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Affect-marked Lexemes and Their Relational Model Correlates

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ABSTRACT

Four categories of affect-marked lexemes are prominent in a variety of languages, suggesting thereby that all four may be universal, cross-cultural categories: slang, swearwords, honorifics and terms of endearment. Each of these categories (as well as the closely associated ones of nicknames and pet names) is "designed" to serve specific social functions. Data from China and the U.S. indicate that these lexemic categories overlap with each other both functionally and in terms of the specific lexemes that comprise them (Moore et al. 2010). However, they can be distinguished in terms of their prototypical forms and functions. Furthermore, the prototypical functions correspond to the universal relational models identified by Alan Fiske (1991). This paper proposes that the apparent universality of both the lexemic categories and Fiske's relational models together reveal fundamental aspects of social structure at the behavioral and linguistic levels.

INTRODUCTION

Some categories of words and phrases are characterized by their association with specific kinds of affect. Of these, slang, swearwords, honorifics and terms of endearment stand out as so characterized, and are also worthy of interest by virtue of their seeming universality. There appear to be no languages in which these linguistic forms do not occur, or, at least I am not aware of any such languages.

It is also the case that the four relational models identified by Fiske and his associates (Fiske 1991) also occur cross-culturally and correspond in some ways to the lexemic categories listed above. This correspondence does not represent a perfect one-to-one match between the lexemic and relational categories, but they are parallel in some important ways. This correspondence between linguistic forms and relationship types suggests that the former may have emerged in support of the latter. These lexemic categories, then, may exist in various languages because they supplement the patterns of interaction that have emerged as the building blocks of human societies.

DEFINING SLANG

Of the four categories listed above, the one that has received the most scholarly attention is slang. Several slang dictionaries have been published and two books covering the nature and uses of slang have appeared within the past few years (Adams 2009, Coleman 2012). One reason for the attention that slang scholarship has received is the difficulty linguists have had in defining it. It is with this difficulty that I will begin this analysis.

In their classic attempt to establish the validity of slang as an appropriate object of linguistic study, Dumas and Lighter (1978) listed four features that they suggest capture the essence of this concept. These features can be paraphrased as (1) lowering the dignity of formal or serious speech or writing, (2) implying the speaker's familiarity with people who use the term in question and who are low in status or are regarded as irresponsible, (3) tabooed in ordinary discourse with people of high status or significant responsibility, and (4) used as a way to avoid the discomfort associated with a standard equivalent or the discomfort that elaboration in standard language might entail.

Subsequent efforts to define slang have resulted in a similarly diverse and seemingly unstructured array of key features. The sprawling and unfocused quality of slang's various defining features that have been presented by different authors since Dumas and Lighter's study include, for example, its function in creating distance from social norms and promoting solidarity for members of a group (Drake 1980), as a device for "obtruding the self within the subculture—by cleverness, by control, by up-to-dateness, by insolence, by virtuositities of audacious and usually satirical wit, by aggression" (Chapman 1986:xii-xiii), characterized by extreme informality and "rebellious undertones or an intention of distancing its users from certain mainstream values" (Finegan 1994:373), serving to express informality, identify group membership, and oppose established authority (Eble 1996:116), pointedly non-deferential tone, often deployed to enhance sociability in relatively egalitarian groups (Moore et al. 2010).

The common features emphasized by these (and other) authors suggest that slang, in any given language, comprises a lexicon of words and phrases that express extreme informality, non-seriousness, cleverness, wit, audacity, rebelliousness, the rejection of mainstream values, the rejection of mainstream authority figures, and the embracing or acceptance of fellow group members in an egalitarian context. Very much in line with these features is Lighter's 2001 definition:

Slang denotes an informal, nonstandard, nontechnical vocabulary composed chiefly of novel-sounding synonyms (and near synonyms) for standard words and phrases; it is often associated with youthful, raffish, or undignified persons and groups; and it conveys often striking connotations of impertinence or irreverence, especially for established attitudes and values within the prevailing culture. (2001:220)

There is a contradiction in not being able to say just what a thing is on one hand, yet discussing it at length in scholarly articles on the other. One way to resolve this contradiction is to focus on those aspects of slang that are essential to it and that can be shown to serve a function that explains its continued existence and its relevance to the human condition in general. Such a function would justify our enduring sense that slang is, after all, an identifiable entity, and, in the words of Dumas and Lighter, "a word for linguists."

To illustrate, I will offer two sentences offered by my students when I asked them to provide examples of slang expressions that they might hear on campus today (i.e., Fall 2013).

Dude, that burger is dank.

She's so ratchet.

These two sentences are marked, first of all, by their informality. Beyond this, they also strongly suggest "attitude," and attitude, as a number of authors have recently noted, is the key to understanding slang (Adams 2009, Moore et al. 2010, Coleman 2012). *Dude* in particular has drawn attention for the attitude that it expresses. Kiesling (2004) has linked *dude* with what he describes as "cool solidarity." The other slangy expressions in the above samples – *dank* and *ratchet* – similarly suggest attitude. Their attitude is such that neither, for example, is likely to be used by a student to address a respected professor when discussing a serious issue. It is the attitude that each expresses, and not their *mere* informality or their usage within a restricted social group, that marks them as unacceptable in certain conversational contexts. To use slang is to express a more pointed attitude than, say, a mere colloquialism would imply.

TWO KINDS OF ATTITUDE: PLAYFUL VS. FEISTY

According to Adams, "When a word or phrase mingles irreverence and playfulness into something like defiance, whether toward authority (official or social) or life's vicissitudes, it's slang" (Adams 2009:12). Rather than describing slang as characterized by both playfulness and irreverence, I would suggest that it most typically expresses an attitude of either non-serious playfulness or a kind of feisty assertiveness that is irreverent or, at least, regarded by some as irreverent. Slang also may signal an underlying attitude when it references people or things that, to use Dumas and Lighter's wording, imply "the user's special familiarity either with the referent or with that less statusful or less responsible class of people who have such special familiarity and use the term" (1978:14). Slang, in other words, may be used not just to express immediate affect, but to imply, through identification, an association with certain kinds of people, people who are viewed as inclined to irreverence or aggressiveness toward the established, mainstream social order. These people, often members of marginalized groups, are perceived as caring little for the respectful and deferential language with which authority figures expect to be addressed. The honorifics which mark socially deferential language, as will be argued below, are the virtual opposites of slang terms.

Many, if not most, slang utterances can be placed into either the playful or the irreverent/defiant category. Since playfulness and defiant irreverence are rather different in nature, it may be argued that slang itself is an awkward category, one not conducive to linguistic analysis. But what binds these contrasting types of slang together is their opposition to an attitude of deference. Slang signals a rejection of a deferential attitude, that is, one which, through an exhibition of meekness or restrained dignity, one holds one's own thoughts or feelings in check out of respect for some social ideal or personage. Whether a slang user disregards the strictures of propriety out of non-serious playfulness or irreverent defiance matters less than that he or she is disregarding them at all. It is this sharp and pointed opposition to requirements for or

expectations of respectful deference that characterizes slang and makes it a somewhat coherent linguistic category, albeit a bifurcated one.

A speaker who uses slang, then, signals an unwillingness to be deferential by virtue of either a playful or a somewhat feisty attitude. Slang expressions that suggest a light or playful attitude are often linked to a particular social group, typically a marginalized group, one that is not expected to approach the social order and its prominent representatives with deference. In fact, sociability, playfulness and membership in a specific social group can be seen as a cluster of behavioral and symbolic elements that work together: Those who “play” together are both regularly (though, of course, not invariably) sociable in their interactions and likely to share membership in a particular social group. This cluster of mutually reinforcing attributes, when viewed as functionally linked, helps clarify the logic of slang and explain its encompassing of a seemingly disparate array of defining qualities.

I have periodically asked my students over the past years to provide me with examples of current slang. The examples of slang I have elicited in this way tend to favor terms that are new and that are associated with a measure of humor or playfulness. Over the past five years, terms that have been offered in significant numbers include *baked*, *baller*, *crunk*, *dank*, *dope*, *dudeman*, *epic*, *fail*, *gangsta*, *ghetto*, *ill*, *mad*, *pop*, *random*, *ratchet*, *sick*, *skeazy*, *skank*, *sketch*, *sleaze*, and *‘sup*. In this same category of the playful can be included abbreviations made popular via the Internet: *bff*, *brb*, *ftw*, *idk*, *lmao*, *lol*, and *wtf*. Also popular are terms linked to the “cool” concept, including both *cool* itself as well as derivative terms, e.g., *chill* and *chillax*. Most of the above lexemes are, predictably enough, associated with contemporary youth culture.

But, in addition to these relatively light slang terms are a number which are not linked to youth culture or to any specific social group, i.e., such perennial swearwords as *bastard*, *bitch*, *cunt*, and *fucker*. Also in this category of feisty slang are a number of ethnic and homophobic slurs as well as the insult terms *cracker*, *douche* and *jackass*. Except possibly for *douche*, none of these is particularly linked to today’s youth or to any other social group. These kinds of slang are not as popular as those in the more playful group cited in the paragraph above. It may well be that slang can best be prototypically thought of as comprising those playful terms that are usually associated with specific social groups and that are often ephemeral, while the feistier or less playful expressions form a secondary category of slang. This latter category blends, almost imperceptibly, into swearing. That is, some slang utterances, used assertively or as a device for expressing intense affect, are barely distinguishable from swearwords, or distinguishable only through the conventional marking of the latter as taboo by virtue of their “dirty” nature, as the discussion of swearwords below will emphasize.

Given that the playful uses of slang are often employed to promote sociability, the playful vs. feisty categories of slang terms can be regarded as characterizing a “Sociability Dimension.” On one end of this continuum are those terms that promote sociability through their expression of a lighthearted or engaging attitude. On the non-sociable end of the dimension we can place those utterances that express an intense and sometimes hostile affect that is akin to the one expressed in swearwords.

The distinction between sociable and feisty slang can be illustrated through a consideration of specific usages. For example, from the PBS documentary *Young Lakota*, which is about young men and women on a Lakota Indian reservation, a guest musician opens his patter on a radio program with these words:

Hey, wha's up? This is Lightfoot, you're listenin' to the Podtribe. Don't touch that dial. Live from Pine Ridge, South Dakota. You know what's poppin'. Hello!

The young musician's use of "wha's up" and "You know what's poppin'" typify the sociable function of light slang, the kind of slang likely to promote a positive connection between speaker and listener. In such a context, slang promotes sociability, which, according to Eble (1996) is one of its primary functions among university students. A very similar function is served in the following case where the rock musician Jimi Hendrix introduces himself at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967:

Yeah, baby, dig on. Dig, man, this, you know I've been around, went to England and picked up these two cats, and now here we are, man. It was so, you know, groovy to come back this way, you know, and really get a chance to really play, you know.

Hendrix uses the 1960s youth slang terms *dig*, *man*, *cats*, and *groovy* to encourage a positive or sociable relationship with his audience. These slang terms also function to mark his membership in the generation that came of age in the 1960s and which is particularly associated with the slang term *cool* (Moore 2004). In fact, a relationship between sociable or light slang on the one hand and humor on the other, can be discerned in that humor is also commonly used by public speakers in their introductory remarks as a device for connecting with the audience.

On the other end of the spectrum are slang terms that do not suggest positive affect and usually are not indicative of membership in a specific group. For example, a young heir from the Newhouse family, interviewed for documentary, *Born Rich*, says, "They beat the *crap* out of me at a Quaker school." And then a little later, "I realized I didn't like my father so much because I came home all *screwed up* and he didn't even notice."

When Mr. Newhouse says "beat the *crap* out of me" and "I came home all *screwed up*," he is using phrases commonly regarded as slang, but neither these words nor the tone he uses suggest sociability, light-heartedness or playfulness. In fact, *crap* and *screwed* are near-swearwords, *crap* being a euphemism for *shit* and *screwed* for *fucked*. *Crap* and *screwed* are slang and they have slang's key characteristic: namely they are informal, they suggest attitude and they are used in egalitarian contexts rather than in hierarchical ones where deference and respect would be called for. In addition to this, *screwed*, like most slang expressions, is a Standard English lexeme used with a new meaning.

Neither *crap* nor *screwed* is quite the same as the more sociable terms used by the young Lakota speaker and the musician Jimi Hendrix in their self-introductions cited above. *Crap* and *screwed* do not characterize youth culture nor any other social category in particular. Like swearwords they are known to virtually all social groups in the U.S. and have endured as widely understood "lexemes with attitude" for decades.

Though a number of sources define slang as a “low” form of speech, it makes more sense to classify it as egalitarian rather than low. Of course, those of its terms which come close to swearwords may, by association, be regarded as somewhat vulgar, and that category of slang can therefore legitimately be thought of as “low” in some sense. However, slang as a whole cannot be so regarded, except by privileging the perspective of those who seek to enforce or emphasize status differences and who are therefore resentful or hostile toward slang’s egalitarian aspect. By analogy, one could argue that tuxedos and evening gowns are not really socially “higher” than T-shirts and sundresses. The former clothing categories are simply appropriate in certain social environments, specifically, in environments to which people of power and prestige have more access than do others. From a disinterested or scholarly perspective, it does not make sense to regard evening gowns as “superior to” or “better than” sundresses, nor does it make sense to regard formal, deferential speech as superior to slang. Each has its place.

Similarly, the idea that slang is “rebellious” calls for reconsideration. Slang has, for example, been defined as expressive of “insolence,...audacious and usually satirical wit,...aggression” (Chapman 1986:xii-xiii), or to have “rebellious undertones...” (Finegan 1994:373), or to be opposed to “established authority” (Eble 1996:116), and associated with “...youthful, raffish, or undignified persons,...[and to embody] striking connotations of impertinence or irreverence...” (Lighter 2001:220). But the insolent, satirical, rebellious, anti-establishmentarian, raffish, impertinent and irreverent qualities attributed to slang by these and other authors are largely explicable in terms of slang’s egalitarianism.

Dalzell’s (2010) description of “the slang of the oppressed in America,” includes citation after citation of slang used in a rebellious and often hostile spirit. Two citations that Dalzell lists from written African-American sources should suffice as illustrations.

“I was working down the aisle and a big, beefy, red-faced cracker soldier got up in front of me” (Dalzell 2010:37, from the *Autobiography of Malcom X* by Malcom X, orig. 1964).

“I escaped from Kern County jail and fought the pigs, all the way back to the midwestern area of my birth. (Dalzell 2010: 41, from *Soledad Brother* by George Jackson, orig. 1970).

From the perspectives of the *cracker* soldier in Malcolm X’s story and the *pigs* (i.e., police officers) in George Jackson’s, these slang terms are quite hostile, even though they can also be said to be the vocabulary of a specific social group, i.e., African-Americans. These lexemes can be categorized as social group-enhancing in that they reflected a widely shared set of attitudes within the African-American community, particularly during the turbulent 1960s. But from the perspective of those toward whom the hostility is directed, namely, the *crackers* and *pigs* at whom these terms are directed, the effect is certainly not “sociable.” On the Sociability Dimension, it makes sense to place terms used in contexts like these as near the midpoint, in that they share both the group-strengthening features of sociable slang and the defiant/irreverent affect of those slang terms that approach swearwords in their emotional tone.

SLANG/SWEARWORD OVERLAP

As the similarity of some slang terms to swearwords implies, these categories are not absolutely restricted in their usage to the purposes or the affective tones with which I am associating them. Furthermore, swearwords, in those contexts where they are used to promote a playful and sociable atmosphere can be viewed as virtual slang terms. A bridge party offers one incident illustrating this. This took place at the home of one couple with three other couples present, all good friends. The eight players earnestly engaged in the game for several minutes. Then one of the females, in an apparent effort to lighten the tone of the party, said, "Somebody say something dirty." Immediately one of the males (not her spouse) responded with, "Shit," and everyone burst into laughter. This quick exchange lightened the atmosphere which had threatened to be dragged down by the concentration or competitive impulses of the players.

Two things are worth mentioning here. First, *shit* was readily identifiable as "dirty," which is to say, it is fundamentally a swearword. Second the function of this lexeme in this instance had nothing to do with the intense, negative or hostile affect with which swearwords are associated. It functioned in the bridge party as a slang term; that is, it served to increase the lighthearted sociability of the group, again in a way that suggests sociable slang's close connection to humor.

And, just as swearwords may function as slang, slang lexemes, in their feistier usages, sometimes come close to functioning as swearwords. In the 1967 Pennebaker documentary *Dont Look Back*, Bob Dylan is seen mildly complaining about the quality of the harmonica he's been given to use in a soon-to-begin performance. "I'll use it, it's passable. It's just a *drag*..."

The slang term *drag*, widely used in the 1960s and a marker of the young generation of that era, refers to a dispiriting or otherwise negative experience. It's not a swearword, but Dylan's use of it emphasizes his annoyance or negative affect. Had he said, "...it's just a *shitty* situation," the negative affect would be even more intense. Had he instead used Standard English, e.g., "...it's just a disappointing situation," the negative affect would not have registered with such strength. Again, slang is prototypically expressive of attitude, and when that attitude is feisty or assertive rather than sociable or playful, slang terms can come close to functioning like swearwords. This close tie between slang terms and swearwords has been noted by a number of authors (Stenström et al. 2002, Moore 2012, Mohr 2013).

PROTOTYPES

A useful concept from cognitive psychology that will help deal with the problem of these overlapping categories is that of the prototype. According to Rosch, prototypes are "the clearest cases" of members in a given category (1978:36). A robin, for example, is a prototypical example of a bird, whereas an ostrich is not. By considering elements in a category in terms of how clearly they are understood to belong to that category, we can conceptually set aside troublesome borderline or ambiguous cases. These borderline or "fuzzy boundary" cases are best regarded as secondary to the key functions of slang terms and swearwords. What they illustrate is the human capacity for endless invention or "bricolage."

Non-prototypical usages of affect-marked lexemes, like that where the swearword *shit* was used for jocular effect, reveal the complexity and flexibility of these lexemic categories. But these lexemes are best understood first and primarily in terms of their prototypical functions, the functions that justify their very existence. Swearwords, when used for their prototypical function - the expression of intense and often negative affect - comprise a distinct lexicon. This distinctness is reflected, for example, in that in some cases of aphasia, a speaker may have lost his or her ability to speak, but still remains capable of uttering common swearwords (Jay 1999).

For swearwords, six of the seven words “you can’t say on television,” made famous by comedian George Carlin (shit, piss, fuck, cunt, cocksucker, and motherfucker) can be viewed as prototypical when they are used to express intense affect. Any of these may come readily to mind when a speaker is shocked, surprised, injured or angered. If the speaker hurls one or more of them out in anger or pain (“You cunt-faced bastard!”), he or she is deploying these words in a way for which they are, so to speak, “designed” to be used. No other class of lexemes can do the work that swearwords can do when they are used to express such intense affect. In fact, the uniqueness of their capacity to fulfill this function goes a long way toward explaining their very existence.

Insult terms can actually be viewed as a spectrum of expressions that range from obscenities or swearwords on one end (e.g., *cunt*, *asshole*) through such vulgarisms as *douchebag* and *butthead* to less obscene expressions like *jerk* or *creep*. These too, can be viewed as affect-marked in contexts where they are hurled as insults. In American English, ethnic and racial slurs fall along this spectrum and are similarly, even increasingly, regarded as taboo in much the same way that traditional swearwords are.

Expressions on this spectrum can be classified as swearwords in those cases where their obscene or “dirty” nature is a cultural given. But the insult terms that are not swearwords (*douchebag*, *jackass*, etc.) are best viewed as slang terms inasmuch as they express a feisty attitude and are relatively inventive constructions derived from Standard English. *Jerk*, *creep* and other non-obscene insult terms (*rat*, *heel*, *louse*, *loser*, etc.) have enduring positions in the English language that may make their status as slang debatable. Their questionable status as slang emphasizes, again, the fuzziness of the boundary that separates clearly and prototypically slang terms like *ratchet* and *dank* from other kinds of colloquial expressions. For our purposes, the “slanginess” or prototypicality of a given expression is a function of how pointedly non-deferential it is, how new to the language it is, and how closely it is associated with a specific subgroup, particularly a marginalized subgroup. Words like *jackass* and *cracker* are not examples of prototypical slang, since they are enduring in American English and not associated with any particular group, but they are slangy enough that they have been offered as examples of slang by some of my students.

HONORIFICS AND TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

Two other lexemic categories that are marked by affect are honorifics and terms of endearment. Honorifics are words or phrases used to address or refer to people for whom esteem or respect is expected (Irvine 1998). When esteem or respect is entailed in a relationship, in many cases this calls for a degree of deference on the part of the junior member. Terms of endearment are defined by their inherent link to feelings of tender affection.

These four categories – slang, swearwords, honorifics and terms of endearment - can be viewed as a semiotic set defined by virtue of the members of each as being affect-marked. When a term from one of these categories is deployed in an utterance (always with such obvious exceptions as ironic usage) the speaker is generally saying something about the affective tone that he or she believes to characterize the relationship, or hopes to encourage as an attribute of the relationship. A few examples collected over the past several years will illustrate this point.

SLANG

Yo Philly, 'sup? (One student addressing another in a college cafeteria)

SWEARWORD

You *cunt-faced bastard!* (Uttered by a young, male video game player against an ally who he felt had betrayed him.)

HONORIFIC

Hello, *Dr. Miller*, Thank you for informing me. I will also introduce myself to *Dr. Newton*. (Student email to professor – names changed to preserve privacy.)

TERM OF ENDEARMENT

Hey *Hon*, I thought you sent me some Christmas present ideas, but I can't find any in my inbox. (Part of an email exchange between spouses.)

Each of these categories of lexemes can be seen as typically marking affect when deployed in discourse. The affective tones are as follows:

- pointedly non-deferential informality
- intense affect
- deference
- affection

Each of these lexemic categories, incidentally, is widespread enough in different languages that they can all be considered good candidates for universality. Slang, for example, appears to occur in some form in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, and Kannada, to name a few languages in which it has been identified. And in all of these languages, the lexicon of slang shares similar attributes: it comprises a set of words and phrases entailing an informal, pointedly non-deferential attitude that is primarily used in egalitarian contexts. It may well be that like slang, swearwords, honorifics and terms of endearment are also universal. They all occur, for example, in the major languages of Western Europe as well as in Mandarin and Cantonese.

Where honorifics are concerned, a comparison between a prototypical and an ambiguous case may be useful. The phrase “your honor,” when used to address a judge in a courtroom exemplifies a prototypical usage. This is a context in which the “powers that be” in an urban society insist on respect and deference in both word and deed toward the most authoritative individual representing the state, namely, the judge. Respect and deference are the quintessential defining qualities of honorifics, and these affective aspects of this usage mark “your honor” as a prototypical example of an honorific.

A non-prototypical or borderline case would be the term of address *Doc*, as it was used by a group of my students who traveled with me on a research trip. It is somewhat respectful, but it also has qualities that suggest a nickname, a category that is much closer to slang in its sociable mode than of the sober deference of prototypical honorific usages. In fact, the relationships between instructor and students on this trip was relaxed and informal enough that the somewhat casual term of address “Doc” seemed perfectly natural and fitting.

TERMS OF ENDEARMENT, PET NAMES AND NICKNAMES

Hon as used in the example above (Hey *Hon*, I thought you sent me some Christmas present ideas...) can be regarded as a prototypical term of endearment, as can the infamous *schmoopie* uttered ad nauseam by Seinfeld and his girlfriend in the “Soup Nazi” episode. A somewhat more ambiguous case is the use of terms like *Hon* and *Sweetheart* by waitresses in certain restaurants. The waitresses may want to suggest a kind of friendliness akin to what a warm-hearted aunt might extend to a favorite niece or nephew, even though the customer being addressed could well be a complete stranger. A usage framed in these terms can be seen as one in which the affective relationship does not exist, but, in light of the waitress’s desire for a decent tip, and/or a pleasant exchange with a fellow human being, the term of endearment here must be regarded as a non-prototypical usage. It’s best seen as an extension from the prototypical usage, namely that which commonly occurs between parents and children, spouses, lovers and other such emotionally linked individuals.

Certain categories of names are affectively marked in ways that are similar to slang on the one hand and terms of endearment on the other. Specifically, ordinary nicknames, which are usually bestowed by friends or among such egalitarian groups as classmates, soldiers, or workmates, have many of the same attributes that slang has. They are often playful or humorous, they are used mainly in informal contexts, and their use suggests an egalitarian relationship (Brandes 1975).

Walt Whitman was one of the earliest observers to note the connection between slang and nicknames when he wrote in his famous essay on slang (1885) as follows:

What a relief most people have in speaking of a man not by his true and formal name, with a ‘Mister’ to it, but by some odd or homely appellative. The propensity to approach a meaning not directly and squarely, but by circuitous styles of expression, seems indeed a born quality of the common people every where, evidenced by nick-names, and the inveterate determination of the masses to bestow sub-titles, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes very apt.

A separate category from ordinary nicknames is the pet name, an informal name typically bestowed by parents on their young children or by lovers or spouses on each other. In English these are often referred to as nicknames, but in other languages, e.g., Chinese, these names are distinguished from ordinary nicknames by having completely different labels, as will be discussed further below.

The power of the affective impulses underlying terms of endearment and pet names is evidenced by their pervasiveness. I asked students in two (non-linguistic) anthropology classes to write down any pet names that their parents or other older relatives gave them when they were children. Of the 30 students in the two classes, only four indicated that no pet names had been bestowed on them in their childhood. Of these four, one indicated that, though he had no pet name, his sister had in fact been given such names by her father and grandfather. Here are some of the pet names collected (anonymously) from 22 different students:

FIGURE 1: FAMILY PET NAMES OF 22 COLLEGE STUDENTS

Baby	Kels	Negrino
Bebe	Maymay	Noka
Bebo	Mimi	Pooka Bear
Bub	Miss Tay	Shellica
Catie-lady	Miss Tess	T
Chrissy Boo	Mon Amour	T2
Coco	Nanny Sue	Walzy
Kat-koot		

Besides these, there were another four names offered by four other students that were hypocorisms, common derivatives of given names, e.g., Petey from Peter and Willy from William. Some students listed more than one pet name for themselves. In addition to this, 20 students cited family pet names that had been bestowed on one or more of their siblings.

CHINESE NICKNAMES – XIAOMING VS WAIHAO

These pet names are affectively distinct from the kinds of nicknames picked up in school or the workplace. The emphasis in pet names is on a sense of intimacy and affection, whereas ordinary nicknames more typically suggest the (sometimes rough) playfulness of slang. This distinction is not especially evident in English where both of these types of names are commonly referred to as nicknames. But in Mandarin Chinese, these two kinds of names are markedly distinct from each other, not only in their affective tone, but in the labels that each has. In Mandarin the family pet name is known as a *xiaoming* (literally, a “small name”) while the common nickname is a *waihao* (“outside name”). *Xiaoming* are at least as common in China as family pet names are in the U.S. The different affective implications of these two kinds of names can be illustrated by a comment made to me by a Chinese graduate student who, at the time, was studying in the U.S. When I asked him if he would ever address his brother by his *waihao*, which was “Da Tou” or “Big Head”, he said to me with a great deal of emphasis, “I would not call my little brother ‘Da

Tou.’ *Waihao* and *chuohao* are never called among families.” (*Chuohao* – literally “extra name” - is an alternate Mandarin word for outside or common nickname.)

In China, *xiaoming* are used not only within the family (and sometimes by close family friends), but also between lovers. A Beijing couple of my acquaintance, started out addressing each other by their given names, but eventually, once their relationship had become quite seriously marriage-oriented, began to address each other as “Huhu.” Huhu has no semantic content and no connection to either one’s actual name. Nobody else used this name, and, as they explained to me, it was definitely a *xiaoming* and not a *waihao*.

Some couples actually make use of the *xiaoming* that one or the other of them already bears by virtue of natal family bestowal in their childhood. In an unusual case, one university student explained how her boyfriend’s nickname (*waihao*) eventually became her pet name (*xiaoming*) for him. When he first sought her affections, she and her friends regarded him as just another classmate, and they nicknamed him Lufanhe (Green Lunch Box) because of the distinct lunch box he habitually carried. However, when he was finally accepted as her boyfriend, his nickname evolved into a pet name. That is, she continued to address him, now affectionately, as “Green Lunch Box,” but her friends and other classmates dropped this usage out of deference to the intimacy of the couple (Moore 1993).

Cantonese follows the same pattern as Mandarin. “Outside” nicknames (*fameng*, literally “flower names”) are bestowed by friends, classmates and other such acquaintances. Family nicknames (*yuhmeng* or “milk names”) are given within the family. What these Mandarin and Cantonese patterns highlight is the distinctively different affect that is associated with these two different categories of what in English are called nicknames. Both pet names and nicknames proper are informal, and are inappropriate for use in formal settings, but each is quite different from the other by virtue of their emphasis on, respectively, tender affection and playfulness or humor.

FISKE’S RELATIONAL MODELS

If the four affect-marked categories listed here (including nicknames and pet names as subcategories of slang and terms of endearment, respectively) are universal, it makes sense to regard them as facilitators of certain kinds of social relationships that are cross-culturally universal. The research of Alan Fiske offers one model through which linguistic and behavioral categories might be seen as cross-culturally linked. Fiske has isolated a set of social relationship types that he argues are universal in human societies. According to his theory of relational models (Fiske 1991), there are four elemental kinds of relationships that he labels as Communal Sharing (CS), Authority Ranking (AR), Equality Matching (EM), and Market Pricing (MP). Briefly, the Communal Sharing relationships are those in which individuals are close enough to each other that they “share a fate” in the sense that what one owns is automatically regarded as also belonging to the other, as are their debts and obligations. AR relationships are those in which one party is expected to defer to the authority or higher status of another. Equality Matching describes a relationship in which individuals are treated as separate but equal and are also regarded as having certain fixed equal rights to a given good, or are similarly equally obligated with regard to some duty. Market Pricing relationships are those in which individuals

are also regarded as separate and equal, but in these relationships the individuals have the flexibility to negotiate what each is willing to give to the other in any given exchange.

These four relationship types are, of course, ideals; a relationship between two real individuals may include aspects of more than one relationship type. A child will relate to a beloved parent both in a Communal Sharing sense (as when both mother and daughter feel free to help themselves to food in the household refrigerator) and in terms of Authority Ranking (as when the mother expects to be addressed as Mom or Mother rather than by her first name).

Fiske’s Communal Sharing relationships correspond, in many cases to the use of terms of endearment. Communal sharing relationships, in their most basic or prototypical sense, are those found among individuals who are strongly committed to each other in emotional terms, such as family/household members and lovers. But there are extensions beyond these basic or prototypical relationships that Fiske would include, such as clan members, within which the affect implied in a term of endearment or pet name might not be expected. These extended groups, in light of the prototype theory discussed above, are best seen as reflecting the difference between a prototypical Communal Sharing relationship (e.g., between a loving mother and her daughter) as opposed to a borderline case (e.g., the sense of obligation an individual might feel toward a not particularly charming cousin who invites himself to Thanksgiving dinner).

Rather than seeing these four categories as essentially equal in terms of their differentiation from each other, it might be best to view them taxonomically, such that some or more different from each other than are others.

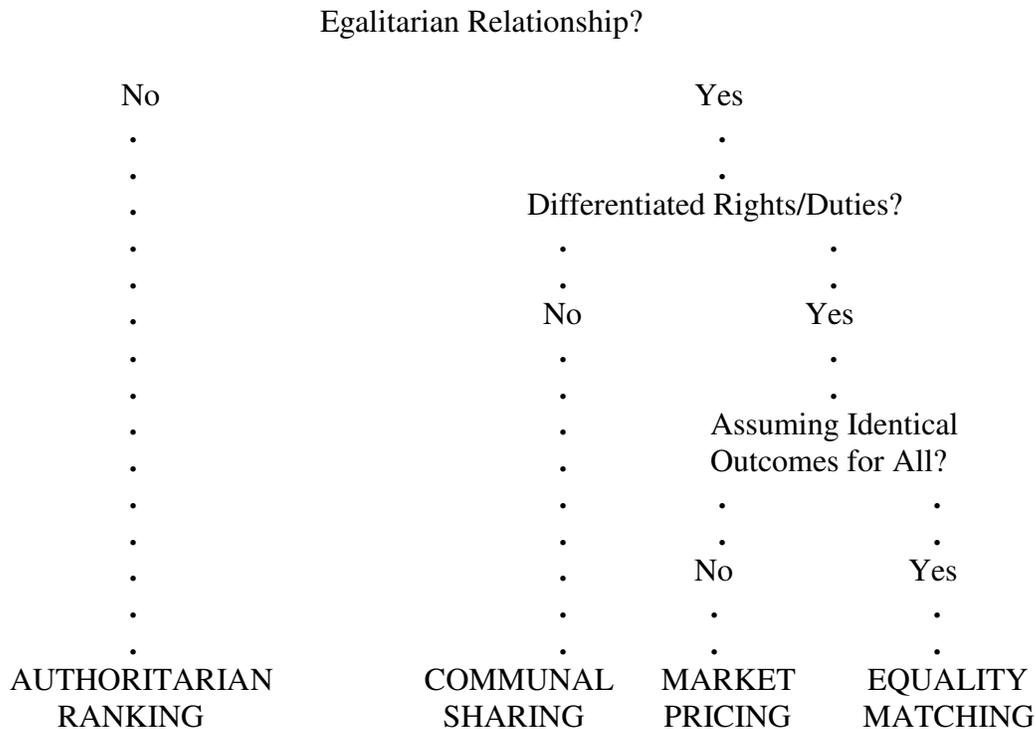


FIGURE 2 – FISKE’S CATEGORIES ARRANGED TAXONOMICALLY

Authority Ranking relationships match rather closely those in which honorifics are appropriately used by the individual of lower status. The other two relationship types identified by Fiske (Equality Matching and Market Pricing) are similar to each other in a number of regards, and, given that each is constituted of separate but theoretically equal individuals, they are the kinds of relationship in which slang is most likely to occur.

These four relationship types are pertinent here because they are presented as universal patterns of human interaction and they correspond in many ways to the categories of affect-marked lexemes listed above. If Fiske is correct in his claim that these four relationship types are the elements comprising social relationships in all societies, it makes sense that societies everywhere would support these relationship types with certain specific, affect-marked sets of lexemes. The social forces that have led to the relationships Fiske describes then, would be the same ones encouraging the emergence of their corresponding lexeme types.

Swearwords can be seen as special in the sense that when they are used in a social relationship in a manner that I would regard as prototypical, that is, as markers of intense, possibly hostile, affect, they weaken rather than support the relationship. It may be said that when one individual directs an angry swearword against another, he or she is disregarding what may have previously been an Authority Ranking, Communal Sharing, Equality Matching or Market Pricing relationship in favor of what Fiske describes as a Null Relationship, that is, the absence of an established connection. Obviously not every use of an angry swearword ends a relationship, but swearwords comprise the one lexemic category most likely to do so or whose use implies, to some extent and perhaps temporarily, the absence of a sense of affection or obligation between individuals.

Referring to Fiske's model, we might say that every human society is organized around a specific set of social relationship types, and every language provides certain affect-marked lexemes that can be readily deployed to identify and reinforce the relationships to which they correspond.

FIGURE 3

FISKE'S RELATIONSHIP TYPES AND CORRESPONDING LEXEMIC CATEGORIES

Communal Sharing	Terms of Endearment (and Pet Names)
Authority Ranking	Honorifics
Equality Matching	Slang (and Nicknames) - when informal solidarity is sought
Market Pricing	Slang (and Nicknames) - when informal solidarity is sought
Null Relationship	Swearwords – may signal a weakening of a relationship

Though Fiske's relational types correlate roughly with the categories of affect-marked lexemes identified here, it can be said that in the case of slang, Fiske's relationship types offer no explanation as to why slang should exist as a separate category from the standard form of any given language. Standard language without honorifics or terms of endearment would seem to be adequate for communication in Fiske's Equality Matching and Market Pricing relationships, i.e., those that exist between equal but separate individuals. But it is in these two relationship types that slang would most likely be used.

To explain slang's existence in terms of its function, it is best to think again in terms of attitude, that quality that has come to dominate many contemporary definitions of slang. What the attitudes of slang say, in both their playful/sociable and defiant/irreverent versions, is that individuals occasionally seek to be pointedly expressive no matter what social forces may be arrayed in potential opposition to them. Slang, then, is an impulsive and largely individualistic verbal gesture that is fundamentally defiant toward some of the forces identified by Foucault (1995) as the instruments of social control, namely, hierarchical observation, and normalizing judgment. The user of slang defies or ignores hierarchy and rejects what is "normal" or standard in favor of that which is pungent and creative. Seen in this light, slang can be regarded as an individual's self-asserting gesture against the linguistic restraints of the social order.

CONCLUSION

This review of affect-marked lexemes began with a consideration of the definition of slang, and it is on this issue that I would like to conclude. In some ways, the definitions of slang developed thus far suggest a parallel with the famous folktale in which different blind men argue as to whether the elephant they are touching is a pillar, a rope, a branch, a fan, a wall, or a pipe. But those who have attempted to define slang, unlike the argumentative blind men of this tale, seem to have finally agreed that slang is characterized by a disparate array of attributes, and have decided to let the issue stand at that. But I would suggest that a little further argumentativeness might be conducive to a more coherent and thorough understanding of slang. After all, biologists can actually explain how elephants operate as viable, unified systems, and it follows that linguists should be able to do the same with slang.

Scholars have been reaching an agreement recently that slang is fundamentally a set of lexemes which, in appropriate contexts, express an attitude that is pointedly non-deferential. I would add to this that slang, in its lighter form (on the "sociable" end of the Sociability Dimension), often enhances egalitarian solidarity. Furthermore, especially in its light/sociable form though sometimes in its feisty/assertive form as well, it is often perceived as an identifying marker of certain social groups, even though its use within these groups may be viewed by outsiders as impertinent or even rebellious. Slang, in other words, while bringing people together through its sociability function, may simultaneously tend to distance them from those who see themselves as outside its solidarity-building effects. And, though sometimes described as a relatively low form of discourse, it is best thought of, not as necessarily lower than standard speech, but rather as appropriate for informal interactions in which those who seek to affirm superior status are not deferred to. This "declining to defer" aspect is responsible for much of slang's rebellious, impertinent and lowly reputation.

Slang is a linguistic form whose affective tones serve a number of related purposes. At the heart of these purposes is slang's embodying, in its prototypical usage, of an impulsive, from-the-heart quality that is inherently satisfying in its expressiveness. As a rule, those who use slang do so because they "feel like it" and not because figures of authority demand it. Naturally, one could argue that honorifics are also often used by speakers who feel right about their utterances, and believe they are speaking just as they choose to without any thought that their use of honorifics is merely a response to coercive pressures. Nevertheless, the prospect of social pressure is there even in these cases. On the occasions where honorifics are called for, those who decline to use them may well be sanctioned. In light of this, slang is best seen, in Foucauldian terms, as a linguistic device through which individuals can assert themselves against the social order, particularly where that order is hierarchically arranged.

Slang's less individualistic function is to represent one's association with a group. For example, when the widely used basic slang terms *swell* and *cool* were adopted by rebellious generations in the 1920s and 1960s respectively, they served as indicators of where those who uttered them stood concerning a number of social values. In fact, they signaled fundamental shifts in social values implemented by rising generations in those eras (Moore 2004).

We might say, then, that slang allows individuals to say who they believe themselves to "really" be, and in doing so, it also allows them to indicate what group they belong to. In using slang an individual says, "This is who I am, this is how I feel, these are the people who share my views and the powers that be can take it or leave it." Where Fiske's relational models are concerned, slang does not correlate well with Communal Sharing relationships and is concerned not at all with those of Authority Ranking. It is most appropriate in relationships where independent individuals of theoretically equal status adjust their behavior vis-à-vis each other, i.e., in relationships of Equality Matching and Market Pricing. Obviously it is not necessary to such relationships, but it is within them that it is most appropriately deployed. These relationship types, by the way, may best be thought of as default option relationships, that is, as relationships characterized neither by the special togetherness typical of Communal Sharing nor of the status differentiation of Authority Ranking.

Like slang, the other three affect-marked lexemic categories serve their own prototypical functions. Swearwords resemble slang in being informal and non-deferential, and largely for this reason, overlap broadly with slang to the point where many people regard swearwords as a kind of slang. But prototypically, swearwords are used to express intense affect, and when directed by one individual against another, they express negative affect. Like slang, they are most likely to be associated with Equality Matching and Market Pricing relationships, though certainly they can be found in any relationship where things somehow go wrong.

Honorifics are the linguistic forms with which individuals signal respect for others, and prototypically, their expression signals a status difference where the one addressed or referred to demands a measure of deference. They correspond closely to Fiske's Authority Ranking relationship type. The last affect-marked set of lexemes, terms of endearment, and the closely related pet names, are expressive of affection and are prototypically used between individuals who know and care for each other, that is, individuals in a Communal Sharing relationship.

What all four of these lexemic categories have in common is a connection to affect or attitude that is called up automatically when they are used, and for this reason, they are best understood in light of this shared attribute. The relational models offered by Fiske provide a social foundation that suggests that these linguistic types may have emerged in response to specific, cross-culturally universal relationship patterns.

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