This is the accepted manuscript of the article, which has been published in *Synthese*.
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-019-02473-6

Generic Inferential Rules for Slurs

Dummett and Williamson on Ethnic Pejoratives

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Received: date / Accepted: date

Abstract Michael Dummett has proposed an influential analysis of the meaning of ethnic and racial slurs based on inferential rules. Timothy Williamson, however, finds the analysis problematic. It does not seem to explain how slurs are actually used. Williamson's challenge for the inferentialist account of slurs has not gone unnoticed. In this article, I first discuss the debate between the inferentialists and Williamson. I argue that the inferentialist responses concentrate on the wrong issue and the real issue in Williamson's challenge is left untouched. I go on to specify his challenge and offer a solution to the challenge. The solution rests on the idea that the inferential rules for slurs involve a generic component.

Keywords ethnic and racial slurs · inferential rules · harmony · conservative extension · generics

1 Introduction

Michael Dummett has proposed an influential analysis of the meaning of ethnic and racial pejoratives or slurs based on inferential rules. His analysis has been widely accepted in the inferentialist circles. Timothy Williamson, on the other hand, finds the analysis problematic. It does not seem to explain how slurs are actually used which is somewhat ironic because inferentialism has strong affiliations with the view that meaning is closely connected with the use of language. His challenge for inferentialism has received a lot of attention among the inferentialists.

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I argue that the dialogue between Williamson and the inferentialists needs clarification as it seems to me that the inferentialist responses concentrate on the wrong issue. Williamson poses two challenges on the inferentialist account of slurs. I call these challenges *learnability of slurs* and *determination of reference*. The challenges can be distinguished by the perspectives they take on the understanding of slurs. First one takes the perspective of non-xenophobic understanding. Inferentialism places a lot weight on the use of language and, according to inferentialism, to use language is to know language. The immediate question with slurs is how can a non-xenophobic speaker know the meaning of a slur if she never uses it. The inferentialist responses tend to concentrate on this issue. However, I will argue that Williamson's real challenge lies elsewhere. At the heart of the real challenge is the xenophobic perspective on the understanding of slurs as Williamson's second challenge claims that Dummett's proposal clashes with the actual xenophobic use of slurs. That is, Williamson argues quite effectively that Dummett's inferential rules for slurs do not determine the reference of slurs in such a way that they could accommodate the *xenophobic* use of language. Finally, I go on to formulate rules of inferences which accomplish two things. They accommodate the xenophobic use of slurs and they tell what is bad about slurs. This is done by adding a generic element to the inferential rules.

2 Inferentialism and harmony

Williamson characterises the debate between referentialism and inferentialism by saying that the difference is the direction of explanation. Referentialism starts with referential semantics "which is then used to explain the inference rules for the language, [...] as those which preserve truth". Inferentialism, on the other hand, starts off with the inferential rules "which are then used to explain its referential semantics, [...] as semantics on which the rules preserve truth". He adds that these directions cannot be combined because it would cause an obvious circularity in the explanation. (Williamson 2009, 137.)

For the present purposes, the concentration is on the inferentialist direction because we are investigating the plausibility of the inferentialist account of slurs. Arthur Prior presented a famous problem for inferentialism. 'Tonk' is a sentential connective with the following introduction and elimination rules:

$$\text{Tonk-I: } \frac{\text{A}}{\text{A tonk B}} \qquad \text{Tonk-E: } \frac{\text{A tonk B}}{\text{B}}$$

Tonk-I is the standard introduction rule for disjunction and Tonk-E is the standard elimination rule for conjunction. Let us suppose that A is true and B is false, then it is obvious that the rules for 'tonk' still allow the above inferences and it is clear that the rules for 'tonk' are not truth-preserving. (Prior 1960, 38-39.) The most obvious way to rule out 'tonk' is an appeal to semantics (of propositional logic): Since B is false but the rules for 'tonk' allow to infer that B is true anyway, the rules for 'tonk' must be rejected. This response however

does not stay faithful to inferentialism. It appeals to semantics to rule out the bad inferential rule. In order to stay faithful to the inferentialist direction of explanation, the inferential rules must rule out bad semantics, not the other way round.

In an equally famous response, Nuel Belnap showed that tonk-like connectives can be ruled out in a way that stays faithful to inferentialism. He sets a constraint on the inferential practice as he introduces the notion of conservative extension. It is a restriction on the extended syntactic consequence relation. It has to be the same as the consequence relation of the original language. The notion of conservative extension is available to the inferentialists since it is a restriction on the syntactic consequence relation making no appeal to semantics. (Williamson 2009, 138-139 and Belnap 1962, 130-134.) In the present case, the notion of conservative extension allows us to rule out 'tonk'. If we start with the part of the language that does not contain the connective 'tonk', then by adding 'tonk' to the language we get a non-conservative extension of the language. Dummett's notion of harmony is very close to Belnap's conservative extension. Harmony can be defined with the help of conservative extension. When the set of new rules produce a conservative extension of the language, it can be said that the set of rules (the new and the old ones) are in harmony with each other. Harmony requires that when the introduction rule specifies the conditions for the application of the target expression, the introduction rule has to match the consequences of applying the rule that are specified by the elimination rules (Williamson 2009, 145). The elimination rule can unpack only the information that the introduction rule packed in (Rumfitt 2000, 789). In the case of 'tonk', too much is unpacked. In distinction, the standard rules for conjunction are harmonious:

$$\text{\&-I: } \frac{\text{A} \qquad \text{B}}{\text{A \& B}} \qquad \text{\&-E(1): } \frac{\text{A \& B}}{\text{A}} \qquad \text{\&-E(2): } \frac{\text{A \& B}}{\text{B}}$$

The conditions for asserting "A & B" is that A is assertable and that B is assertable. When you eliminate the symbol '&' from "A & B", you are back in the starting point: A is assertable; B is assertable. These rules determine the meaning of the symbol '&'. The question of harmony between rules can be investigated with the notion of conservative extension. Rules are harmonious (non-harmonious) iff they produce a conservative (non-conservative) extension of the language.

3 Inferentialism and slurs

One might wonder, as Williamson does, whether 'tonk' is a realistic example. It is questionable whether 'tonk' represents a concept at all. It is fairly certain that no natural language contains a connective like 'tonk'. To borrow Graham Priest's phrase, it would surely explode the language to triviality. So at this point, one can ask whether there actually is any expression which genuinely stands for a concept but the use of which is defective in the sense that the

rules are non-harmonious. (Williamson 2009, 139.) Dummett anticipated this question and answered to it by referring to slurs. The conditions for the application of 'Boche' is that the target is German but the consequences of the application is that the target is "barbarious and more prone to cruelty than other Europeans". Dummett says the rules for 'Boche' are not harmonious just because the elimination rule produces a non-conservative extension of the language. (Dummett 1973, 454-455.) 'Tonk' and 'Boche' are analogous in the sense that both display non-harmonious inferential patterns. Even more importantly, Dummett ties the meaning of slurs, not only with the meaning of 'tonk' but also with the meaning of logical constant like '&'. Later (in Section 5), the connection between real logical connectives turns out be crucial as I argue that the connection between slurs and negation is more important than the connection between slurs and more or less fictional 'tonk'.

On the basis of Dummett's remark, Williamson proposes the following rules for 'Boche':

$$\text{Boche-I: } \frac{\text{x is German}}{\text{x is Boche}} \qquad \text{Boche-E: } \frac{\text{x is Boche}}{\text{x is cruel}}$$

Here the consequences of asserting "she is a Boche" do not match with the conditions for that assertion. That seems quite obvious. The elimination of 'Boche' does not get you back to the starting place. The invited conclusion is that slurs are the kind of concepts we are after. The use of slurs represent an actual case of a bad concept and the badness is seen in the way the xenophobes use language. At the same time, it must be pointed out that slurs clearly express concepts. It seems obvious that the xenophobes use sentences containing slurs to express complete thoughts. It seems equally obvious that we find the use of slurs offensive just because we do understand them, not because the use of slurs is gibberish to us. (e.g. Boghossian and Williamson 2003, 234.) The badness of slurs seems to be resting "on inadequate proof-theory" (Williamson 2009, 140). This claim certainly has a ring of over-intellectualisation but the important point is the connection between derogation and understanding. First, we can see the claim as a demand on the account of slurs. The account has to explain the understanding of slurs in a credible way. Secondly, the account has to explain the badness. In my view, Dummett's inferentialism aims to explain the badness in the following way. The term 'Boche' licences to attribute cruelty to its target without a single shred of evidence that the target actually is cruel. According to inferentialism, the meaning of a word is explicated with the inferential pattern. Hence, it is the meaning of 'Boche', not the actual evidence, that allows the inference from German to cruelty.

4 Williamson's challenges for inferentialism

Williamson poses two challenges for the inferentialist account of slurs. Both problems stem from the idea that the inference patterns governing 'Boche' are

non-harmonious. However, there is a difference in the perspectives the challenges take. One challenges the inferentialist account from the non-xenophobic perspective and the other challenges inferentialism from the xenophobic perspective. To label the challenges, let us call them:

(i) Non-xenophobic use: *Learnability of slurs*

(ii) Xenophobic use: *Determination of reference*

(i) challenges the non-xenophobic learnability of slurs. In short, inferentialism has affinities with the slogan "meaning is use" in the sense that the rules of language specify the use. The meaning of language is then learned by adopting the rules of language. As a result, the learnability challenge simply asks "how can a non-xenophobic person know the meaning of slurs, if she refuses to use them". Williamson phrases the problem in the following way:

> People who were never brought up or inclined to feel anti-German sentiment do not even have an underlying disposition to infer according to those rules which they inhibit as a result of training in political correctness, respect for proof-theoretic hygiene, or a general patina of civilization. [...] Nevertheless, they understand 'Boche' [...] (Williamson 2009, 141.)

(ii) challenges the inferentialist account from the perspective of xenophobic use. The idea is that the inferentialist procedure first establishes the inferential rules and then, on the basis of the rules, assigns reference to the terms in a truth-preserving way. Williamson's point is that in the light of this procedure, the proof-theoretic badness of 'Boche' becomes dubious. On the basis of Dummett's rules, 'Boche' is assigned a reference but the problem is that the assignment does not match the actual xenophobic use of 'Boche'. Hence, "anything like the account of 'Boche' on which inferentialists have actually relied badly misrepresents the meaning of pejoratives" (Williamson 2009, 148).

My understanding is that the role of (i) is just a preliminary remark before the real problem, the determination of reference. (Williamson 2009, 141-148.) However, the received view is that (i) is the main challenge for inferentialism. Here I will concentrate on Daniel Whiting's and Mark McCullagh's responses to Williamson. Both of them concentrate on (i). Whiting does discuss (ii) but he does not see it as a problem. Rather, he sees it as a virtue of the inferentialist account. McCullagh discusses only (i) and offers a solution only to learnability. (McCullagh mentions the determination challenge just to say that it is not the challenge he is focussing on.) Both of them see (i) as an instance of a general problem: How can a speaker who refuses to use a concept for whatever reason still know the meaning of the concept? (See McCullagh 2011, 293-319; Whiting 2008, 375-388; Anderson and Lepore 2013, 359-361; and also Hom 2010, 173-175.) In my view, Williamson is right when he emphasises (ii). In the following, I will discuss these two challenges. First, I will show that received view has been concentrating on (i). I will also give an outline of a solution based on McCullagh's work. However, the main point is that this solution does not solve (ii). When the determination of reference is seen from the xenophobic

perspective, it poses a genuine problem for inferentialism. I then go on to propose a solution to this challenge. The solution rests on a contention that the inferential rules for slurs involve a generic component. This not only solves Williamson's main challenge but also coheres with the nature of xenophobia and racism.

5 Learnability of slurs

5.1 Whiting on non-conservative extension

In his response to Williamson, Whiting concentrates on the learnability challenge. He thinks that the problem inferentialism encounters concerning the determination of reference is not a problem at all. Rather, it is a virtue. The challenge of determination of reference is a consequence of the non-conservative extension of slurring language and Whiting diagnoses the problem of non-conservative extension in the following way:

> An extension of the language is conservative if and only if one cannot use the new vocabulary to derive any statements in the original vocabulary that could not already be derived using the original vocabulary. More informally, the problem is that non-conservative rules for the use of an expression clash with the meanings of existing expressions or, rather, the rules governing their employment. The novel rules 'clash' in the sense that, when added to the established rules, they lead to contradiction. As a result, the extended language is inconsistent. (Whiting 2008, 376)

According to Whiting, the point with concepts like 'Boche' is that the governing inferential patterns produce contradictions. The novel rules 'clash' with the original rules. (I suppose that the technical term for the 'clash' of rules is non-harmony.) The non-conservative extension is a definite sign of this as "the extended language is inconsistent". Whiting goes on to explain how this is then reflected by the use of concepts like 'Boche'. Assume that original language L_{or} does not contain the term 'Boche' and then you add the term to the language thereby forming extended language L_{ex}. In this case, extended L_{ex} is inconsistent with respect to the original L_{or}. Whiting illustrates:

> Suppose, for example, that Merkel was born in Germany and does not cause suffering with disregard. On this basis – given what one may assume to be among the established inferential rules for the employment of 'German' and 'cruel' – one infers 'Merkel is German and is not cruel.' However, by following Boche-introduction one may make the transition to 'Merkel is Boche and is not cruel,' and in turn Boche-elimination allows one to infer 'Merkel is cruel and is not cruel.' Hence, in such a way, the introduction of the Boche-rules to a Boche-free language leads to contradiction [...] (Whiting 2008, 379.)

Whiting thinks that there is a very close connection between 'tonk' and 'Boche'. Both produce contradictions. As a result, he is settled that the inferentialist framework does show what is wrong with slurring concepts like 'Boche'. It cannot be a good thing if the adding of a concept produces a contradiction as soon as it is added to the language. Given this, Whiting thinks that the main challenge is to explain how a bad concept like 'Boche' is part of natural language in the first place. According to Whiting, 'tonk' and 'Boche' differ in one important sense: 'Boche' is part of our language, 'tonk' is not. Just because 'tonk' is a bad concept, it is not part of our language. But 'Boche' *de facto* is part of our language. How is that possible? As Whiting says about inferentialism: "It is successful in the case of 'tonk' precisely because we want to banish it from the language, but it is of less help in the case of 'Boche' precisely because our language already contains it" (Whiting 2008, 380). The point is that Whiting does not see non-harmonious rules problematic. Quite the opposite, they explain what is bad about slurring concepts. The real problem is how can there ever be slurring concepts like 'Boche' in our language since they should be banished just because they are bad and all they do is create contradictions. According to Whiting, this turns the focus on the learnability of these bad concepts.

5.2 Specifying non-conservative extension

I do not agree with Whiting. His characterisation of the notion of conservative extension is somewhat inaccurate. An inconsistency is not the only sign of a non-conservative extension. To specify the non-conservative extension, you can first define a conservative extension between L_{or} and its extension L_{ex} as

$$\Gamma \vdash_{or} \mathrm{A} \equiv \Gamma \vdash_{ex} \mathrm{A}$$

This is enough to define a conservative extension. The consequence relations between the original language and the extended language match. On the basis of this, you can define the non-conservative extension as

(i) $\Gamma \vdash_{or} \mathrm{A} \not\equiv \Gamma \vdash_{ex} \mathrm{A}$

(ii) The theorems of L_{or} is a proper subset of the theorems of L_{ex}[1]

The definition simply states that the consequence relations between the original language and the extended language do not match and that the theorems,

[1] (i) and (ii) are together necessary and sufficient conditions for the non-conservative extension. An informal demonstration: Let the set of sentences of L_{or} be S_{or} = {A, B, C} and let the set of theorems of L_{or} be T_{or} = {A, B}. At the same time, let the set of sentences of L_{ex1} be S_{ex1} = {A, B, C, D} and the theorems of L_{ex1} be T_{ex1} = {A, B, D}. In this case, L_{ex1} is a *conservative* extension of the L_{or} as only (ii) is satisfied. Whereas, the extended language L_{ex2} with the set of sentences S_{ex2} = {A, B, C} and with a set of theorems T_{ex2} = {A, B, C} is a *non-conservative* extension of L_{or}. Because in L_{ex2} sentence C can be proven (C ∈ S_{ex2} & C ∈ T_{ex2}) and C is also a sentence but not a theorem of L_{or} (C ∈ S_{or} & C ∉ T_{or}), both (i) and (ii) are satisfied. The consequence relation of L_{ex2} does not match with the consequence relation of L_{or} and furthermore $T_{or} \subset T_{ex2}$.

i.e. proven sentences, of the original language is a proper subset of the theorems of the extended language. (Provability is of course relative to the inferential rules of the language.) The extension is non-conservative but, crucially, there need not be any inconsistencies between L_{or} and L_{ex}.

To see where exactly Whiting's characterisation goes wrong reveals an important point about the notion of conservative extension and, more importantly, it reveals a crucial point about the harmony constraint. 'Tonk' is a concept which is apt to produce a contradiction very quickly but in one very important sense that is beside the point. Everyone agrees that it is more or less a piece of fiction, no language actually contains 'tonk'. Strictly speaking, Whiting is right about 'tonk' but if one generalises from 'tonk' a general problem with non-harmonious rules, then you get too weak notion of harmony because it only rules out contradictions. In the next section, I will give an example of non-harmonious rules which surely do not create contradictions but the outcome is still non-conservative extension. Notably, I argue that ethnic slurs should be compared with my example below because from the xenophobic perspective, slurs do not create contradictions.

5.3 Dummett's criticism of classical negation

To see what harmony and the related notion of conservative extension are about, it is illuminating to go through the core points of Dummett's argument against classical logic (CL). The problem with CL, according to Dummett, is that the rules for negation are not harmonious. Intuitionistic logic (IL) and CL share the introduction rule for negation:

$$\neg\text{-I:}\quad \dfrac{\begin{array}{c}\mathrm{A}\\ \vdots\\ \bot\end{array}}{\neg\mathrm{A}}$$

The rule says that if A leads (with some unspecified proof procedure indicated by the dots) to absurdity ($\bot$), then infer $\neg$A. But after this, IL and CL go their separate ways. The intuitionistic elimination and the classical elimination rules are

$$\text{IL-}\neg\text{-E:}\quad \dfrac{\mathrm{A}\qquad \neg\mathrm{A}}{\bot} \qquad\qquad \text{CL-}\neg\text{-E:}\quad \dfrac{\neg\neg\mathrm{A}}{\mathrm{A}}$$

Given $\neg$-I, only IL-$\neg$-E is harmonious according to Dummett. In the inferentialist frame, an argument carries the proofs or the evidence of the premises to the conclusion but CL-$\neg$-E (or *double negation elimination*) does not do this. The assertion of $\neg\neg$A contains (according to the introduction rule) the evidence that it is consistent to assert A. However, the evidence for the consistency of A is not yet the proof of A (see e.g. Dickie 2009, 164-165). The point

is that the evidence is preserved in every step of the inference. If we take the rules for conjunction as an example, then whole procedure is captured by:

$$\dfrac{\begin{array}{cc}\Gamma & \Delta \\ \vdots & \vdots \\ \mathrm{A} & \mathrm{B}\end{array}}{\mathrm{A}\ \&\ \mathrm{B}}\ (\&\text{-I})$$

The introduction of the conjunction is ultimately justified with the premise sets Γ and Δ and the proof of those is carried via A and B to "A & B". At the same time, the warrants for Γ and Δ are sufficient warrants for the assertion of "A & B" but this is not the case with CL-¬-E. The rule needs the assumption of bivalence to go through. So when the classical rule suggests that one can infer A from ¬¬A, it is non-harmonious. Namely, it unpacks more than the introduction rule packs in. From this the discussion usually expands to a debate about the nature of truth. For the proponents of CL, truth is evidence-transcendent and CL-¬-E is saved with this realistic notion of truth. If realism is right about the *bivalent* nature of truth, then CL-¬-E does preserve truth. Whereas, the intuitionists adhere to a epistemically constrained notion of truth. Epistemically constrained notion of truth is captured by the slogan "all truths are knowable" meaning that there has to be a demonstration of truth. The demonstration of consistency is not yet such a demonstration. As far as the intuitionists are concerned, CL-¬-E is not truth preserving.[2]

The point can be put in the following way. CL is an extension of IL. That is, the set of theorems of IL is a subset of the set of theorems of CL. If it happened that there was a contradiction between IL and the extended part of CL, that would mean that CL itself is contradictory; but surely no intuitionist claims that CL is inconsistent. Rather, the accusation is that in CL the non-harmonious pair, ¬-I and CL-¬-E, does not preserve evidence.

It seems to me that Dummett's idea is to capture xenophobic language and also xenophobic thinking. To honour that aim, it is important to take xenophobic language and thinking at face value. An important point is that from the xenophobic perspective slurs do not create contradictions. The xenophobic incentive to use slurs is that the xenophobes already have a derogatory attitude towards the target. The xenophobes believe that Germans are cruel and 'Boche' provides a convenient way to express this belief. Hence, there is no contradiction between the xenophobe's previous beliefs and the consequence of using a slur. To me, this shows that the correct analogue with slurs is CL-¬-E, not 'tonk'. If this observation is correct, then Whiting's analysis of (ii) is incorrect. On the basis of the above discussion, we can say that the claim

[2] In his "Truth", Dummett lays out his criticism of CL on the basis of the nature of truth (Dummett 1978, 1-14) and continues the criticism in *Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (1991). Stig Alstrup Rasmussen and Jens Ravnkilde's "Realism and Logic" captures well the reasons why truth is important in understanding the debate between semantic realism and anti-realism (Rasmussen and Ravnkilde 1982, 379-437).

that slurs create contradictions is not a virtue of inferentialism as slurs do not create contradictions.

5.4 McCullagh on learnability

Before we turn to the main challenge which is the determination of reference, the question still remains: How do the non-xenophobic speakers learn 'Boche'? Admittedly, it is a challenge for inferentialism, even if not the most important one. Here I am relying on McCullagh's response to Williamson's challenge. His solution rests on the idea that Boche-I and Boche-E are not the only inferences involving 'Boche'. The non-xenophobic people can possess the concept of 'Boche' through other inferences. According to McCullagh, Boche-I and Boche-E rules "govern only a proper subset of the possible thought contents involving the concept 'Boche'". For example, Boche-I and Boche-E rules cannot tell what to infer from a belief that John thinks that Merkel is a Boche. (McCullagh 2011, 301.) Yet, the non-xenophobic speakers do make inferences on the basis of the belief that John thinks that Merkel is a Boche which clearly involves the concept 'Boche'. McCullagh distinguishes between *content-specifying* and *direct* use of concepts. Boche-I and Boche-E rules govern the direct application of the concept but direct application of the concept is by no means the only way to use a concept.

The non-xenophobic speakers learn 'Boche' with inferences related to content-specifying uses. A lingering question might still be whether the non-xenophobic users understand Boche-I and Boche-E rules. McCullagh thinks that even though it is not necessary to master Boche-I and Boche-E rules, it is necessary even for a non-xenophobic speaker to understand the role of Boche-I and Boche-E rules. That is, it is necessary to know that they govern the direct use of 'Boche'. However, the non-xenophobic speakers need not endorse any inferences governed by Boche-I and Boche-E. (McCullagh 2011, 303-304.) In sum, McCullagh's thoughts adequately explain how the non-xenophobic speakers can learn the concept 'Boche'. At the same time, McCullagh recognises the special role of Boche-I and Boche-E. Hence, his proposal does overcome Williamson's learnability challenge.

Although I do not think that learnability is the main issue with the inferentialist proposal, the challenge still deserves an answer. It needs an answer even in our present context as my generic proposal later does appeal to the non-harmonious rules for 'Boche'. It is just that I do not think Boche-I and Boche-E rules are the right non-harmonious rules. This becomes clear when we take the xenophobic use seriously.

6 Determination of reference

6.1 Xenophobic use

To see what Williamson's challenge (ii) really is, let us revisit the dispute between inferentialism and referentialism. The difference is in the order of explanation. Referentialism starts with semantics and determines the rules of inferences based on semantics. Inferentialism starts the other way round. It starts with the rules of inferences and semantics is determined on the basis of that as truth-preserving semantics. To illustrate, let us assume that certain inferential rules are already in place and truth-preserving semantics for that language is also determined. After this, a new term is introduced, say, expression E. It is then subject to new rules R(E). According to the inferentialist outlook, the procedure of assigning a reference for E could be one of two options. First, if an assignment X as the reference of E makes R(E) truth-preserving (and no other does), then E refers to X. Second case is this. If many different assignments all make R(E) truth preserving, then the reference of E is indeterminate between all these assignments. (Williamson 2009, 143-144 and 2003, 258.) According to Williamson, the second case applies to 'Boche'. The assignment of reference of 'Boche' is indeterminate and because of this indeterminacy the assignment of reference is not truth preserving. To emphasise, the point of these rules is to capture the *xenophobic* way of thinking. When it comes to xenophobic thinking, Whiting's previous point about Merkel is not effective. The xenophobes think that Merkel is cruel, just because she is German and when 'Boche' is introduced to the language, it provides a very handy way to express that thought. When you think about the uses of 'Boche', surely, at least the xenophobes think that the term refers, i.e. the xenophobes think that it refers to someone or to some set of people, namely to the Germans. The real crux of the discussion is that Williamson goes out to show that the rules do not accommodate the xenophobic use. The initial observation is this. Even the most persistent xenophobe (someone who thinks that all Germans are cruel) should find the rules unsatisfying. For the rules do not yield a determinate reference. Even the most persistent xenophobe thinks that the set of Germans is a subset of cruel people, but not the other way round. It is a rather safe assumption that the xenophobes do not think that the Germans are the only cruel foreigners. Yet the rules treat the set of cruel people and the set of German people symmetrically. The rules misrepresent the xenophobic mindset: The rules are truth-preserving in the case the reference is assigned to be the set of Germans *and* when the reference is assigned to be the set of cruel people. Because of this symmetry between the sets, the rules cannot explain why a xenophobe might say things like:

(1) Stalin was cruel as a Boche but he was not a Boche; he was Russian.

Boche-I and Boche-E rules assign the reference in such a manner that the extension includes Stalin since he clearly was cruel. But the xenophobes do not think that Stalin was a 'Boche', Stalin was Russian. Hence, the xenophobes

do not think that the reference of 'Boche' is indeterminate between two sets, the Germans and the cruel people. Rather, (1) shows that there is nothing indeterminate in the extension of 'Boche' in the xenophobic mind. The problem, according to Williamson, is that "Dummett gives no more weight to one of his rules than to other" but (1) demonstrates that the xenophobes emphasize the introduction rule, i.e. the tie between being a German and being a 'Boche' (Williamson 2009, 144). But even if Dummett pointed out which rule to emphasise, a mere emphasis would not solve the problem. The problem is that Dummett's rules do not match with the actual use because they do not provide a determinate reference.

6.2 Dilemma for Dummett

The obvious solution to the problem is to try to accommodate the actual use of language by harmonizing the inferential rules because harmonious rules yield a determinate extension. We can do this either by assigning the set cruel people as the extension or the German people. In the former case, we can take the existing E-rule and come up with a new I-rule:

$$\text{Boche-I*:}\ \frac{\text{x is cruel}}{\text{x is a Boche}} \qquad \text{Boche-E:}\ \frac{\text{x is a Boche}}{\text{x is cruel}}$$

The rules are harmonious but no progress has been made. The rules still badly misrepresent the extension of 'Boche'. The rules suggest that even Stalin was a 'Boche' because he was cruel. But he was not a 'Boche', he was Russian. (Williamson 2009, 145-147.) These rules completely betray the thought that the target is first and foremost the set of German people who are more prone to cruelty than your average European. In the latter case, we only take Boche-I rule and we come up with a new elimination rule which is harmonious with Boche-I:

$$\text{Boche-I:}\ \frac{\text{x is a German}}{\text{x is a Boche}} \qquad \text{Boche-E*:}\ \frac{\text{x is a Boche}}{\text{x is a German}}$$

The proposed rules are harmonious and together the rules determine the set of Germans as the extension of 'Boche'. The set of Germans and only the set of Germans makes the rules truth preserving. Williamson says that all the dictionaries he consulted do define 'Boche' in this way. They define 'Boche' as a German but highlight that it is derogatory. So at least the above rules satisfy lexicographer's intuition about slurs. Nevertheless, even these rules are far from satisfying. Just because the rules are now harmonious, they fail to explain what is bad about the slurs (bad in the proof-theoretic sense).

Williamson's point can be presented as a dilemma for inferentialism. *Either* the rules for 'Boche' are harmonious but then the inferentialist cannot explain what is so bad about slurs *or* the rules are non-harmonious but this mis-

represents the way the xenophobes actually use language. (Williamson 2009, 147.)

7 Generic proposal

7.1 Williamson's conjunctive proposal

Williamson's own proposal for the meaning of slurs relies on synonymity between slurs and their neutral counterparts. He offers a referentialist treatment of slurs according to which slurs and their neutral counterparts have the same intension (and hence they have the same extension) and the derogation is exposed with pragmatic means. According to Williamson, 'Boche' triggers a conventional implicature that the Germans are cruel. Crucially, the implicature does not affect the truth conditions of the original slurring statement. Whiting's solution to the learnability problem is that he agrees with Williamson, 'Boche' and 'German' mean the same. Whatever are the inferential rules for 'German', the same rules can be applied to 'Boche'. This certainly harmonizes the rules for 'Boche' but we are still left with the other horn of the dilemma. The inferential rules for 'Boche' no longer tell us what is so bad about 'Boche', as Whiting himself also points out. He solves the problem by separating linguistic normativity from moral normativity. To explain the meaning of 'Boche' is a linguistic challenge and the explanation for derogation is a moral issue. To put it a bit crudely, Whiting simply ignores Dummett's idea that there is something wrong with the inferential rules of 'Boche'.[3]

Dummett's claim is that the rules of inference should preserve evidence. Non-harmonious rules like CL-¬-E do not preserve evidence. Similarly and very obviously, the rules of 'Boche' do not preserve evidence. The term 'Boche' allows the inference from German to cruelty. Thereby, 'Boche' by-passes the usual methods for justifying your assertion. In general, the entitlement to say that someone is cruel comes from the *evidence* for the cruelty of that person. This is not the case with 'Boche'. It is the meaning of 'Boche' that licences the attribution of cruelty, not the evidence. In my view, this is Dummett's insight: The meaning of 'Boche' by-passes the usual demands for backing up your claims. However, the real problem with the inferentialist account is that the rules for 'Boche' do not correspond with the actual xenophobic use of language. The xenophobes just do not think the way the rules for 'Boche' suggest. I aim to come up with rules for 'Boche' which preserve Dummett's insight and also to overcome the current problem with the determination of reference. In other

[3] This should not be taken as criticism of Whiting. It seems to me that Whiting's solution resembles Robert Brandom's proposal. Brandom rejects the harmony constraint. According to him, the requirement of harmony is not a realistic constraint on natural language. On Brandom's proposal slurs are bad because they signify that the speaker endorses morally objectionable beliefs about the target. (Brandom 2000, 69-76.) However, in this paper, the aim is to outline a solution to challenge (ii) which honours the idea that the meaning of slurs does not preserve evidence.

words, the task is to overcome the dilemma: to accommodate the xenophobic use of slurs *and* to show why the use of slurs is a bad thing.

Before this, Williamson makes an interesting proposal in his "Blind Reasoning" (co-authored with Paul Boghossian). He says that you might suppose that "'Boche' refers to the conjunctive property of being both cruel and German" (Boghossian and Williamson 2003, 260). The xenophobes do not think that Stalin was a 'Boche' because he was cruel. 'Boche' is first and foremost German, not any cruel foreigner. The xenophobes do not think that 'Boche' is indeterminate between German people and cruel people. Williamson's new suggestion overcomes this problem as the exact rules for the conjunctive proposal are

$$\text{Boche-I(Con):}\ \frac{\text{x is German \& x is cruel}}{\text{x is a Boche}}$$

$$\text{Boche-E(Con):}\ \frac{\text{x is a Boche}}{\text{x is German \& x is cruel}}$$

These rules are obviously harmonious. Williamson says that the conjunctive proposal has the advantage that it counts

(2) Stalin was a Boche.

as false and

(3) Stalin was not a Boche.

as true, just like the xenophobes think. However, Williamson claims that the conjunctive rules are disadvantageous "since it counts 'Lessing was a Boche' literally false and 'Lessing was not a Boche' as literally true" (Boghossian and Williamson 2003, 261). The conjunctive property does not apply to Lessing because Lessing was kind, not cruel. I agree that the conjunctive rules are not satisfying but for a different reason. The proposed rules cannot explain why the non-xenophobic speakers object to the use of slurs. The conjunctive analysis fixes the reference of 'Boche' to a subset of Germans, namely to a set of Germans who are cruel. Needless to say, there are cruel Germans, just like there are cruel Brits, cruel Swedes and cruel Frenchmen. When the xenophobe applies 'Boche' to one of these cruel Germans, it seems that the application is appropriate. Importantly, a non-xenophobic speaker cannot object to a xenophobic assertion

(4) Himmler was a Boche.

because the xenophobe is right: Himmler was German and cruel. The conjunctive analysis creates a contrast between (4) and (5):

(5) Lessing was a Boche.

According to Boche-I(Con) and Boche-E(Con), (4) is true and (5) is false. But there should not be any contrast between the statements, because slurs do

not derogate individuals but social groups. They derogate individuals only as members of a certain social groups. That is what is offensive about slurs. The personal merits or demerits are irrelevant. The upshot is that Williamson's proposal will not do as he himself points out. His contention is that this only makes his case against inferentialism stronger and in a certain sense it does. When the linguistic evidence concerning the xenophobic use is put together, it does support the idea that the reference of 'Boche' is the set of German people and only the German people. The previous evidence shows that the reference cannot be indeterminate between the set of German people and some other set. Now we have seen that it cannot be a subset German people either because then we would lose the explanation for the derogation associated with 'Boche'.

7.2 Inferential rules and the psychology of generics

However, Williamson has not exhausted the inferentialist resources. My proposal rests on Williamson's remark that the implicature which 'Boche' triggers is a generic sentence like "There is a tendency for Germans to be cruel" (Williamson 2009, 151). This is a recognised feature of slurs. For example, Stefano Predelli points out that the xenophobes hold that every typical 'Boche' is cruel (Predelli 2010, 180). Furthermore, Dummett's original rules may also include a generic element. His original rules allowed the inference that Germans are prone to cruelty which seems to be a generic formulation. In any case, what needs to be explained is how exactly the generic element helps to overcome Williamson's challenge. First, I propose to incorporate the generic element directly to the inferential rules in the following way:

$$\text{Boche-I(Gen):}\ \frac{\text{x is German}}{\text{x is a Boche}}$$

$$\text{Boche-E(Gen):}\ \frac{\text{x is a Boche}}{\text{x is German and Germans are typically cruel}}$$

More formally, Boche-E can be formulated as follows:

$$\text{Boche-I(Gen):}\ \frac{\text{x is German}}{\text{x is a Boche}}$$

$$\text{Boche-E(Gen):}\ \frac{\text{x is a Boche}}{\text{x is German \& Gen x [German(x)] [cruel(x)]}}$$

The formalisation of the generic sentence is pretty standard way to represent the structure of generic sentences. 'Gen' is a generic operator comparable to quantifiers, but unlike quantifiers, it does not specify the exact relationship between the sets in the scope of the operator. In natural language the generic operator can be substituted with terms like 'usually', 'generally' or 'typically'. (see Leslie 2008, 1-6.) There are two distinguishing features to generics: We assent to them and the assent holds in the face of counterexamples. The curious thing about generics is that the portion of individuals needed to confirm the

generic varies wildly. Take the generic "Tigers are striped". Here the portion of relevant individuals is very high. Only a tiny portion of tigers are stripeless. In "Ducks lay eggs" the portion of relevant individuals is around 50 percent, since only female ducks lay eggs. This is still pretty high when it is compared to "Mosquitoes spread West Nile virus". In actuality, less than 1 % of mosquitoes spread the virus. Yet, we tend to assent to the sentence. The study of generics usually takes a semantic approach. The semantic views aim to come up with truth conditions for "Ducks lay eggs", "Mosquitoes spread West Nile virus" and "Tigers are striped". The truth conditions would then confirm the sentences as true in a compositional manner despite the variation in the number of relevant individuals. This points to an obvious difficulty concerning Boche-I(Gen) and Boche-E(Gen). "Germans are typically cruel" is not true. Given the two-fold goal set for the view, to accommodate the xenophobic use and to explain what is bad about slurs, the semantic view will not do because it cannot accommodate the xenophobic use. According to Williamson, this can be done only by assigning the set of Germans as the reference of 'Boche' but the semantic interpretation of generics results in interdeterminacy of reference. Boche-I(Gen) fixes the reference to the set of Germans but Boche-E(Gen) determines the reference to an empty set since the conjunction in Boche-E(Gen) is false. The Boche-I(Gen) and Boche-E(Gen) are not truth-preserving, according to the semantic approach. Sarah-Jane Leslie proposes an alternative approach to generics. Leslie is sceptical whether any semantic view can explain the puzzle of generics.[4] She proposes a psychological approach instead. She hypotheses that generics can be explained with psychological mechanism of generalisation and "this mechanism ought to be an efficient information gathering mechanism, since it is our most basic and immediate means of obtaining information about categories" (Leslie 2007, 383-384; see also 2008, 18-23).

In my view, the psychological view of generics yields the material to overcome the dilemma but first we need some further details concerning Leslie's proposal. The semantic views hold that the key to generics is to give an analysis for the 'Gen' operator. This would then yield semantic truth conditions for individual generics. Against this, Leslie first admits that "Tigers are striped" should be represented as "Gen x [Tiger(x)] [Striped(x)]" but she refrains from any further analysis of generics. There are no *semantic* truth conditions for generics in the sense that the 'Gen' operator would contribute compositionally to the truth conditions of "Tigers are striped". Instead she offers much looser "worldly truth-makers" for generics. She says that the mechanism of generalisation involves three types of generalisations, each tracking a different type of truth-maker in the world. First, there is a characteristic dimension. The mechanism aims to identify regularities in the world. It seeks characteristic features of kinds. Animals of the same kind tend to make similar noises.

[4] She is, first of all, sceptical whether the semantic views can actually handle the variation in generics but her main argument against the semantic view is what she calls *asymmetry in complexity*. Her point is that the semantic explanations tend to be very complex but small infants understand generics perfectly well and they do this before they understand, say, universal quantification. (Leslie 2007, 380-383 and 2008, 19-28.)

Leslie mentions that reproduction is a characteristic dimension. Hence, "Ducks lay eggs" is true because characteristically ducks lay eggs and the counterexamples are only negative. That is, the male ducks do not exhibit alternative ways of reproduction. Secondly, majority generics are true simply iff the majority of the kind possesses the attributed feature. For example, "Tigers have stripes" is true because the majority of tigers do have stripes. Finally, the mechanism registers and generalizes information that is striking. Leslie says that the striking feature is often horrific or appalling. Hence, generics like "Mosquitoes spread West Nile disease" and "pitbulls maul children" are considered to be true because both attribute a pretty horrific property to the kind. They are considered true even though only a tiny portion of mosquitoes actually spread the disease and even though pitbulls rarely maul anyone. Still, the striking feature generalisation often acts as a good predictor of a property which might pose a threat to the agent. Leslie also mentions that the erroneous generalisation "Muslims are terrorists" is most likely a product of the striking feature generalisation. (Leslie 2007, 383-386.) This remark pretty much settles the question of what type of generalisation "Germans are cruel" is. Leslie says that even though only a small portion of mosquitoes carry the virus, the virus-free mosquitoes are still disposed to carry the virus (Leslie 2007, 385). Similarly, the xenophobes might think that even though not all Germans exhibit the signs of cruelty, they are still disposed to act in a cruel way.[5] Leslie says that the psychological mechanism of generalisation is closely connected to psychological essentialism. According to psychological essentialism people tend to believe that things have an internal essence which makes them the things they are (Medin and Ortony 1989, 183). Leslie has argued that psychological essentialism can have pernicious effects concerning social kinds (Leslie 2017, 393-421). It can lead to generalisations like "Germans are cruel" and "Muslims are terrorists". Importantly, the worldly truth-makers do not support the truth of these generalisations.

At this point, it is worth mentioning a caveat. The role of the generic component is to help to overcome the dilemma posed by Williamson. It does not explain derogation. Without a doubt, the added generic component explains aspects of racism and xenophobia well. For example, the rules explain why the xenophobes can say things like

(6) She's a Boche but she's not cruel; she's one of the good ones.

The xenophobes are usually willing to make exceptions. The generic nature might also explain the persistency of xenophobic and racist beliefs as the racist beliefs are not affected by obvious counterexamples. However, the derogation associated with slurs still stems from the attribution of a negative stereotype to the target. In general, the views of slurs can be divided on the basis of the nature of derogation. Some views hold that derogation is based on a negative

[5] If 'x is prone to cruelty' is just another way of saying that x is disposed to cruelty, then Dummett's original proposal does indeed have a generic component.

stereotypical conception.[6] So far, I have taken this for granted. Other views hold that derogation is not based on any stereotype. Rather, derogation is based on the expression of a negative attitude towards the target. For example, the meaning of 'Boche' is something like "Boo the Germans!". The source of derogation is a non-propositional attitude.[7] Both views have virtues. As Adam Sennet and David Copp point out in a recent paper, in some cases derogation does stem from stereotypes. This is apparent in many slurring verbs. For example, in the verb 'to gyp' derogation very obviously derives from the stereotypical conception that associates swindling to Romani people and in 'to throw a Paddy' derogation derives from the stereotypical conception that the Irish are prone to tantrums. On the other hand, Sennet and Copp argue that the competency in 'Frog' need not include any knowledge of stereotypes. The xenophobe can simply ventilate his, perhaps irrational, dislike of the French and yet be a competent user of 'Frog'. (Sennet and Copp 2019, 1-22.) However, I do not see these as mutually exclusive alternatives. In order to be competent, the speakers need to know only that 'Frog' allows them to express hostility towards the French. However, it seems to me that the linguistic fact that 'Frog' allows to express the speaker's general hostility towards the French stems from the meaning of 'Frog' which can still include the attribution of a negative stereotype.

7.3 The reference of 'Boche'

At last, we get to see how the generic proposal contributes to the task of overcoming the dilemma. There are two relevant questions: Are the rules harmonious and what is the reference of 'Boche'? First question has a straightforward answer as the proposed rules are non-harmonious rules since Boche-E(Gen) allows to infer that Germans are typically cruel on the basis of &-E rule but the Boche-I(Gen) rule does not allow that.[8] The Boche-E(Gen) unpacks more than the Boche-I(Gen) packs in. The current construal of generics aims to come up with inferential rules for 'Boche' which assign the set of Germans as the reference. I think the developed generic rules for 'Boche' achieve this. Together Boche-I(Gen) and Boche-E(Gen) determine the extension of 'Boche' to be the set of Germans because, and very crucially, the generic element does

[6] A well-known defense of the stereotype view is Christopher Hom's view (Hom 2008, 416-440). His (and Robert May's joint) view is discussed below. Lynne Tirrell has discussed derogation and stereotypes from an inferentialist standpoint. (Tirrell 1999, 41-79, especially 51-56).

[7] Robin Jeshion has defended the non-propositional view forcefully and has argued against the stereotype view equally forcefully (Jeshion 2013a, 307-335 and 2013b, 314-329).

[8] Interestingly, Leslie says that since she does not give any semantic analysis of 'Gen', her view does not predict any semantically valid inferences involving 'Gen'. She thinks that this is a virtue because inferences involving generics are notoriously difficult. The only kind of inferences she accepts are the kind of inferences which appeal to rules of inferences. For example, "Birds fly & tigers are striped $\vdash$ Birds fly" is valid according to Leslie because it appeals, not to the meaning of 'Gen', but to &-E rule. (Leslie 2007, 400.)

not have any semantic consequences. On Leslie's psychological view of generics "Germans are typically cruel" does not have a contribution in assigning a reference to 'Boche'. However, since the rules are non-harmonious, we can hold on to the claim that there is something proof-theoretically wrong with slurs. Most importantly, the rules do not preserve evidence. The meaning of 'Boche' licences the claim that the Germans are typically cruel, without any evidence for the cruelty of Germans.

I have maintained that Williamson's insight is that if you want to accommodate the xenophobic use of 'Boche', then you have to assign the set of Germans as the reference of 'Boche' but then it could be asked why do you want to accommodate the xenophobic use of slurs. After all, the users are xenophobes and racists. Christopher Hom and Robert May take this road. They argue that the content of 'Boche' is something like 'x ought to be the target of a negative moral opinion because of being German'. Needless to say, no one deserves a negative evaluation on the basis of ethnicity. Hence, unnegated slurring sentences are systematically false. They also claim that this makes xenophobes and racists at least partially incompetent speakers. (Hom and May 2013, 297.) The very fact that the xenophobes think that 'Boche' refers to the Germans is a sign of linguistic incompetence. I disagree with this.[9] The xenophobes are wrong about world but they are very capable of expressing their erroneous and hateful thoughts concerning the Germans and the meaning of 'Boche' gives the means to express these thoughts. They are competent just like classical logicians are competent speakers despite the fact that they adhere to classical negation. That is why we need to take the xenophobic use seriously.

8 Conclusion

Williamson challenges Dummett's inferential view of slurs by revealing two problems with it. Although both challenges concern the understanding of slurs, an essential observation concerns the perspectives. The learnability challenge takes a non-xenophobic perspective. The responses to Williamson's challenges

[9] Jeshion has argued effectively against Hom and May's view. First, Hom and May think that a sentence like "Lessing is not a Boche" is not only true (since no one is a Boche) but it is also an appropriate sentence because they think that the sentence is an instance of educational use. Jeshion then asks what about "Churchill is not a Boche. He is a Limey". The utterance manages to derogate the Germans and the British at the same time but Hom and May's view cannot explain the derogation since "Churchill is not Boche" is true. (Jeshion 2013b, 316.) The anonymous referee pointed out that my view has the advantage that it makes the right prediction concerning negated slurring sentences: "Max is not a Boche" is ambiguous and my view can explain the ambiguity. It is unclear which conjunct in "not(Max is German & the Germans are typically cruel)" the speaker is aiming to deny. Admittedly, the prediction of ambiguity relies again on the distinction between the syntactic and the semantic side. The ambiguity is on the syntactic side because the conjunction is the result of Boche-E rule. Furthermore, the prediction requires that the relevant sentential operators, conjunction and negation, are interpreted in the inferentialist spirit without any appeal to semantics. When we move on to semantics, the ambiguity disappears since the reference is unambiguously the set of German people.

tend to concentrate on this issue. However, I think that the real challenge is the determination of reference. I believe that this is also Williamson's contention as he clearly concentrates on the determination of reference. I go on to offer a solution to the main challenge by coming up with inferential rules that can accommodate the actual xenophobic use of slurs.

The proposed inferential rules for slurs include a generic component. As a consequence of this, the proposed rules for 'Boche' are truth-preserving if and only if the assignment of reference is the set of German people. This is how the xenophobes use 'Boche'. At the same time, the rules honour Dummett's idea that 'Boche' does not preserve evidence as the rules allow to attribute cruelty to the Germans without any evidence.

Acknowledgements I thank the anonymous referees for their invaluable suggestions and comments. While visiting LOGOS research group, my discussions with Esa Díaz-León and also with Adam Sennet turned out to be very helpful. I also thank Peter Sutton and Mark Textor for their comments on earlier versions of the paper. Kuisma Keskinen did invaluable proof-reading. Most of all, I thank Chris Hughes. Much of the ideas developed here originate in discussions with Chris. The work has been supported by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation.

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