Reference, Inference and the Semantics of Pejoratives[*]

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1. Introduction. Two opposing tendencies in the philosophy of language go by the names of 'referentialism' and 'inferentialism' respectively. In the crudest version of the contrast, the referentialist account of meaning gives centre stage to the referential semantics for a language, which is then used to explain the inference rules for the language, perhaps as those which preserve truth on that semantics (since a referential semantics for a language determines the truth-conditions of its sentences). By contrast, the inferentialist account of meaning gives centre stage to the inference rules for the language, which are then used to explain its referential semantics, perhaps as the semantics on which the rules preserve truth. On pain of circularity, we cannot combine both directions of explanation.

Of course, this simple opposition may not survive more refined definitions of 'referentialism' and 'inferentialism'. Not all of those willing to apply one or other term to their views would accept the crude characterizations just given. Nevertheless, the two styles of theorizing often function as rivals in practice. There is a corresponding contrast in the philosophy of thought, concerning the reference of concepts, rather than of

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expressions of a public language, and inferential connections between thoughts, rather than between sentences.

If inferentialists appealed only to inference rules, they could not hope to explain how many words refer to extra-linguistic objects, or how language is used in interaction with the extra-linguistic environment. We may therefore assume that, in addition to intra-linguistic rules such as the introduction and elimination rules for the logical constants in a Gentzen-style system of natural deduction, inferentialists may also advert to 'language-entry' rules that connect perceptual states to moves in the language game, and 'language-exit' rules that connect moves in the language game to non-linguistic actions. Inferential roles are thereby generalized as conceptual roles.[1] The details do not matter here, for the overall picture is the same. The rules by which speakers use the language have explanatory primacy. The referential semantics is a kind of epiphenomenon. At least on the simplest versions of inferentialism, understanding a word is equated with using it according to the appropriate rules, not with having propositional knowledge of its referential meaning: practice is prior to theory.

At first sight, inferentialism may appear to be a conservative or quietist view: since whatever rules the speech community uses thereby determine a semantics on which those very rules come out valid, the community can never rightly be criticized for using invalid rules. By contrast, referentialists appear not to be barred from assigning a semantics to the language of a community on which invalid rules are in use.

In a classic paper (1960), Arthur Prior showed that not all inference rules are self-validating in the way that simple-minded inferentialists imagine. For consider these rules for a new binary sentence connective 'tonk':

Tonk-Introduction	*Tonk-Elimination*
A	A tonk B
_____	_____
A tonk B	B

Tonk-Introduction is just like one half of the standard introduction rule for disjunction; Tonk-Elimination is just like one half of the standard elimination rule for conjunction. Taken together, they allow one to infer any conclusion from any premise. Given that the 'tonk'-free part of the language contains at least one true sentence and at least one false sentence (with respect to a given context), no assignment of meaning to 'tonk' makes both Tonk-Introduction and Tonk-Elimination truth-preserving.

In an almost equally classic reply (1962) to Prior, Nuel Belnap pointed out in effect that we can find fault with the rules for 'tonk' without deviating from the inferentialist paradigm. For if we start with a 'tonk'-free language and a system of inference rules in which not every sentence can be inferred from every other sentence, and then extend the language by adding 'tonk' and the system of rules by adding Tonk-Introduction and Tonk-Elimination, the result is not a *conservative extension* of the original system. An extension is conservative if and only if whenever a conclusion in the original language follows according to the extended system of rules from premises also in the original language, that conclusion already followed according to the original system of rules from those premises.[2] In other words, the restriction of the extended consequence relation to the original language is just the original consequence relation; the new rules do not interfere with inferential relations between old

sentences. The idea of a conservative extension is evidently defined in terms available to inferentialists; it adverts to no referential semantics for the original or extended language.

Belnap suggested a further constraint on the rules with which an expression is introduced if they are to define it properly. The rules R(E) should provide a *unique characterization* of the new expression E, in the sense that if we introduce *two* new expressions E1 and E2, governed by the corresponding rules R(E1) and R(E2) respectively, then those rules should make E1 and E2 inferentially equivalent in an appropriate sense.[3] Informally, failure of unique characterization is supposed to show that the rules are too weak to define the new expression adequately; failure of conservative extension is supposed to show that they are too strong to do so.

Belnap's combined constraints of conservativeness and uniqueness are closely related, although not quite equivalent, to Michael Dummett's requirement of harmony on the rules for a logical connective for them to count as self-justifying (1991: 246-51). Not all inferentialists accept Belnap's constraints. For example, Robert Brandom denies that non-conservativeness is an automatic vice in the rules for a new connective, since the new inferences between sentences of the old language might be good, useful ones (1994: 127-30; 2000: 71-2). His brand of inferentialist assesses inferential practices case by case, in a more nuanced or *ad hoc* way.

'Tonk' does not provide a fully satisfying example of an inferentialist critique of an inferential practice. For no community could seriously make unrestricted use of both Tonk-Introduction and Tonk-Elimination, on pain of trivializing their use of the whole language. Nor does the example provide a clear case of a defective concept, since one could plausibly deny that 'tonk' stands for a concept at all (Peacocke 1992: 21). The question therefore arises: are any naturally occurring inferential practices defective in this way? For Dummett,

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the ordinary use of negation according to classical logic provides just such a case. His claim is hard to assess, because highly sensitive to the form in which classical logic is presented (Rumfitt 2000). However, Dummett (1973: 397 and 454) also points to a class of expressions in natural language that seem to exhibit non-conservativeness of a peculiarly simple and vicious kind: pejoratives, such as terms of ethnic abuse.

Dummett takes as his example the word 'Boche', perhaps because its air of anachronism, its associations with anti-German propaganda in Britain and France at the outbreak of the First World War, isolate us from its derogatory implications more clinically than mere quotation marks can do. It is harder to bring oneself to write down or pronounce more currently potent expressions of abuse. On Dummett's view, the meaning of the word 'Boche' is constituted by rules of inference along these lines (1973: 454):

Boche-Introduction   *Boche-Elimination*

x is a German x is a Boche

_____   _____

x is a Boche x is cruel

As Dummett points out, these rules induce a non-conservative extension of the 'Boche'-free language, since they permit the inference from 'He is a German' to 'He is cruel', which presumably could not be made without them.[4] They also exhibit lack of harmony in Dummett's sense. Thus ethnic abuse rests on inadequate proof-theory.

Dummett's account of pejoratives has been widely accepted. Although Brandom does not endorse conservativeness as a universal constraint, he accepts Dummett's description of

the rules for 'Boche' (1994: 126; 2000: 69-70). Similarly, it is relied on by Paul Boghossian, although he is not in general an inferentialist outside the realm of logic (2003: 241-2).

Part of the interest of Dummett's account is that pejoratives are commonly occurring, clearly meaningful terms. As Boghossian points out, it would be highly implausible to deny that the word 'Boche' expresses a concept; surely xenophobes use sentences in which it occurs to express complete thoughts, however bad those thoughts are (2003: 242-3).[5] One might even regard Dummett's account not merely as defusing a potentially tricky case for the inferentialist programme but as providing it with a positive success, by elegantly explaining in inferentialist terms just what is wrong with pejorative expressions and concepts.

There is thus some point to investigating whether Dummett's inferentialist account of pejoratives in natural language is in fact correct. One main contention of this paper is that it is quite mistaken. An alternative account will be provided within the framework of referentialist semantics. Little will be said explicitly about the overall upshot for the inferentialist-referentialist debate, the terms of which may be too inchoate for fruitful engagement at that level of abstraction. However, an issue will tentatively be raised about the bearing of pejoratives on another vexed and programmatic debate, that over the relative priority of language and thought.

2. Understanding pejoratives. What is required for understanding a pejorative expression or grasping a pejorative concept? On the simplest development of Dummett's account, one understands 'Boche' if and only if one is disposed to apply Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination. Boghossian writes 'Plausibly, a thinker possesses the concept *boche* just in case he is willing to infer according to [Dummett's rules]' (2003: 241-2).

Let us first note a grammatical point. 'Boche' can be used both as a noun and (perhaps less commonly) as an adjective. Like 'German', it is restricted to people when used as a noun but not when used as an adjective. Although Dummett does not specify which use he has in mind, his rules have been formulated here only for the use of 'Boche' as a noun (witness the indefinite article; by formulating Dummett's rules for 'boche' without the article, Boghossian (2003: 242) treats it as an adjective).). The adjectival use clearly has no direct connection with the inference from '*x* is Boche' to '*x* is cruel', for not even the wildest xenophobe will infer from 'That camera is Boche', 'That camera is cruel'. Thus Dummett's account of 'Boche' is incomplete, since it does not cover the adjectival use. That does not show that it is incorrect about the use of 'Boche' as a noun.

Is a disposition to reason according to Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination necessary and sufficient for understanding the noun 'Boche'? I trust that I am one counterexample and that you are another. Unlike someone who thinks that the word 'Boche' means *box*, we fully understand the word, for we understand sentences that xenophobes utter in which it occurs. We know what 'Boche' means. We find racist and xenophobic abuse offensive because we understand it, not because we fail to do so. Yet we are unwilling to infer according to both Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination. Similarly, imagine a reformed xenophobe who once was willing to infer according to those rules but now has seen the error of his ways, while vividly recalling with shame what it was like to shout xenophobic abuse. He still remembers what 'Boche' means, and so understands the word.

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. They have no such disposition whatsoever, even though they can

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imagine what it is like to have such a disposition. Nevertheless, they understand 'Boche'; they do not merely have the ability to imagine what it is like to understand it. They need not even have the conditional disposition to infer according to the rules if they used 'Boche' at all: rather, their disposition might be to use 'Boche' in ways subversive of the rules if they used it at all.

Since understanding the word 'Boche' (with its present meaning) is presumably sufficient (although not necessary) for having the concept that 'Boche' expresses, it follows that a willingness or disposition to reason according to Dummett's rules is equally unnecessary for having that concept.

The objection does not depend on the details of Dummett's rules. Consider any set of rules that an inferentialist proposes for 'Boche'. If they are logically unobjectionable — more specifically, if they constitute a conservative extension of a civilized 'Boche'-free system of rules — then the inferentialist has no account of what is objectionable about 'Boche'. For the primary objection to the use of the word does not depend on how it is applied: even the statement 'If Lessing was a Boche then he was a Boche' is objectionable. On the other hand, if the rules are logically objectionable — if they constitute a non-conservative extension of the civilized 'Boche'-free system of rules — then millions of civilized people are counterexamples to the claim that a willingness or disposition to infer according to the rules is necessary for understanding 'Boche', or for having the concept that it expresses. Either way, the account is inadequate.

Can a civilized person say directly *what* 'Boche' means, what concept it expresses? If one says '"Boche" means *Boch*" or '"Boche" expresses the concept *Boche*', one is in danger of using the word 'Boche' in its italicized occurrence, not just mentioning it, and thereby of committing oneself to the xenophobic abuse. But if one cannot say (even homophonically)

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what the word means, does one really understand it? However, that 'Boche' is used in its ordinary sense in the italicized occurrences is far from clear. The italics may be tantamount to sense quotation, a device by which one refers to the ordinary meaning of the expression, not to its ordinary referent (Kaplan 1969). That would not be a straightforward, committing use of the pejorative. In any case, a difficulty in saying (even homophonically) what a word means need not imply a difficulty in understanding it. Consider a tribe in which men and women are supposed to use quite different words for some things. A woman might happen to know the men's word for something but not know the women's word for it; she might not even have a synonym in women's vocabulary. She understands the men's word perfectly well but cannot say what it means, or what concept it expresses, without using that very word herself, and thereby committing a linguistically inappropriate act, breaking the rules. Similarly, non-xenophobes can understand the word 'Boche' quite well, whatever proprieties interfere with making their understanding explicit.

The inferentialist may retreat to the claim that to understand a term is to know what the rules for it are, not to be disposed to reason according to those rules. One knows the rules of the 'Boche' game but is unwilling, perhaps for that very reason, to play it. On this conception, understanding a term consists not so much in using it appropriately as in knowing how to use it appropriately (by its rules). Although the inferentialist may insist that this knowing how that one has never been inclined to put into practice is still practical knowledge, it is unclear what is behind this slogan. One applies one's knowledge of what pejoratives mean in understanding xenophobic discourse: if one is applying knowledge how to infer by the 'Boche' rules, despite not inferring by those rules, it needs to be explained in what way that knowledge is much more practical than the semantic knowledge that the referentialist invokes.[6]

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A further problem faces even the watered-down inferentialist account of understanding pejoratives. Someone might grow up in a narrow-minded community with only pejorative words for some things, in particular with only the pejorative 'Boche' for Germans. He might understand 'Boche' as other xenophobes do without understanding 'German' or any equivalent non-pejorative term. He would be unacquainted with Boche-Introduction and any similar rule. Thus not even knowing how to infer according to Boche-Introduction is necessary for understanding 'Boche', or for having the concept that it expresses.

3. The reference of pejoratives. For inferentialists, the rules for an expression determine whatever is determined about its reference (given a context of utterance). Suppose that the referential semantics for a language has already been determined. Now a new expression E is added to the original language, subject to inferential rules R(E). The natural inferentialist account of the reference of E is this. If the hypothetical assignment of X as the reference of E makes R(E) truth-preserving, and no other assignment does, then E does indeed refer to X (for classical inferentialists, the standard introduction and elimination rules for the usual truth-functors uniquely determine their referential semantics, in other words their truth-tables, in this way). If several different hypothetical assignments of reference to E all make R(E) truth-preserving, then E is indeterminate in reference between all those assignments (traditional supervaluationist semantics might be used to combine them all into a single semantic upshot with truth-value gaps). But if no hypothetical assignment of reference to E makes R(E) truth-preserving, then E does not refer. The simplest sentences in which E occurs are therefore either uniformly false or uniformly truth-valueless, although it may still be allowed that E has a sense, and expresses a concept.

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Since there are non-cruel Germans, no assignment of reference to 'Boche' makes both Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination truth-preserving. Therefore, on the picture just sketched, 'Boche' does not refer. Thus atomic ascriptions of 'Boche' are either uniformly false or uniformly truth-valueless. Either way, 'The Kaiser was a Boche' and 'Kitchener was a Boche' have the same semantic status.[7] Presumably, if 'He is a Boche' is always false, then 'He is not a Boche' is always true (when the negation is not Horn's metalinguistic negation (1989)), while if 'He is a Boche' is always truth-valueless, then 'He is not a Boche' is always truth-valueless too.

A complete account of the reference of a term should apply to its occurrence in modal contexts. To extract such implications from Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination, one would have to treat them as applicable in modal contexts, and therefore as implying that *necessarily* all Germans are cruel. It is doubtful that many xenophobes go that far, but for the sake of simplicity this further dubious aspect of Dummett's account will be ignored. For present purposes, we can identify the reference of a general term with its extension in the actual world (rather than, for example, with a property).

Surprisingly, on the inferentialist account of reference determination above, even consistent xenophobes who think that all Germans are cruel should conclude that Dummett's rules for 'Boche' fail to determine its reference uniquely. On their view, the set of all Germans is a subset of the set of all cruel people, but not *vice versa* (they think that Germans are far from the only cruel foreigners), so many sets have the set of all Germans as a subset and are in turn subsets of the set of all cruel people.[8] If any such intermediate set is assigned to 'Boche' as its extension, both Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination are truth-preserving. In particular, for the xenophobe, both rules are truth-preserving if the extension of 'Boche' is the set of all Germans, but are equally truth-preserving if the extension of 'Boche'

is the set of all cruel people. In Belnap's terms, Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination together are not uniquely characterizing. On this view, the logically sophisticated xenophobe (the British or French counterpart of Frege?) should conclude that 'Boche' is indeterminate in reference between all these different sets. But that result badly misrepresents the xenophobe's conception. For the xenophobe thinks that the term 'Boche' is literally false of non-Germans, however cruel they are. Dummett's account fails to explain why xenophobes say things like 'He's as cruel as a Boche, but he isn't a Boche — he's a Bulgar'. Dummett gives no more weight to one of his rules than to the other, but the xenophobic use of 'Boche' does not treat them symmetrically.

We can begin to compare the status of the two rules by considering each of them separately. Any introduction rule determines an elimination rule in harmony with it: the elimination rule specifies consequences of applying the target expression that match the conditions for applying it that the introduction rule specifies. In the simplest case, such as Boche-Introduction, the introduction rule has a single premise and a single conclusion; the corresponding elimination rule has the conclusion of the introduction rule as its single premise and the premise of the introduction rule as its single conclusion; the two rules are mutual converses. Similarly, any elimination rule determines an introduction rule with which it is in harmony: the introduction rule specifies conditions for applying the target expression that match the consequences of applying it that the elimination rule specifies. In the simplest case, such as Boche-Elimination, the elimination rule has a single premise and a single conclusion; the corresponding introduction rule has the conclusion of the elimination rule as its single premise and the premise of the elimination rule as its single conclusion; again, the two rules are mutual converses. If the introduction and elimination rules for an expression are not in harmony, then either the elimination rule gets more out of applying the expression than

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the introduction rule put in or the introduction rule puts more into applying the expression than the elimination rule gets out. But if the rules are in harmony, then the sufficient condition for applying the expression that the introduction rule supplies is equivalent to the necessary condition for applying it that the elimination rule supplies; the rules satisfy Belnap's constraints of conservativeness and uniqueness, and uniquely determine the reference of the expression (given a referential semantics for the rest of the language). Let us consider Dummett's two rules in turn.

(A) Boche-Introduction determines this elimination rule in harmony with it:

Boche-Elimination*

x is a Boche

_____

x is a German

Boche-Elimination* merely allows one to infer from 'x is a Boche' what Boche-Introduction allows one to infer 'x is a Boche' from, and Boche-Introduction merely allows one to infer 'x is a Boche' from what Boche-Elimination* allows one to infer from 'x is a Boche'. Consequently, if the two rules are added to a theory in a language without 'Boche', they yield a conservative extension: anything in the original language provable with them was already provable without them. Boche-Elimination* is the elimination rule that naturally corresponds to Boche-Introduction. Together, Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination* determine the set of all Germans as the extension of 'Boche': it is the only candidate extension that makes both rules truth-preserving (for every value of the variable). This is the assignment of

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reference that naturally corresponds to Boche-Introduction. The set of all Germans is the smallest set that makes Boche-Introduction truth-preserving. On this interpretation, 'Lessing was a Boche' is true, because Lessing was a German, but 'Nero was a Boche' is false, because Nero was not a German. Boche-Elimination is invalidated: every non-cruel German yields a counterexample.

(B) Boche-Elimination determines this introduction rule with which it is in harmony:

Boche-Introduction*

x is cruel

_____

x is a Boche

(If the variable can take non-persons as values, then 'cruel' in both rules should be expanded to 'a cruel person'.) Boche-Introduction* merely allows one to infer 'x is a Boche' from what Boche-Elimination allows one to infer from 'x is a Boche', and Boche-Elimination merely allows one to infer from 'x is a Boche' what Boche-Introduction* allows one to infer 'x is a Boche' from. Consequently, if the two rules are added to a theory in a language without 'Boche', they yield a conservative extension: anything in the original language provable with them was already provable without them. Boche-Introduction* is the introduction rule that naturally corresponds to Boche-Elimination. Together, Boche-Introduction* and Boche-Elimination determine the set of all cruel people as the extension of 'Boche': it is the only

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candidate extension for 'Boche' that makes both rules truth-preserving (for every value of the variable). This is the assignment of reference that naturally corresponds to Boche-Elimination. The set of all cruel people is the largest set that makes Boche-Elimination truth-preserving. On this interpretation, 'Lessing was a Boche' is false, because Lessing was not a cruel person, but 'Nero was a Boche' is true, because Nero was a cruel person. Boche-Introduction is invalidated: every non-cruel German yields a counterexample.

On the picture of Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination as carrying equal weight in determining reference, or the lack of it, for 'Boche', (A) and (B) have exactly the same status; the advantages and disadvantages of the two treatments of 'Boche' are symmetrically related. But that result is wildly implausible. Intuitively, Boche-Elimination* is just as intimately linked to the meaning of 'Boche' as Boche-Introduction is. By contrast, Boche-Introduction* has no standing at all; even most xenophobes would reject it, for they think that Germans are not the only cruel foreigners. Again, although both 'Lessing was a Boche' and 'Nero was a Boche' are regrettable utterances, the former seems to have a far stronger claim to literal truth than the latter has. The xenophobic abuse is preserved in the negations of those sentences, but 'Lessing was not a Boche' seems to have a far weaker claim to literal truth than 'Nero was not a Boche' has. Thus Boche-Introduction trumps Boche-Elimination.

A further asymmetry between the two rules is observable in practice. Xenophobes typically treat Boche-Elimination as defeasible, because they allow that there are a few good Germans ('Some of my best friends are Boche'), whereas they treat both Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination* as indefeasible. Such asymmetries undermine inferentialist attempts to give explanatory primacy to Dummett's account of 'Boche'.

The natural if tentative conclusion to draw from the preceding considerations is that, far from suffering reference-failure or massive indeterminacy of reference, 'Boche' has the

same reference as 'German'. All the dictionaries that I have consulted define 'Boche' to that effect. With minor variations of no present concern, they all define 'Boche' as 'German', while glossing the word as 'contemptuous' or 'derogatory'. On the lexicographers' view, 'Boche' applies to all Germans, however kind, and to no non-Germans, however cruel. Thus Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination* are exceptionlessly truth-preserving, while Boche-Elimination is very far from truth-preserving. Accounts that make Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination the basic rules of use for 'Boche' are therefore highly implausible.

The inferentialist attempt to derive the reference of pejoratives from Dummett's account leads to results inconsistent with the consensus of descriptive linguists not involved in the philosophical dispute. Could the inferentialist improve on Dummett's account by proposing a different set of inference rules? The general difficulty is this. If the inference rules for 'Boche' constitute a conservative extension of a civilized system of rules for the 'Boche'-free part of the language, then they do not explain what is offensive about even such statements as 'If Lessing was a Boche, then he was a Boche'. On the other hand, if the rules for 'Boche' constitute a non-conservative extension of the civilized system, then the inferentialist account of reference determination seems to imply that 'x is a Boche' is not true for any value of 'x', which is empirically implausible. One strategy for the inferentialist is to say that the indefeasible rules for 'Boche' are Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination*, while Boche-Elimination is a merely defeasible rule. On the natural hypothesis that indefeasible rules trump defeasible ones in determining reference, the extension of 'Boche' would be the set of all Germans, but 'Boche' would still be offensive in virtue of the defeasible inference (by the indefeasible Boche-Introduction and the defeasible Boche-Elimination) from 'x is a German' to 'x is cruel'. This is not totally dissimilar from the view developed below. But it still distorts the picture. For, as already noted, the word 'Boche'

might be used as a pejorative for Germans in a narrow-minded community with no non-pejorative equivalent of 'German'. That would not affect its referential status. Thus inferences involving 'German' are not crucial to determining the reference of 'Boche'.

Can some inferentialist story utterly different from Dummett's be told about pejoratives? At least, anything like the account of 'Boche' on which inferentialists have actually relied badly misrepresents the meaning of pejoratives. A fresh start is needed.

4. An alternative account. In Fregean terminology, the lexicographers' account of 'Boche' is in effect that it has the same reference as 'German' but a different tone. Indeed, since the differences between 'Boche' and 'German' apparently play no role in determining reference, and so make no difference to the way in which the terms contribute to the truth-conditions of sentences in which they occur, a Fregean might even count 'Boche' and 'German' as having the same sense. Frege himself gives just such an account of another pejorative term (1979: 140): 'cur' has the same sense and reference as 'dog' but a different tone. According to Frege, 'This dog howled the whole night' and 'This cur howled the whole night' express the same thought (the same sense). They differ in that only the latter conveys an attitude of contempt for the dog on the part of the speaker. Frege denies that 'This cur howled the whole night' expresses the further thought that the speaker has such an attitude, because the absence of the attitude would not falsify the sentence.[9]

It might be objected to Frege's account that if the words 'dog' and 'cur' have the same sense, then, on Frege's own account of propositional attitude ascriptions, the sentences 'Mary believes that every dog is a dog' and 'Mary believes that every dog is a cur' must have the same truth-value, however much Mary loves dogs. Mary, a fully competent speaker of English, assents to 'Every dog is a dog'; will she assent to 'Every dog is a cur'? If she agrees

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that 'Every dog is a cur' is true but misleading, we can surely agree that 'Mary believes that every dog is a cur' is also true but misleading. What if Mary, under the influence of too much inferentialist reading, claims that 'Every dog is a cur' lacks a truth-value in virtue of its badly matched introduction and elimination rules? If she believes that every dog is a cur, why does she not assent to 'Every dog is a cur', for surely she knows that it expresses her belief that every dog is a cur? Such problems undermine, if anything, Frege's simple account of propositional attitude ascriptions, not his claim that pairs like 'cur' and 'dog' have the same truth-conditional meaning. For similar problems arise even for pairs of synonyms with the same tone. Kripke (1979) gives the example of the synonymous natural kind terms 'furze' and 'gorse'. A speaker might learn the two words on different occasions, from ostension of examples, and acquire normal competence with both without being sure that they refer to exactly the same kind of plant. Thus 'He believes that all furze is furze' and 'He believes that all furze is gorse' appear to differ in truth-value. It does not follow that 'furze' and 'gorse' are not synonyms after all. Such problems show nothing special about pejoratives. Whatever the right account of propositional attitude ascriptions, it is compatible with the Fregean view that 'cur' and 'dog' differ in tone but not sense (truth-conditional meaning).

Unfortunately, Frege's category of tone is too miscellaneous to take us very far in the analysis of the example. It includes stylistic differences, such as that between 'sweat' and 'perspire', which are significantly unlike the difference between 'Boche' and 'German'. Frege discusses his examples by speaking unhelpfully of the images and feelings that the words evoke in hearers. Nevertheless, the classification of the difference between 'Boche' and 'German' as truth-conditionally irrelevant is at least a useful start, for it respects intuitive distinctions over which the original inferentialist account rides roughshod.

What needs explaining is this. Competent English speakers know, or are in a position to know, that 'German' and 'Boche' have the same reference, and therefore that 'Lessing was a German' and 'Lessing was a Boche' have the same truth-value. If educated, such speakers know, or are in a position to know, that both sentences are true. Nevertheless, although such speakers are willing to assert 'Lessing was a German', they are not willing to assert 'Lessing was a Boche', even on reflection, unless they are xenophobes. I know that 'Lessing was a Boche' is true, but I refuse to assert 'Lessing was a Boche'. Why?

The natural answer is that to assert 'Lessing was a Boche' would be to *imply* that Germans are cruel, and I do not want to imply that, because the implication is both false and abusive. Since the false implication that Germans are cruel does not falsify 'Lessing was a Boche', it is not a logical consequence of 'Lessing was a Boche'. Rather, in Grice's terminology, 'Lessing was a Boche' has the *conventional implicature* that Germans are cruel, in much the same way that 'Helen is polite but honest' has the conventional implicature that there is a contrast between Helen's being polite and her being honest.[10] Just as 'Lessing was a Boche' and 'Lessing was a German' differ in conventional implicatures while being truth-conditionally equivalent, so too 'Helen is polite but honest' and 'Helen is polite and honest' differ in conventional implicatures while being truth-conditionally equivalent. In Grice's terms, conventional implicatures are *detachable*, because they can differ between truth-conditionally equivalent sentences (in the same context). But they are not easily *cancellable*, for someone who says 'Lessing was Boche, although I do not mean to imply that Germans are cruel' merely adds hypocrisy to xenophobia; equally deviant would be an utterance of 'Helen is polite but honest, although I do not mean to imply that there is any contrast between her being polite and her being honest'. By contrast, Gricean conversational implicatures are easily cancellable but not detachable. Whether one says 'She is either in Paris or Rome' or

something truth-conditionally equivalent to it, the maxims of conversation generate the implicature that one does not know which city she is in; nevertheless, one can easily cancel it by adding 'I know which city she is in, but I am not going to tell you'.[11]

The implicature that 'Boche' carries must be conventional rather than purely conversational, for if there were not already a significant difference between the words 'Boche' and 'German', the norms of conversation would not generate any difference in implicature between 'Lessing was a Boche' and 'Lessing was a German'. Of course, there can be non-semantic sociological differences between terms with the same reference. For instance, the expressions E and E* both refer to X, but E predominates in the dialect of a social group G whose members tend to view X positively, while E* predominates in the dialect of a social group G* whose members tend to view X negatively. But it does not follow that a member of G who uses E thereby conversationally implies (perhaps by manner) something positive about X, or that a member of G* who uses E* thereby conversationally implies (perhaps by manner) something negative about X. For E may simply be the default, neutral term for X in G, smoothly available even to the few members of G who view X negatively, while E* is the default, neutral term for X in G*, smoothly available even to the few members of G* who view X positively. In any case, such a drastic sociological difference is empirically implausible for 'Boche' and 'German'. Those who used 'Boche' were not presenting themselves as members of a social group in which anti-German feeling was commonly known to predominate; they were insulting Germans much more directly. The failure of cancellability for 'Boche' confirms this difference. One does not cancel the implicature by saying 'Lessing was a Boche, but I'm not one of those German-hating people who use "Boche"'.

The conventional implicatures of 'Boche' and 'but' are preserved under embedding in more complex sentences. For example, 'If Lessing was a Boche then he was a European' still conventionally implicates that Germans are cruel, and 'If Helen is polite but honest then she is honest' still conventionally implicates that there is a contrast between her being polite and her being honest. The implicatures are present just as strongly in non-indicative sentences, such as 'Is he a Boche?', 'Give this to a Boche!', 'Is she polite but honest?' and 'Be polite but honest!'. In this respect, such conventional implicatures are like presuppositions rather than logical consequences. However, the relevant sense of 'presupposition' is closer to Stalnaker's than to Strawson's: although a presupposition modifies the context of utterance, its failure does not deprive the sentence of a truth-value.[12] In the case of 'Boche', the very use of the word generates the xenophobic implicature, irrespective of its position in the sentence.[13]

The false implicature of 'Lessing was a Boche' is not merely that Lessing was cruel. For otherwise the corresponding implicature of 'Himmler was a Boche' would merely be that Himmler was cruel, which is commonly known to be true. Then I could decently assert 'Himmler was a Boche': but I cannot. Thus even a singular ascription of 'Boche' carries the false general implicature that Germans are cruel. But since xenophobes treat Boche-Elimination as a defeasible rule, the implicature is not that all Germans without exception are cruel. The implicature is expressed by 'Germans are cruel' read as a generic sentence, meaning something like 'There is a tendency for Germans to be cruel'. A xenophobe may easily say 'He's a Boche, but he's not cruel — he's one of the few decent ones' .[14]

The implicature that 'Boche' carries is not merely about the speaker's psychological state. In particular, what is implicated is not merely that the speaker *believes* that Germans are cruel; such an implicature might well be true. When someone uses the word 'Boche' one

can legitimately ask him to withdraw the anti-German implication; but if it is clear, as it may well be, that he does believe that Germans are cruel, then it is hardly legitimate to ask him to withdraw the implication that he has that belief. Although one might try to persuade him to abandon the belief, and even succeed, the view at issue makes the implicature of his original remark be that he had the belief at the time of utterance, not that he has it now, which leaves no false implicature to withdraw. The false implicature is that Germans are cruel, not that the speaker believes that they are cruel. Perhaps the use of 'Boche' does also carry the additional implicature that the speaker believes that Germans are cruel, since a linguistically competent speaker who uses 'Boche' without believing that Germans are cruel is being insincere; but such a belief condition would be a byproduct of the simple implicature that Germans are cruel, combined with the conversational norm of sincerity; it is not the source of what is most objectionable in the use of 'Boche'.

One might argue that the use of 'Boche' implies more than that Germans are cruel, namely, that the speaker knows that Germans are cruel, or even that it is common knowledge in the conversation that Germans are cruel. In asserting p, one implies in some sense that one knows p, although of course one does not thereby assert that one knows p, for one is in an epistemic position to assert p only if one knows p. Might implying p similarly generate the further implication that one is in an epistemic position to imply p? Such putative implications are not generated directly by the use of the pejorative word, but at best indirectly by the application of general principles of conversation to the direct implication; they will not be further discussed here.[15]

The conventional implicatures that words such as 'but' and 'Boche' generate are part of their meaning, in a broad sense of 'meaning'. If one is ignorant of them, one is at least partially ignorant of the meaning. An Englishman in Italy who thinks that 'ma' is

synonymous with 'and' and 'e' with 'but' is mistaken, for 'e' is synonymous with 'and', not with 'but', and 'ma' is synonymous with 'but', not with 'and'. Fully to understand a word, one must have some awareness, however inexplicit, of the conventional implicatures that it generates. In the case of 'Boche', one might say, in Putnam's terminology, that cruelty is part of its associated *stereotype*; a stereotypical Boche is cruel. Putnam allows that stereotypes may be inaccurate; perhaps ferocity is part of the stereotype associated with the natural kind term 'gorilla', although really gorillas are gentle. On his view, the stereotype for a word plays no direct role in determining its reference, but to be competent with the word one must have the stereotype (1975: 247-52). Since a competent speaker may know that the stereotype is inaccurate, to have the stereotype is not to believe that it is accurate; what one must be aware of is that it is the stereotype. Someone who understands 'Boche' may know that cruelty is an inaccurate part of the associated stereotype. The exact relation between conventional implicatures and stereotypes deserves further investigation, but we have a clear enough view for present purposes. What is most crucial is the separation of those aspects of meaning that contribute to truth-conditions from those that do not.[16]

'Boche' and 'German' have the same reference, so 'The Boche are the Germans' is true, but in using 'Boche' one implies that Germans are cruel. One can fully understand the word 'Boche' and know all that without being committed to the claim that Germans are cruel, for one can refuse to use the word 'Boche'. One is not obliged to utter every sentence that one knows to be true. One can know that a rule of inference is truth-preserving without using it. Non-xenophobic speakers of English may acknowledge that the rules of Boche-Introduction and Boche-Elimination* are truth-preserving yet still refuse to infer according to them. For one must *use* 'Boche' to infer according to those rules, whereas to classify them as truth-preserving is only to *mention* the word.[17] Similarly, consider the Tarskian biconditional:

(T)   'Lessing was a Boche' is true in English if and only Lessing was a Boche.

One can acknowledge that (T) is true in English but still refuse to utter it assertively, because one wants to avoid using 'Boche'.[18]

The present account has at least two further advantages over any account like Dummett's. First, it generalizes smoothly to adjectival uses of 'Boche'. In using 'Boche' as an adjective, one implies that Germans are cruel. Second, the account applies even to the narrow-minded community with the pejorative 'Boche' but no corresponding non-pejorative term. In using 'Boche', they conventionally imply that Germans are cruel, although they can articulate the content of the implicature only by saying 'The Boche are cruel'.[19]

5. *Pejoratives in language and thought.* Pejoratives raise a further question about the nature of concepts. A vital feature of a pejorative *word* is that it carries a conventional implicature, but how could a pejorative *concept* do so? Conventional implicatures seem to arise from the communicative use of language. Although synonymous words in different languages carry the same conventional implicatures, how could they share those implicatures with a non-verbal concept? In the study of pejoratives, it is dangerous to give thought methodological priority over language by treating concepts as intrinsically non-linguistic yet still capable of doubling as linguistic meanings. For that treatment is appropriate only if the false pejorative implicature is a feature of the concept expressed by 'Boche'; but then it is unclear how one could have the concept other than by understanding a word synonymous with 'Boche'. On such a view, the notion of having a concept seems to be parasitic on the notion of understanding a word, and language takes methodological priority over thought. If, on the

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other hand, the false implicature is not a feature of the concept expressed by 'Boche', then presumably 'Boche' and 'German' express the same concept: since 'Boche' is not synonymous with 'German', the meaning of a word is therefore not exhausted by the concept that it expresses, and the study of meanings cannot be subsumed under the study of concepts.[20] An adequate theory of concepts must resolve such questions.

It might be replied that since we can imagine someone who uses a pejorative concept in thought for which he has no corresponding word, the communicative use of language is inessential to pejorativeness. But that argument is too quick. We can imagine something like conversational implicature in thought, for example when one thinks that there will be a nice view of the stars to imply to oneself that the roof of a dwelling has a large hole. Similarly, we can imagine something like conventional implicature in thought, for example when one discriminates between one's own 'and' thoughts and 'but' thoughts. However, such examples show only that communicative phenomena can occur even in silent communication with oneself. They are cases in which one manipulates the rhetorical effects of one's own thoughts on oneself. A significant motive for the methodological switch from the level of language to the level of thought was precisely to avoid such complexities of the process of communication in the most elementary examples. When those complexities are reintroduced at the level of thought, the putative gain in simplicity disappears. If a straightforward inferentialist account of pejoratives were correct, then pejorative concepts could occur at a quite primitive level of thought, since the corresponding inferential roles could be realized at that level. By contrast, if the present account is correct, then pejorativeness is a more sophisticated phenomenon than the inferentialist account suggests.[21]

Notes

* This paper discusses some of the same phenomena as the fascinating Kaplan 2004, and reaches conclusions that are in some respects quite similar (a difference concerning the notion of validity is noted below). One sign of my general debt to David Kaplan is the difficulty that I have in writing a paper without citing Kaplan 1989, a difficulty that I share with many other philosophers of language. I first encountered his work as an undergraduate, when I read Kaplan 1969, and was immediately impressed by his intellectual fertility, his rigour and his playfulness. Opponents of the scientific spirit in philosophy often associate it with humourless severity, sterility, and indifference to nuance and aesthetic value. David is a wonderful counterexample. Playfulness is one of the best antidotes to that toxin for the scientific spirit, the desire for salvation from philosophy. Precision forces one to respect the subtle distinctions that free-flowing 'humanistic' prose pours indifferently over. Rigour provides the constraints that distinguish creativity from arbitrary variation. By precedent rather than precept, logic teaches the value of elegance and a sense of form, even in the search for truth.

1 Although perception and action are typically extra-linguistic, it does not follow that they are extra-conceptual: on some views, perceptual content is already conceptual, and guiding intentions make intentional action conceptual too.

2   For the purposes of generalizing the notion of a conservative extension to systems including language-entry and language-exit rules, perceptions and actions can be treated on a par with sentences.

3   For more discussion of the unique characterization requirement see Williamson (1987/88), McGee (2000) and references therein.

4   It is not clear that 'cruel' exactly captures the pejorative connotation of 'Boche', but it will do for the sake of argument. Dummett has 'barbarous and more prone to cruelty than other Europeans' (1973: 454).

5   Boghossian's claim that 'Boche' expresses a genuine concept even though its rules cannot be interpreted as truth-preserving represents a change of view from his (2002).

6   Brandom (1994: 25-6) proposes to explain knowledge-that in terms of knowledge-how. For an argument that knowledge-how is just a special case of knowledge-that see Stanley and Williamson (2001).

7   The change from present to past tense is immaterial.

8   A xenophobe might apply the term 'Boche' to someone he knew not to be German whom he regarded as displaying a distinctively German kind of cruelty, but that is a recognizably metaphorical use. The xenophobe would not apply 'Boche' even metaphorically

to someone he knew not to be German whom he regarded as displaying a distinctively non-German kind of cruelty.

9   The example involves complications about the proper treatment of indexicals and of descriptive elements in demonstratives, but Frege's general line is clear. Dummett (1973: 84-89) gives a nuanced account of Frege on tone.

10   See Grice (1989: 41) and (1961: section III). The example of the truth-conditionally irrelevant difference between 'and' and 'but' goes back to Frege (1879: §7), but he misdescribes the difference by requiring the contrast to consist in the unexpectedness of what follows 'but' (Dummett (1973: 86). Frege (1979: 140) gives this analogy for someone who uses the word 'cur' without feeling the contempt that it implies: 'If a commander conceals his weakness from the enemy by making his troops keep changing their uniforms, he is not telling a lie; for he is not expressing any thoughts, although his actions are calculated to induce thoughts in others'. This captures the conventional nature of the implicature only if the troops flout conventions as to which uniforms they are permitted to wear. A question by Owen Greenhall about the relation between the pairs 'Boche'/'German' and 'but'/'and' in a class at Edinburgh first interested me in the present line of thought about pejoratives.

11   Perhaps logically equivalent sentences in the same context can differ in conventional implicature: compare 'She said that she was there' and 'She said that she was there, and either she was lying or she wasn't'. Those two sentences still differ in truth-conditions by a very fine-grained standard (intensional isomorphism). Even by a more fine-grained standard of truth-conditional equivalence, detachability may be only a rough guide to conversational

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implicature. By choosing long words one might conversationally imply that the children must not be told.

12   Contrast Stalnaker (1999: 38-40 and 47-62) with Strawson (1952: 175-79). For a related view of conventional implicature see Karttunen and Peters (1979).

13   If the mere use of the pejorative word is what generates the implicature, then the compositional properties of this kind of conventional implicature may contrast with those of the usual paradigms of presupposition. For example, a conditional does not automatically inherit the presuppositions of its consequent: whereas 'He has stopped beating his wife' presupposes 'He once beat his wife' the conditional 'If he once beat his wife then he has stopped beating his wife' lacks that presupposition (for a related approach to compositional features of conventional implicature see Karttunen and Peters (1979, 33-48)). It is less clear that 'If Germans are cruel then he is a Boche' fails to inherit the conventional implicature 'Germans are cruel' from 'He is a Boche'. These are matters for a more detailed account of pejoratives.

14   See also Hornsby 2001: 136. However, she registers significant doubts as to whether an appropriate content for (in present terms) the conventional implicature can be captured non-homophonically. She also discusses the relation of pejoratives to accounts of evaluative terms by Hare and other moral philosophers. The bearing on such terms of the present paper is a large question.

15   On assertion see Williamson (2000: 238-69). Evidently, an infinite regress looms if implying *p* involves implying that one knows *p* (in the same sense of 'imply'), for then one also implies that one knows that one knows *p*, and so *ad infinitum*. Arguably, all but the first few of these implications are false, even if 'know' is weakened to 'is in a position to know' (2000: 114-30). But no such regress flows from the principle that when one conventionally implies *p*, one conversationally implies that one knows *p*. In clause (2) of Grice's original definition of conversational implicature, 'the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, *q* is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say *p* (or doing so in *those* terms) consistent with this presumption [that he is observing the conversational maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle]' (1989: 31), the qualification 'or doing so in *those* terms' may permit conventional implicatures and not just what is said to generate conversational implicatures. If not, an amendment along such lines would be consistent with the spirit of Grice's approach.

16   The argument in the text does not require conventional implicatures to form a homogeneous category, and therefore withstands recent arguments that they do not (Bach (1999), criticized by Carston (2002: 174-77)). Much recent discussion of conventional implicatures focusses on their role in organizing discourse, as in the case of 'but'; pejoratives typically play no such role. For a recent systematic and rigorous account of conventional implicature see Potts 2005. Potts's application of his framework to expressives (153-93), for example honorifics in Japanese, is consonant in spirit with this paper. However, to subsume the present account of 'Boche' under his framework, one must relax his constraint that no term has both truth-conditional ('at-issue') content and conventional implicature content. See also note 13 above.

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17   Unlike Kaplan (2004), I do not want to replace truth-preservation as the standard of validity by 'information delimitation', in the sense that any semantic information (including conventional implicatures) contained in the conclusion must already be contained in the premises. By Kaplan's standard, 'or'-introduction is an invalid rule, because '2 + 2 = 4 or Lessing was a Boche' inherits the derogatory implication of 'Boche' and so contains semantic information not contained in '2 + 2 = 4'. Similarly, the inference from 'This is not a camera' to 'This is not a Boche camera' counts as invalid by Kaplan's standard. Of course, Boche-Introduction counts as valid only in a less than purely logical sense of 'valid', for 'Boche' and 'German' are not logical constants.

18   See Barker 2003 for the problem that conventional implicature poses for asserting Tarskian biconditionals. However, the details of Barker's account do not seem well-motivated. In acknowledging the truth of such biconditionals, the present truth-conditional approach is less reticent than that of Hornsby 2001. Note that

19   Vagueness is another case in which willingness to infer by rules that are not truth-preserving has been treated as a precondition for having some defective concepts. Thus Dummett (1975) argues that observational predicates in natural language are governed by rules that infect the language with inconsistency: for example, to understand 'looks red' one must be willing to apply a tolerance principle by which one can infer from 'x is visually indiscriminable from y' and 'x looks red' to 'y looks red', which generates sorites paradoxes because visual indiscriminability is non-transitive. More recently, Roy Sorensen (2001) has argued that linguistic competence with vague terms involves willingness to make inferences

such as that from '*n* seconds after noon is noonish' to '*n*+1 seconds after noon is noonish', which commits us to inconsistent conclusions by sorites reasoning (given our other commitments, such as 'Noon is noonish' and 'Midnight is not noonish'); he combines that view with an epistemic account of vagueness on which vague expressions have non-trivial classical extensions. By the present arguments, such claims about linguistic competence and concept possession are mistaken. An ordinary speaker of English who understands 'looks red' and 'noonish' and has the concepts *looks red* and *noonish* in the normal way but then rejects the relevant tolerance principles in the light of the sorites paradoxes does not thereby cease to understand those expressions or to have those concepts (perhaps she treats the premises of the tolerance principles as providing excellent defeasible evidence for their conclusions, an attitude which is less than Dummett and Sorensen require for competence). Even if the whole linguistic community abandons its supposed commitment to the tolerance principles, without stipulating any cut-off points, that would not make 'looks red' or 'noonish' any more precise, so speakers' acceptance of tolerance principles is in any case quite inessential to vagueness.

20   If concepts are thought constituents, and *Boche* and *German* are the same concept, then in judging *Germans are German* one simultaneously judges *Germans are Boche*, however much one's reactions discriminate between the sentences 'Germans are German' and 'Germans are Boche'. Compare: if *furze* and *gorse* are the same concept, then in judging *furze is furze* one simultaneously judges *furze is gorse*, however much one's reactions discriminate between the sentences 'Furze is furze' and 'Furze is gorse'.

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