*FEMALE-SEX*(x) & *CANINE*(x) $\triangleright_{\text{properly}}$ *bitch*(x)] gives the false readings that *any female is properly called a bitch* and *any canine is properly called a bitch*.

But not everything labelled *bitch* is a female canine, hence (3) obtains.

(3) If x is a *bitch*, then x is possibly a female canine.

(3) is inferred in part from (1) and the fact that “not everything labelled *bitch* is a female canine”. Hence, (4) in which \neg symbolizes “not” and \diamond is the possibility operator.

$$(4) \quad \forall(x)[[\lambda(y)[\text{FEMALE-SEX}(y) \ \& \ \text{CANINE}(y)]](x) \ \triangleright_{\text{properly}} \ \text{bitch}(x)] \\ \& \ \exists(x)[\lambda(y)[\text{bitch}(y) \ \& \ \neg[\text{FEMALE-SEX}(y) \ \& \ \text{CANINE}(y)]](x)] \\ \rightarrow \ \exists(x)[\text{bitch}(x) \ \& \ \diamond[\lambda(y)[\text{FEMALE-SEX}(y) \ \& \ \text{CANINE}(y)]](x)]]$$

(4) can be glossed as follows: from the facts that (a) every referent x that is both female and canine is called a bitch (b) and yet there is some referent x that is among the set of things called a bitch but is not both female and canine (c) it follows¹¹ that some referent x that is among the set of things called a bitch is possibly both female and canine.

The extended uses of *bitch* are grounded in the literal sense. To condemn a woman as a *bitch* potentially likens her to a bitch in heat, suggesting she is sexually promiscuous. Linking the sexual insult with an animal-name insult is doubly-dysphemistic. It is common for insults to liken humans to animals that are conventionally ascribed certain behaviours, cf. *cat*, *fox*, *vixen*, *sow*, *pig*, *cow*, *bitch*, *cur*, *dog*, *mongrel*, *swine*, *louse*, *dove*, *hawk*, *coot*, *galah*, *chicken*, *turkey*, *mouse*, *rabbit*, *bull*, *ox*, *goat*, *ape*, *monkey*, *ass*, *donkey*, *mule*, *rat*, *snake*, etc. Incidentally, although *son-of-a-bitch* is comparable with Spanish *hijo de puta* and similar expressions in many other languages, the use of *bitch* simply to mean “prostitute” is rare to non-existent in English. So, the sexual undertone is normally secondary when *bitch* is used as a slur. Among American children *bitch* is the favourite insult from girl to girl and used proportionately more often than by boys—who also target girls with it, of course—(Jay 1992: 60–67). Hence, *bitch* is applicable to girls as well as women, and typically ascribes the female human being as aggravating (i.e. of confrontational, disagreeable or malicious character). The same is applicable to homosexual males, but the term is derivative. Hence, (5) and more formally (6) where $\triangleright_{\text{colloquially}}$ symbolizes “is colloquially called”. Note that the *FEMALE-SEX*

¹⁰By *referent* I mean whatever is spoken about; see Allan (2013).

¹¹An anonymous reviewer objected to this gloss of entailment, but I stand by it on this occasion.

of (2) is replaced by *FEMALE-GENDER*: something of female-sex is biologically female bearing organs that potentially enable it to reproduce offspring; humans of female-gender identify as psycho-socially female (and are typically recognized as female), though they are not necessarily born to the female sex.

- (5) If x is a female human and aggravating she is colloquially called a *bitch*.
 (6) $\forall(x)[[\lambda(y)[\text{FEMALE-GENDER}(y) \ \& \ \text{HUMAN}(y) \ \& \ \text{AGGRAVATING}(y)](x)] \triangleright_{\text{colloquially}} \text{bitch}(x)]$
 (6) Gives rise to (7):

$$(7) \exists(x)[\text{bitch}(x) \ \& \ \diamond[\lambda(y)[\text{FEMALE-GENDER}(y) \ \& \ \text{HUMAN}(y) \ \& \ \text{AGGRAVATING}(y)](x)]]$$

Despite being nonliteral, (7) is the salient sense of *bitch* instead of the literal sense (2) whence it derives. On a rough count (via the internet) it is about 1500 times as common such that the salient sense could be assigned a likelihood of $\text{CRED} = 0.9$ versus a $\text{CRED} = 0.0006$ for the literal sense, but it is more appropriate in the model to peg it at 0.1.

If the speaker is a female human it is possible for her to use *bitch* as a term of camaraderie or amicable banter. Let me distinguish banter from insult.

Insult. (A) The agent has the perlocutionary intention in uttering ε (the expression under consideration) to assail the target with offensively dishonouring or contemptuous speech or action and/or to treat the target with scornful abuse or offensive disrespect. (B) The agent's uttering ε has the perlocutionary effect (perhaps realizing the agent's perlocutionary intention) of demeaning someone and/or of affronting or outraging them by manifest arrogance, scorn, contempt, or insolence.

Banter. A form of competitive verbal play and upmanship in which the agent needles a sparring partner with critical observations on their physical appearance, mental ability, character, behaviour, beliefs, and/or familial and social relations in circumstances where it is mutually understood that in uttering ε there is no serious attempt to wound or belittle the interlocutor.

Where *bitch* is used as an expression of camaraderie or amicable banter the antagonistic *aggravating* is replaceable by the positive counterpart *like-minded* since most people prefer to regard themselves as trying to be resolute and agreeable and their preferred comrades as similar to themselves, i.e. like-minded. This gives us (8), glossed “some things called *bitch* are like-minded human females”. There is a restriction: s (the person uttering *bitch*) must be a human of female gender (or someone attributed similar status, such as a male homosexual); this is represented in (8) by an implicature, conventionally symbolized $+>$. A justification for the implicature is that it is implied by correct usage but can readily be violated resulting from misunderstanding on the part of s or, if deliberately violated by s , probable misunderstanding by the audience. $+>_{\text{CRED } 0.9}$ indicates that is most likely that s , the one who utters *bitch*, is of female gender.

- (8) $\exists(x)[bitch(x) \ \& \ [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ LIKE-MINDED(y)](x)] \ +>_{\text{CRED } 0.9}$
 $\lambda(x)[FEMALE-GENDER(x) \ \& \ HUMAN(x)](s)$

There is a spin-off from (6) and (7) from female human to inanimate objects or events, e.g. *life's a bitch*; *the bitch of a thing won't work*.

- (9) $\forall(x)[[\lambda(y)[\neg[ANIMATE(y)] \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)] \ \blacktriangleright_{\text{colloquially}} \ bitch(x)]$
 (10) $\exists(x)[bitch(x) \ \& \ \blacklozenge[\lambda(y)[\neg[ANIMATE(y)] \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]]$

The foregoing capture the various senses of the noun *bitch* and are brought together into a model lexicon entry in (11). In (11), *ELSE* indicates that if the preceding sense of *bitch* does not apply we move to the next, less likely, one.

- (11) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \ \rightarrow \ [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]]$
 ELSE
 $\rightarrow \ [\lambda(y)[\neg[ANIMATE(y)] \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)] \ ELSE$
 $\rightarrow \ [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ LIKE-MINDED(y)](x)]$
 $\quad \quad \quad \ +>_{\text{CRED } 0.9} \lambda(x)[FEMALE-GENDER(x) \ \& \ HUMAN(x)](s) \ ELSE$
 $\rightarrow \ [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-SEX(y) \ \& \ CANINE(y)](x)]$

Obviously (11) is heavily dependent on context: the motivation to move from one sense to another depends on recognizing that the first does not apply in context. So, what is context? In Allan (2018: 182–183), I suggested that context consists of common ground plus three categories of context as described in (12) in which *s* is the speaker (utterer, writer, signer), *h* the hearer (audience), $\varepsilon \subseteq v$ is the expression ε under consideration in utterance *v*.

- (12) (a) Common ground for any community *K* of two or more people is that every member, or almost every member, of *K* knows or believes some fact or set of facts *F*.
 (b) A member of *K* is presumed to know or believe *F* by (almost) every other member of *K*.
 (c) A member of *K* knows that both (a) and (b) are true.
 (d) Both *s* and *h* are members of *K*.
 (e) *s* utters *v* to *h* in context C_v .
 (f) When a member of *K* applies knowledge of *F* in order to interpret *v*, he or she can presume that others in the community will also apply (or be able to apply) knowledge of *F* in order to interpret *v*.
 (g) The existence of *F*, *v*, and the application of knowledge of *F* to interpreting *v* is common ground for members of the community *K*. Once attended to, *v* becomes part of *F*, incrementing the common ground.
 (h) If language expression ε is a constituent of utterance *v*, such that $\varepsilon \subseteq v$, then part of the context *C* of ε , namely C_1 , is the world (and time) spoken of, constituted by the topic of discourse revealed by expression ε 's co-text (what has been said and what is said, including text that follows ε).

- (i) Part of C, C2, is the situation in which v is uttered, which includes what is known about s and the perlocutionary effect of this and similar uses of ε —we might call this situation of utterance ‘the world spoken in’.
- (j) Finally, part of C, C3, is the situation of interpretation in which h seeks to understand $\varepsilon \subseteq v$, i.e. the meaning of ε in the context of the utterance v in which it occurs.

I distinguish three aspects of context: C1, C2, and C3.¹² C1 is the world (and time) spoken of, which is largely identified from co-text; essentially, C1 captures what is said about what at some world. This is achieved (i) via the semantic frames and scripts evoked by the various constituents ($\varepsilon_{1...n}$) of v —identified through ε and its co-text; and (ii) s 's attitude to what is spoken of or the persons addressed as this is revealed by the locution. (i) and (ii) contribute to identifying what s 's purpose might be in making the utterance, which is the effective meaning of $\varepsilon \subseteq v$. C2 is the world (and time) spoken in, the situation of utterance. C2 captures who does the saying to whom, and where and when this takes place. C2 normally determines the social relationships and conventions that s is expected to follow and, in consequence, sets the standard for the psycho-social appropriateness of what is said. C2 is what governs, for instance, whether such terms as *bitch*, *cunt*, or *nigger* are used as a slur or an expression of camaraderie and whether or not a particular form of words is polite. C3 is the situation of interpretation, the circumstances under which h interprets $\varepsilon \subseteq v$, which in face-to-face interaction is effectively identical with C2. So far as possible, s predicts common ground with h in order to shape utterance v for maximum comprehensibility. Where C3 is very different from C2 such that h does not share s 's system of beliefs and assumptions, the context is disparate from s 's presumed common ground. Although h may be well able to understand what s intended to mean, $\varepsilon \subseteq v$ can have reduced comprehensibility and its psycho-social appropriateness may be differently evaluated from the way s expected to be understood. This can, of course, happen where s and h are face-to-face and s has mistaken the common ground with h .

Let's return to the use of a lexicon entry such as (11) by both s and h . I assume that s takes into account the probable common ground with h and what obtains with respect to C1 and C2 in particular and, if writing for an unpredictable audience, perhaps with an eye to C3. If s wishes to slur some aggravating woman, s must ensure that h can readily identify her from C1 and/or C2. Conversely, when s utters *bitch*, h applies to C1 and/or C2 to distinguish an appropriate referent, if one is found the search ends; if none is found h turns to the next sense of something inanimate but aggravating, h applies to C1 and/or C2 to distinguish an appropriate referent, if one is found the search ends; if none is found h turns to the next sense of a like-minded female human, but only if s is a human female (or a gay male, most likely speaking of another gay male). Once again, if none of these conditions are met, as a last resort, h turns to the least likely but literal sense of *bitch* and should find a canine referent in C1 and/or C2. If C3 applies, i.e. if h is spatially and/or

¹²For additional clarification and justification, see Allan (2018).

temporally very distant from *s*, he or she proceeds so far as possible in the same manner as with C1 and C2. Essentially, *s* seeks to make sure that *h* can retrieve the intended meaning from C1 and/or C2 and/or C3.

Perhaps in the account just given I have appeared to suggest that encountering the word *bitch*, *h* goes systematically through the sequence in (11). In fact as language users, we look to context immediately to try to determine the *s*'s intended meaning, even though it is likely that at least the salient sense will be activated and then suppressed as irrelevant or not in the light of the prevailing context (cf. Gernsbacher 1990, Giora 2003).

- (13) (a) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]]$
 IF IN C1 $\exists(x)[\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]$ &
 IN C1 &OR C2 AGGRAVATED(*s*) ELSE
- (b) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[\neg[ANIMATE(y)] \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]]$ IF IN C1 $\exists(x)$
 $[\neg[ANIMATE(x)] \ \& \ IN \ C1 \ \&OR \ C2 \ AGGRAVATED(s)]$ ELSE
- (c) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ LIKE-MINDED(y)](x)]]$ IF
 in C1 $\exists(x)[\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ LIKE-MINDED(y)](x)]$ & IN C1
 &OR C2 $\neg[AGGRAVATED(s)] \rightarrow_{\text{CRED } 0.9} FEMALE-GENDER(s)$ ELSE
- (d) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-SEX(y) \ \& \ CANINE(y)](x)]]$ IF IN C1 $\exists(x)[CANINE$
 $(x)]$

Only if none of the contextual conditions in (13) applies, e.g. in the unlikely situation where a bottle floats ashore with a piece of paper inscribed with the word *bitch* which *h* seeks to interpret in C3, then would *h* run through the sequence in (11) and speculate on, but be unable to satisfactorily resolve, the probable referent symbolized *x*. By the way, I need to comment on the relation between AGGRAVATING(*x*) and AGGRAVATED(*s*): the relationship is that CAUSE(*x*)[AGGRAVATED(*s*)], i.e. *x* is (said to be) aggravating because *x* causes *s* to be aggravated.

The activating of the dominant sense of dysphemistic expressions is what leads to their avoidance in even orthophemistic uses—that is, some people will avoid referring to a female dog as a *bitch* lest they be judged unmannerly. How should this be accounted for in the lexical entry? Most dictionaries advert the user to the fact that (13)(a) is ‘offensive’, ‘rude’, ‘not now in decent use’, i.e. dysphemistic. Consequently, we need to revise (13) to (14) where ‘DYSPHEMISTIC_{0.6}’ symbolizes offensiveness to a degree of 0.6¹³ on a scale from 0 to 1 where 0 = \neg DYSPHEMISTIC.

- (14) (a) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]]$
 IF IN C1 $\exists(x)[\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]$ &
 IN C1 &OR C2 $\lambda(z)[AGGRAVATED(z) \ \& \ DYSPHEMISTIC_{0.6}(z)](s)$ ELSE
- (b) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[\neg[ANIMATE(y)] \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]]$ IF IN C1 $\exists(x)$
 $[\neg[ANIMATE(x)] \ \& \ IN \ C1 \ \&OR \ C2 \ \lambda(z)[AGGRAVATED(z) \ \& \ DYSPHEMISTIC_{0.6}(z)]$
 $(s)]$ ELSE

¹³Cf. Beers Fägersten (2007).

- (c) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ LIKE-MINDED(y)](x)]$
 IF IN C1 $\exists(x)[\lambda(y)[FEMALE-GENDER(y) \ \& \ HUMAN(y) \ \& \ LIKE-MINDED(y)](x)]$ & IN
 C1 &OR C2 $\lambda(z)[\neg AGGRAVATED(z) \ \& \ DYSPHEMISTIC_{0,1}(z)](s)$ $+>_{\text{CRED } 0,9}$ FEMALE-
 GENDER(s) ELSE
- (d) $\forall(x)[bitch(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[FEMALE-SEX(y) \ \& \ CANINE(y)](x)]$ IF IN C1 $\exists(x)[CANINE$
 (x)]

9.3 A Lexicon Entry for *Cunt*

I do not know of any figures to confirm or reject the claim, but I believe the primary use of the word *cunt* is as a term of abuse for a reviled, aggravating person or thing even though this sense derives misogynistically from its literal use to refer to the genitals (vulva and vagina) of the human female sex.¹⁴

- (15) $\forall(x)[[\lambda(y)[REVILED(y) \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)] \triangleright_{\text{colloquially}} cunt(x)]$
 (16) $\exists(x)[cunt(x) \ \& \ \diamond[\lambda(y)[REVILED(y) \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]]$
 (17) $\forall(x)[GENITALS(x) \leftrightarrow \forall(y)[\lambda(z)[HUMAN(z) \ \& \ FEMALE-SEX(z)](y)] \rightarrow \text{PART-OF}(x, y)]]$
 $\triangleright_{\text{colloquially}} cunt(x)$
 $\triangleright_{\text{properly}} vagina(x) \ \& \text{OR} \ vulva(x)$

(15)–(17) give rise to the lexicon entry in (18)—included in which is the information that *cunt* is dysphemistic to degree 0.9.

- (18) (a) $\forall(x)[cunt(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(y)[REVILED(y) \ \& \ AGGRAVATING(y)](x)]]$ IF IN C1 $\exists(x)[\lambda(y)$
 $[\text{REVILED}(y) \ \& \ \text{AGGRAVATING}(y)](x)]$ & IN C1 &OR C2 $\lambda(z)[\text{AGGRAVATED}(z) \ \& \ \text{DYSPHEMISTIC}_{0,9}(z)](s)$ ELSE
- (b) $\forall(x)[cunt(x) \rightarrow \text{GENITALS}(x) \leftrightarrow \forall(y)[[\lambda(z)[\text{HUMAN}(z) \ \& \ \text{FEMALE-SEX}(z)](y)] \rightarrow \text{PART-OF}(x, y)]]$ IF IN C1 $\exists(x)[\text{GENITALS}(x) \leftrightarrow \forall(y)[[\lambda(z)[\text{HUMAN}(z) \ \& \ \text{FEMALE-SEX}(z)](y)] \rightarrow \text{PART-OF}(x, y)]]$ & IN C1 &OR C2 $\text{DYSPHEMISTIC}_{0,9}(s)$ ELSE
- (c) $\forall(x)[cunt(x) \rightarrow \lambda(y)[\text{ANIMATE}(y) \ \& \ \text{LIKE-MINDED}(y)](x)]$ IF IN C1 $\exists(x)[\lambda(y)$
 $[\text{ANIMATE}(y) \ \& \ \text{LIKE-MINDED}(y)](x)]$ & IN C1 &OR C2 $\lambda(z)[\neg \text{AGGRAVATED}(z) \ \& \ \text{DYSPHEMISTIC}_{0,1}(z)](s)$ $+>_{\text{CRED } 0,9}$ MALE-GENDER(s)

In (18c), $+>_{\text{CRED } 0,9}$ MALE-GENDER(s), indicates that it is most likely s is male. (18b) gives rise to the use of *cunt* in the sense “a woman as a source of sexual gratification” where this one body part is the sole focus of interest, which leads to cancelling of some components as in (19).

- (19) $\forall(x)[cunt(x) \rightarrow [\lambda(z)[\text{HUMAN}(z) \ \& \ \text{FEMALE-SEX}(z)](x)]]$ IF IN C1 &OR C2 $\lambda(z)[\text{MALE-SEX}(z) \ \& \ \text{DYSPHEMISTIC}_{0,9}(z) \ \& \ \text{MISOGYNISTIC}_{0,9}(z)](s)$

(19) is severely misogynistic and in very limited use.

¹⁴A usage very rarely extended to the genitals of other female animates.

9.4 A Lexicon Entry for *Nigger*

Croom (2011, 2013) argues that the use of *nigger* both as a slur and in-group marker of camaraderie can be accommodated if the meaning is expressed as a cluster of properties applicable to the referent, not all of which need to be present in the referent on a particular occasion. The properties Croom (2013: 199) identifies are based on what American speakers report of the meaning of *nigger* in the works cited in the quote where, of course, X is the referent.

- P1. X is African American (Frederickson 1971, p. 41; Asim 2007, p. 12; Williamson 2009)
- P2. X is prone to laziness (Asim 2007, p. 27)
- P3. X is subservient (Frederickson 1971, p. 41; Asim 2007, p. 12)
- P4. X is commonly the recipient of poor treatment (Frederickson 1971, p. 41; Asim 2007, p. 12)
- P5. X is athletic and musical (Alim et al. 2010, p. 128)
- P6. X is sexually liberal or licentious (Asim 2007, p. 27)
- P7. X is simple-minded (Asim 2007, p. 27)
- P8. X is emotionally shallow (Asim 2007, p. 27)
- P9. X is a survivor, tough, or prone to violence (Anderson 1999, p. 50; Rahman 2012)
- P10. X is loud and excessively noisy (Anderson 1999, p. 50).

We find in this quote a mix of semantics and pragmatics: there is far more connotation (pragmatics, cf. Allan 2007) than denotation (semantics)—which is limited to P1. P1 is incorrect in that *nigger* does not only denote African Americans or even of somebody of black African descent but someone not white as, for instance, Burmese (27 times in Orwell 1935), Australian Aborigines (18 times in Gunn 1983 [1908]), Asian Indians (four times in Forster 1924), Native American (Apache) (once in Abbey 1980: 75). Of the connoted properties in Croom's definition, only one, P5, is positive, although P9 is partially positive: 'survivor, tough'. P1 is neither positive nor negative. All the others are derogatory or potentially so. Asim (2007: 85) lists in a glossary of disdainful expressions for his race: 'beastlike, depraved, inferior, childlike, menacing, lazy, small-brained' and there are quotations that confirm these. Furthermore Asim (2007: 146) quarries from Reddick (1944) the following properties found in portrayals of African Americans in media, films, and books; I group these into three classes: positive, somewhat dismissive, and negative. Positive: natural-born cook, natural-born musician, perfect entertainer, sexual superman, superior athlete. Somewhat dismissive: chicken and watermelon eater, devoted servant, happy slave, unhappy non-white, superstitious churchgoer, uninhibited expressionist. Negative: corrupt politician, irresponsible citizen, mental inferior, petty thief, savage African, social delinquent, vicious criminal, razor and knife toter.

What are we to make of such data? Well, etymologically *nigger* derives from Latin *niger* 'black, dark, unlucky' which extended in late Latin to 'black person'—

that lives on in English *Negro*, which is typically orthophemistic. Until the late eighteenth century *nig(g)er* was synonymous with *Negro* (see the *OED*); thereafter and until the second half of the twentieth century the term *nigger* was essentially a colloquial synonym for *Negro*. Because it was colloquial it was more appropriate for use as a racial slur than was *Negro*—though use of the latter was no guarantee against racism. Although Charles Darwin (1809–1892) was not spitefully racist he was reflecting the racial stereotyping of his era when he wrote of the cultural superiority of Caucasians and the evolutionary proximity of Negroes and Australian Aborigines to gorillas (Darwin 1871: 201).¹⁵ The same attitude was almost certainly shared by writers like Gunn (1983 [1908]), Forster (1924), and Orwell (1935) and certainly of the relevant characters in the novels by Forster, Orwell, and Abbey (1980). In all of these cases, *nigger* is used of people looked upon as from the servant class to whom the speaker is ipso facto a social superior.¹⁶ Interesting in that regard is the fact that in the film *Pulp Fiction* (1994, Tarantino 1999) when the black gangster millionaire Marsellus hands white boxer Butch a bribe to go down in the fifth round of his bout with Floyd Wilson (black) he says “You’re my nigger”, which is not in the published script.

MARSELLUS: [...] How many fights d’you think you got in you anyway? Mhm? Two? Boxers don’t have an Old Timers Place. You came close but you never made it. And if you were gonna make it, you would’ve made it before now. (*Holds out the envelope of cash to Butch, but just out of his reach.*) You’re my nigger. [0:22:45]

BUTCH: Certainly appears so.

Here is an exquisite social irony in that (within C1) a powerful African American is calling a white man ‘my nigger’ invoking the sense of *nigger* as an inferior and servant, Croom’s property P3.

The lexicon entry for *nigger* must take the dysphemistic uses as most salient, (20a), which explains why it is regularly euphemized to *the N-word* and *n—*, etc.

- (20) (a) $\forall(x)[nigger(x) \rightarrow \lambda(y)[HUMAN(y) \ \& \ \neg WHITE-RACE(y) \ \& \ SOCIAL-INFERIOR(y)](x)]$
 $\rightarrow_{cred0.9} OF-AFRICAN-DESCENT(x) \ \text{IF IN C1 \ \&OR C2 } \lambda(y)[HUMAN(y) \ \& \ \neg WHITE-RACE(y) \ \& \ SOCIAL-INFERIOR(y)](x) \ \& \ \text{IN C1 \ \&OR C2 } DYSPHEMISTIC_{0.9}(s) \ \text{ELSE}$
- (b) $\forall(x)[nigger(x) \rightarrow \lambda(y)[HUMAN(y) \ \& \ AFRICAN-AMERICAN(y) \ \& \ LIKE-MINDED(y)](x)]$
 $\rightarrow_{cred0.8} MALE-GENDER(x) \ \& \ \text{IN C1 \ \&OR C2 } DYSPHEMISTIC_{0.1}(s) \ \rightarrow_{cred \ 0.9} AFRICAN-AMERICAN(s)$

Since Croom’s definition ignores the use of *nigger* as an expression of camaraderie, (20)(b), my (20a) replaces his ten properties with this single sense which

¹⁵I am drawing attention to the different interpretations made in C2, circa 1870, and C3, circa 2018.

¹⁶It is not irrelevant that their written works show that Forster and Orwell regarded themselves as socially and intellectually superior to the working classes who were not their ‘sort’. Likewise, there is evidence from his writings that Edward Abbey felt similarly socially and intellectually superior to ‘Indians’, i.e. Native Americans.

gives rise to the necessary implication *subservient*(*x*) and to connotations such as *dangerous*(*x*) from the prejudice that social inferiors are often criminals and to *lazy* (*x*) from the prejudice that social inferiors are typically indolent. Still dwelling on (20a): a *nigger*(*x*) who is not subservient is uppity, revolutionary, unmannerly, upsetting the status quo as *s* perceives it, and therefore dangerous. Furthermore, if a *nigger*(*x*) is not lazy, *s*'s prejudice is not fulfilled, leading *s* to feel insecure. Hence, slurs like *nigger* are socially destructive to both *s* and *x*.

9.5 Finale

I have claimed that all of *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger* are slurs, i.e. that they are saliently dysphemistic even though each of them can be used in the spirit of camaraderie. One matter not hitherto considered is what might motivate the choice of one rather than another where *x* has the potential to be labelled by any one of them. Let's suppose that the same black woman, *x*, can be slurred as either a *bitch* or a *cunt* by a speaker she aggravates whom, for the sake of argument, we shall assume is female herself. The principal difference is that *bitch* focuses on the target being female whereas *cunt* focuses on the target being a reviled object. If *x* were addressed by the insult *nigger*, it would most likely be because the focus is on her skin colour, although it could be, if rarely, because *s* is assuming her own social and intellectual superiority to *x*.

In this chapter, I have examined the semantics and pragmatics of three slurs and suggested model lexicon entries for them. The formalisms I have utilized are only of relevance in seeking to cover all necessary bases. Provided these can be covered in any other formal system, it is of no consequence what that may be, say, Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Goddard 2015, 2017; Stollnow 2002; Waters 2012), Discourse Representation Theory (Kamp and Reyle 1993), Default Semantics (Jaszczolt 2005), and so on. The formal terms I have used in the lexicon entries are the following:

¬; ∀; ∃; □; ◇; λ; →; ↔; +>; &; &OR; XOR; **s**; **h**; *x*, *y*, *z*; IN; C1; C2; IF; ELSE;
 ► colloquially; ► properly; AFRICAN-AMERICAN; AGGRAVATED; AGGRAVATING; ANIMATE; CANINE;
 DYSPHEMISTIC; FEMALE-GENDER; FEMALE-SEX; GENITALS; HUMAN; LIKE-MINDED; MALE-GENDER;
 MALE-SEX; MISOGYNISTIC; OF-AFRICAN-DESCENT; PART-OF; REVILED; SOCIAL-INFERIOR; WHITE-RACE

All of these are, I hope, easily interpreted in the context of this chapter. It should be obvious that there is no claim that these are semantic primes; nor do I claim that they are all universally applicable, although I anticipate that their translation equivalents are applicable to very many languages.

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