An introduction to the special issue on Slurs

Welcome to this special issue of Language Sciences on slurs. The collection in this issue consists of 21 original research articles from seasoned scholars and exceptional students across the humanities and social sciences. These scholars come from backgrounds in linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, and sociology, and here they investigate the use of slurs in a variety of natural languages, including English, Croatian, Hebrew, Korean, and Portuguese.

The topic of focus for this special issue has not only remained controversial and relatively unexplored in academic publications, but has also largely been discussed in published work by privileged groups that lack practical experience of the variety of ways that slurs are actually used in contemporary life. This has resulted in mostly unseasoned speculations and one-sided discussions about slurs that do not offer genuine insight into the various ways that they are actually used and that does not help advance further research on the topic. Peer-review and citation practices in philosophy have been especially poor, leaving many minority groups without voice or proper credit for their original work. So with an opportunity to edit this special issue on slurs I felt it important to include contributions from a wide variety of demographics and disciplinary perspectives, and that each article be carefully peer-reviewed by an average of three anonymous reviewers. Scholars from different disciplines were encouraged to read widely, become familiar with each other’s work, and cite appropriately. This required an incredible effort and much patience from all involved, including authors, reviewers, and editors. But as a result this special issue provides a uniquely rigorous and interdisciplinary collection of articles from a wide variety of perspectives on a timely issue that has for far too long been neglected.

The aim for this special issue is not only to enrich our understanding of the meaning and use of slurs in natural language more specifically, but to further broaden our understanding of the meaning and use of natural language more generally by carefully considering, for instance, how language can carry such affective force, involve stereotypes of typical targets, and be used derogatorily or non-derogatorily depending upon the context and agents involved. The articles included in this collection explore these issues and much more, presenting new empirical findings and critical discussion that is sure to advance further fruitful work in the field.

I am honored to have the opportunity to provide a high quality and inclusive forum for discussion on slurs that will be of interest to lay readers, students, and seasoned scholars alike, and sincerely thank everyone involved for their thoughtful contributions to this special issue.

Further reading


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