Pejoration

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Volume 228

Pejoration
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Preface

This volume brings together papers treating a range of theoretical and empirical aspects of pejoration as a linguistic phenomenon. Most of the articles are based on presentations given at the workshop "Pejoration", organised by Jörg Meibauer, as part of the 36th Annual Meeting of the German Linguistic Society (DGfS) at Philipps-Universität Marburg, 5–7 March 2014. Some papers are additional contributions invited to complement the others with further theoretical and empirical perspectives.

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Mainz and Potsdam, January 2016
Rita Finkbeiner, Jörg Meibauer, and Heike Wiese

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Part III. Pejoration in different linguistic contexts

What is pejoration, and how can it be expressed in language?

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1. Introduction

In order to sketch a linguistic perspective on pejoration, let us start with some elementary assumptions. Generally, pejoration has to do with the speaker's evaluation of something as being bad. Pejoration is thus opposed to melioration, i.e., the speaker's evaluation of something as being good. For instance, if I say *This breakfast is awful*, this is a case of pejoration. And if I say *This breakfast is wonderful*, this is a case of melioration:[1]

(1) Pejoration: negative evaluation
    e.g., *This breakfast is awful.*

(2) Melioration: positive evaluation
    e.g., *This breakfast is wonderful.*

To our knowledge, there is not much systematic investigation of pejoration. In terminological dictionaries, you will find that pejoration is defined as a semantic property of verbal expressions triggering negative or derogatory connotations. Often, pejoration is characterized as a type of lexical semantic change. For instance, *notorious* once meant 'widely known' and now means 'widely and unfavourably known', as *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (Crystal 2010:340) points out. However, if you look into handbooks such as *Semantics. An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning* (Maienborn, Heusinger & Portner 2011/2012), you will be disappointed. Pejoration, so it seems, is not conceived of as a semantic object worth of in-depth investigation.

Yet there are two tendencies in recent linguistics that have fostered a renewed interest in pejoration. First, there has been a lively discussion of expressive meaning

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1. As related notions, we want to mention diminution and augmentation. Diminution relates to the speaker's evaluation as being small (or cute). Pejoration may be connected to diminution and melioration to augmentation (Jurafsky 1996).

since Potts's (2005) seminal work (cf. Gutzmann 2013). Second, there is a growing interest in the semantics and pragmatics of ethnic slurs in the context of recent debates about hate speech (Delgado & Stefancis 2004; Langton 2012; Langton, Haslanger & Anderson 2012; Maitra & McGowan 2012; Meibauer 2013a).

We assume that pejoration is associated with a cognitive attitude and thus part of a conceptual domain distinct from language. This attitude can be expressed through language and realized through linguistic means involving all grammatical levels, i.e., phonology (prosody), morphology (word formation), syntax, semantics and the lexicon, and it also relates to pragmatics (for instance, speech acts and implicatures). In what follows, we bring these different domains together in a short sketch that illustrates some central linguistic options and shows where the different contributions to the volume come in. A cautionary remark with respect to the pejorative examples used is in order: All examples are mentioned (for academic purposes), not used.

2.   Pejoration in grammar

2.1   Prosody

Intuitively, there is something as a pejorative tone. As with ironical tone (Voyer & Techentin 2010), there may be many prosodic elements constituting the impression of prosodic pejoration, e.g. accent, pitch, length, offset, etc. For instance, Chen, Gussenhoven and Rietveld (2004) were able to experimentally show that there is something like an unfriendly prosody and that this prosody is differently perceived by Dutch versus English speakers. Sendlmeier, Steffen and Bartels (this volume) show that pejorative prosody goes together with a monotonous speaking style and is accompanied by a deeper voice, little pitch changes, and a slower speech rate.

2.2   Word-formation

Pejorative meaning can be conveyed through morphological processes of compounding as well as derivation. For instance, in German we find cases of compounding where the non-head is pejorative (3) as well as cases where the head is pejorative (4) (cf. Meibauer 2013):

(3)   Compounding: Non-head is pejorative
sau- (*Saupreuße, sauschlecht*) ('sow Prussian', 'sow bad')
scheiß- (*Scheißreform, scheißegal*) ('shit reform', 'shit + irrelevant')

(4)   Compounding: Head is pejorative
-arsch (*Politikerarsch*) ('politician arse')
-dreck (*Evaluationsdreck*) ('evaluation filth')

In addition, we find pejorative meanings with heads that are proper names (e.g., male and female first names like *-heini*, *-suse* and surnames like *-huber*) or names denoting relatives (e.g., *Onkel* 'uncle', *Tante* 'aunt').

In German derivation, a number of affixes convey a pejorative flavour (Fleischer & Barz 2012), for instance *-erei* (*Lauf+erei* 'running around') and the circumfix *Ge-* ... *-e* (*Ge+red+e* 'gossip'). Dammel and Quindt (this volume) analyze the rise of the pejorative meanings of these affixes in more detail (cf. Dammel 2011; Harden 2003).

Another interesting case is English expletive insertion (Zonneveld 1984). In these cases, pejorative elements like *fucking, bloody, freaking*, etc. are inserted into words, thereby violating principles of regular word-formation (but observing phonotactics):

(5) Expletive insertion in English
  a. *un+fucking+believable* (also: *unbe+fucking+lievable*)
  b. *abso+fucking+lutely*

An addressee not acquainted with this type of "marginal" word-formation has to infer that the expressive element serves to intensify the meaning of its host. Thus, in *unfuckingbelievable*, the expressive element *fucking* intensifies the degree to which something is unbelievable; it does not have compound meaning, the constituents being *fucking* plus *unbelievable*.

The main problem with respect to derivational pejoration is that the pejorative meaning is not contributed by the suffixes in a uniform way (see also Fortin 2011). Not only is the word base of these lexemes often negatively evaluated, too, we also have cases in which the overall word-formation is not pejorative although the respective suffix occurs. Take a closer look at the following word-formations with *-ling* (Fleischer & Barz 2012: 217):

(6) Germ. *-ling*
  a. Verbal base: *Lehr+ling* 'apprentice', *Emporkömm+ling* 'upstart'
  b. Nominal base: *Lüst+ling* 'lecher', *Schreiber+ling* 'hack writer'
  c. Adjectival base: *Feig+ling* 'coward', *Schön+ling* 'young adonis';
                        but: *Fremd+ling* 'stranger', *Neu+ling* 'novice'

According to Fleischer and Barz (2012: 217), the word-formations with nominal base display a pejorative connotation (6b), and the ones with adjectival bases (6c) are said to be almost exclusively pejorative. However, the same suffix with verbal base (6a) needs not be pejorative at all, and also with the adjectival base, we find exceptions.

Another morphological domain that can be connected to pejoration is that of diminution. Diminutive formation is evaluative and can thus be linked to an expressive aspect: diminutives can bring with them positive as well as negative evaluations based on conceptual associations of small size with cuteness/care or insignificance.

The first, positive association is relevant for instance in the wide-spread use of diminutives in child-directed speech, but also in expressive language in other informal situations, e.g. in the diminution of interjections and such greeting particles as German *tschüssi* 'bye-DIM' or *shalömchen* 'shalom-DIM' (cf. Wiese 2006). The second, negative association supports a use in pejoration, e.g. in such lexicalized diminutives as German *Wehwehchen* 'ailment-DIM'. Dressler (1994: Ch. 3) captures these links by a metaphoric relation between a semantic feature [small] and a pragmatic speech act feature [non-serious] associated with diminutives.

In general, different processes of metaphor, metonymy, and implicature may be active in shaping the pejorative flavour in the diachronic emergence of pejorative morphemes, and there may be synchronic variation and different degrees of productivity involved. Khoo and Rhee (this volume) point to a range of potential cognitive motivations for the emergence of the pejorative meaning potential in Korean affixes.

2.3   Syntax

As an illustration for pejoration via syntactic means, let us look at two constructions:

(7)   a.   Engl. *Shm*-Reduplication: *Money, shmoney, that's all John ever thinks about.*   (Nevins & Grohmann 2004)
       b.   Germ. *Ich/du NP* ('I/you NP')   (d'Avis & Meibauer 2013)

The first case, *shm*-reduplication, is located at the border of word-formation and syntax. In this pattern, a lexical item (*money*) is followed by a modified copy (*shmoney*), and the combination of both elements signals a pejorative evaluation, namely dismissal. *Shm*-reduplication got into English via Yiddish, and a similar pattern, *m*-reduplication, is also found in Turkish. Interestingly, Turkish might be the source for the emergence of *m*-reduplication in another Germanic language, present-day German, where this pattern can be observed in multilingual urban youth language. Wiese and Polat (this volume) discuss this as an instance of constructional pejoration, together with another construction that might also be supported by Turkish-German language contact, namely the use of *Scherz* 'joke/fun/kidding' in the right sentence periphery, where it can trigger *depejoration* by cancelling the performative force of a preceding utterance.

Another example for pejoration based on syntactic constructions is (7b) above. The construction *Ich/du NP!* can be easily used to convey a pejorative attitude or to insult someone, e.g. by substituting *Idiot* ('idiot'), *Blödmann* ('fool'), etc. for NP. Note that there is a similar construction in Swedish (see d'Avis & Meibauer 2013). On closer inspection, the following aspects are relevant.[2]

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2.   For ease of exposition, we focus on *Du NP!*

1. *Ich/du-NP* constructions seem to appear more often in isolation, i.e., as a single speech act, than as an argument within a sentence.

(8) a. *Du   Idiot!   Du   Glückspilz!*
         You idiot!   You lucky man!
         'Stupid you! Lucky you!'

     b. *Du   Idiot   könntest   auch   besser   aufpassen!*
         You idiot   could   also   better   watch out

2. The NP-part of the *ich/du-NP* construction is more often an NP with expressive content than not.

(9) a. *Du   Idiot/Trottel/Arschloch!*
         You idiot/fool/asshole!

     b. *Du   Lehrer/Angestellter/Mensch!*
         You teacher/employee/human being!

3. In isolation, as well as within the sentence, *ich/du als NP* with expressive meaning is ruled out.

(10) a. *Du   Idiot!*
         You idiot!

     b. **Du   als   Idiot!*
         You as   idiot!

The crucial question is, then, whether the construction as such is associated with expressive content, or whether the expressive content comes about as a conversational implicature (see Rauh 2004; d'Avis & Meibauer 2013). The specific interpretation in (10a) does not fit into the pattern of an evaluative act, because it is presupposed that the addressee is an idiot. In contrast, the utterance *Du Lehrer!* in (9b) gives new information on the speaker's evaluative attitude. This is in line with Rauh's assumption that relevance and quantity play a role (or a maxim that requires that one should not tell what may be presupposed).

2.4 Lexicon

The lexicon contains many words that are associated with pejorative meaning (Havryliv 2003). A large class of such words are nouns but there are also other parts of speech that can express pejoration, for instance verbs and adjectives. Often we find pairs of lexemes, with one item being neutral, the other being pejorative, e.g.:

(11) *Mann – Sack*   man – sod (Brit.)
      Frau – Schlampe   woman – bitch
      Polizist – Bulle   police officer – pig
      Proletarier – Proll   proletarian – ?chav, yob...

(12) *Hund – Köter*   dog – cur
      Firma – Klitsche   firm – little rat shop
      Dorf – Kaff   village – backwater
      Fitness-Center – Mucki-Bude gym – muscles factory

Some of these words are synchronically isolated (e.g., *cur* or *Kaff*), but others also have non-pejorative usages with a meaning derived from different conceptual domains, for instance animals such as *Bulle* 'bull' or *pig* for police, or objects of social contempt, e.g. *bastard* or German *Hurensohn* 'whore's son' (cf. Koo & Rhee, this volume, for a detailed analysis of such links in Korean). These connections, and also the choice of targets for pejoration and hence the pool of pejorative words in general, follow (sub-) culture-specific patterns. As a result, it is often not easy to translate these words, as discussions on the internet impressively show (see ⟨www.leo.org⟩, equivalents for *Proll*).

Within a language, users can vary in their intuitions about application, say, of *Proll*, to a certain category of people, and pejorative associations can change rapidly, including reclaims, appropriations and possible reinterpretations of certain pejorations and the groups targeted by them (cf. Bianchi 2014). The use of *bitch* in some sub-cultures is probably such a case. In addition, 'political correctness', understood as the public feel that an expression is discriminating, may influence semantic change, for instance by replacing Germ. *Greis* ('old man') by *Senior* ('señior'), cf. Germann (2007).

Within the class of pejorative expressions targeting people, ethnic slur terms ('ethnophaulisms') are quite prominent and are studied from a historical and theoretical point of view (cf. Markefka 1999; Yeo 2001). There are some studies that present detailed analyses of specific pejorative terms, for instance Bering (1978) on Germ. *Intellektueller* 'intellectual', Kennedy (2002) on *nigger*, Althaus (2002) on Germ. *mauscheln* 'to fiddle', and Nunberg (2012) on *asshole*. So far, though, this is restricted to a few cases, and there is a lack of in-depth studies with a comparative perspective.

2.5 Semantics

When pejorative words are integrated into sentences, an important question is under what conditions a sentence like (13) is true or false:

(13) *Paul is a kraut.*

The problem is here that if Paul is German and one does not want to disparage Germans, neither an affirmation nor a negation of (13) seems to be fitting. One could therefore ask whether sentences containing such pejorative words have a truth value at all. This question leads us directly into debates of the location of pejoration (semantics, pragmatics, both levels) and moreover, the semantics-pragmatics distinction itself. Gutzmann and McCready (this volume) take their starting point here, developing a formal multi-dimensional analysis of pejorative sentences.

Let us have a quick look at a truth-conditional semantic account of ethnic slurs, namely the 'theory of semantic innocence'. According to Hom and May (2013), pejorative expressions like *kike* do not have an extension ('null extensionality thesis'); that is, they refer to nothing. Therefore, the following sentences are true (examples from Hom & May 2013: 293):

(14)   a.   *No Jews are kikes.*   (TRUE)
          b.   *There are no kikes.*   (TRUE)
          c.   *There are Jews.*   (TRUE)

Yet *kike* has a meaning, that is an intension, and this intension differs from the intension of *jew*, similarly to our example of *kraut* and *German*. The knowledge that the sentences in (24) are true is epistemologically grounded:

> Our view is that actual knowledge of the linguistic meaning of a pejorative term paired with *a priori* knowledge of moral facts entails knowledge of its null extensionality.   (Hom & May 2013: 297)

The intension of *kike* or *kraut* is captured by a lexical marker of the pejoration, namely "PEJ" (Hom & May 2013: 298). Hence, for instance, *kraut* receives the following meaning structure:

(15)   a.   *kraut* = PEJ(*German*)
          b.   In general: PEJ(ξ); the substitution of a neutral term for ξ leads to a pejorative expression PEJ(t)

The main opponent to Hom and May's theory of semantic innocence is the theory of identity-expressivism, e.g. Williamson (2009).[3] This theory argues that such pairs as *German* and *kraut* or, in their example, *Jew* and *kike*, have exactly the same truth conditions – they refer, after all, to the same group of persons – only that *kraut/kike* has an additional, expressive meaning aspect, i.e., the pejorative meaning.

Against this theory, Hom and May (2013: 303ff.) put forward four arguments, from which we pick out only the first.[4] Following this argument, the postulation of an additional expressive meaning is superfluous. In pairs like

(16)   a.   *Institutions that treat Jews as <u>kikes</u> are anti-semitic.* (TRUE)
          b.   *Institutions that treat Jews as <u>Jews</u> are anti-semitic.* (FALSE)

it is clear that pejorative expressions do have an influence on truth-conditions (Hom & May 2013: 304). This influence has to do with the literal meaning PEJ(t).

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3.   Also called the theory of "moral corruption".

4.   These are: (i) the problem of contrasting pairs, (ii) modal-conceivability, (iii) Frege-Geach-problem, (iv) Frege puzzle.

The real problem for the theory of semantic innocence is that the pejorative meaning is constant under negation (example from Hom & May 2013:309):

(17)   a.   *Yao is a chink.*
        b.   *Yao is not a chink. He's a jap.*
        c.   *There will never be a chink PM.*

As Hom and May point out:

> The problem, so the argument goes, is that the effect of negating pejoratives would be to cancel their offensiveness, and hence turn them from being offensive to being inoffensive. But if the semantic content of pejoratives is the source of offensiveness, then it seems that there is no account of the force of pejoratives as used in [17b] and [17c].   (Hom & May 2013:310)

However, this argument is rebutted. If *chink* has a null extension then (17a) is FALSE. In (17b), the first sentence is TRUE and the second sentence is FALSE; finally, (17c) is TRUE. Thus, *chink* remains pejorative in all its uses, due to its semantics.

That utterances containing *chink* are offensive in all contexts finds a pragmatic explanation: "(…) when speakers use predicates, they typically conversationally implicate their commitment to the non-null extensionality of the predicate" (Hom & May 2013:310). Thus, because of the pure mention of this expression, the suspicion arises that the speaker shares the pejorative meaning; otherwise, they would not have used the slur.

The approach by Hom and May (2013) clearly is an approach in the spirit of truth-conditional semantics. There are several other approaches that struggle with the meaning of pejoratives at the semantics-pragmatics interface (see Herder 2012, 2013; Hom 2007, 2010, 2012; Hornsby 2001; Predelli 2010, 2013; Vallée 2014). Others stress that "slurs aren't special" (Nunberg 2013) or argue that slurs are slurs simply because they are prohibited (Anderson & Lepore 2013a, b).

Other semantic studies focus on pejorative meaning using approaches and methods of cognitive semantics. Here, we shortly sketch approaches dealing with stereotypes, categorization, and conceptual structure. A stereotypical approach is pursued by Croom in a number of papers (cf. Croom 2011, 2013, 2014a, b). The basic idea is that a set of stereotypical meanings are attached to slurs such that there is a cluster of stereotypical meaning. This stereotypical approach has been criticized by Jeshion (2013) and Embrick and Henricks (2013). Other researchers point to certain connotations (Frigerio & Tenchini 2014) or perspectives (Camp 2013) that are associated with slurs. It is obvious that pejorative expressions categorize people. It goes without saying that categorizing people is important for a number of communicative reasons. Yet categorizing people often goes together with a derogatory attitude against them such that there seems to be a link between categorizing and discrimination (Graumann & Wintermantel 2007). Also, meta-categories such as 'race' seem to support categories

that can be easily associated with derogatory attitudes (Machery & Faucher 2005). Finally, as Lederer (2013) convincingly shows, pejorative terms such as *anchor baby* (an immigrant baby born in the USA that allows immigrants to follow) are embedded in complex conceptual structures and frames.

3. Pejoration in pragmatics

While pejoration can be associated with elements at different grammatical levels, the discussion of truth values has already indicated that it might also have its locus in pragmatics. As pragmatic parameters, let us briefly consider speech acts, implicature, deixis (indexicality), and discourse/text.

3.1 Speech acts

Negative evaluation is expressed in speech acts. Hence, one may ask whether there is a pejorative speech-act type. For instance, slurring may constitute such a pejorative speech act. Aldo and Tenchini (this volume) argue that slurring is associated with two speech acts, one being descriptive, one being expressive. Meibauer (this volume) assumes that slurring is a subtype of insults, these in turn belonging to the class of expressives (cf. Mateo & Yus 2013; Neu 2008). The classification of pejorative speech acts is by no means easy and one might have to account for subtle distinctions between insulting, slander, slurring, and other types of derogatory utterances (cf. Havryliv 2009; Hornscheidt, Jana & Acke 2011). Furthermore, there are approaches that assume quite general speech-act categories such as 'discriminating' speech acts (Graumann & Wintermantel 2007) or 'subordinative' speech acts (Maitra 2012).

3.2 Implicatures

Following Paul Grice's lead, we can distinguish between conventional and conversational implicatures (Grice 1989; Meibauer 2009; Gutzmann 2013).

3.2.1 *Conventional-implicature approach*
A conventional-implicature approach to pejoration has been put forward by Williamson (2009, 2010) and Whiting (2008, 2013). Basically, it says that 'what is said' is identical in (18a) and (18b) because both predicates refer to homosexuals (example from Whiting 2013:364). The pejorative meaning, however, which is connected to *faggot* in (18b), is analyzed as a conventional implicature.

(18)   a.   *Sammy is a male homosexual.*
       b.   *Sammy is a faggot.*