

Expressivity and Lying

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-- forthcoming in D. Gutzmann and K. Turgay (eds.),
The Oxford Handbook of Expressivity --

1 The Traditional Definition of Lying

According to most writers on lying, to lie is to *assert* something one believes to be false, as captured by what is sometimes called “The Assertion-Based Definition of Lying:”¹

The Assertion-Based Definition of Lying (AL)

A lies to B if and only if there is a proposition p such that

(AL1) A asserts that p , and

(AL2) A believes that p is false.

The classic motivation for this view was to capture the contrast between lying and *merely* misleading, that is, misleading or deceptive speech that falls short of lying.² Here is a standard example:³

Work

Mark is going to Paul’s party tonight. He has a long day of work ahead of him before that, but he is very excited and can’t wait to get there. Mark’s annoying

¹ See e.g. Chisholm and Feehan (1977), Adler (1997), Carson (2006), (2010), Sorensen (2007), Fallis (2009), Saul (2012), Stokke (2013), (2018).

² We use “misleading” and “deceptive” interchangeably.

³ From Stokke (2018, 76).

friend, Rebecca, comes up to him and starts talking to him about the party. Mark is fairly sure that Rebecca won't go unless she thinks he's going, too.

(1) Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?

Mark. No, I'm not going.

(2) Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?

Mark. I have to work.

In (1) Mark lied to Rebecca. By contrast, whereas he was clearly being misleading or deceptive in (2), he did not lie. This contrast is explained by (AL). In (1) Mark asserted that he was not going to the party, whereas in (2) he did not assert that. Rather, in (2), he *conversationally implicated* that he was not going to the party by asserting something true, namely that he had to work.

This standard view of lying, and of the difference between lying and merely misleading, as captured by (AL), makes predictions across a range of linguistic constructions and types of speech acts. Most obviously, if a particular way of speaking cannot be used to make assertions, using it to communicate something one believes to be false does not amount to lying. For instance, given that the interrogative in (3) does not assert anything, you are not lying if you ask (3) while knowing full well whether Eli is going to the party or not.

(3) Is Eli going to the party?

Even so, you are clearly misleading the addressee into thinking that you do not know the answer. Similarly, even though you are being misleading, you are not lying if you utter the imperative in (4) while wanting the addressee to not go to the party, for whatever reason.

(4) Go to the party!

Yet there are other linguistic phenomena for which things are less clear.

Expressives form an interesting category of this kind. As we will see in this chapter, expressives such as “ouch,” “damn,” and “Kraut,” raise a range of interesting questions concerning the lying-misleading distinction, questions that bring out features of these expressions themselves as well as highlighting issues concerning assertion and other ways of understanding lying. We will see that, indeed, a number of methodological considerations are brought to the fore by examining how expressives behave in relation to the difference between lying and merely misleading

2 Expressives

What are expressives and why are they interesting for discussions concerning the notion of lying? It is not the task of this chapter to attempt to delineate the class of expressives in natural languages. Rather, we focus on some cases that we take to be fairly uncontroversial examples of expressives.

At the most general level, expressives are words or constructions that convey some evaluative content, indicating something about the speaker’s perspective, more particularly: something about the speaker’s attitudes or emotions. Here we will distinguish between so-called *pure* and *hybrid* expressives.

The former include words like “ouch” and “damn,” and are widely thought to convey *only* evaluative content. Moreover, their evaluative contents are thought to be genuinely expressive, meaning that it does not contribute to truth-conditional content. Indeed, an utterance like “Ouch!” is not truth-apt at all: it is not an utterance that can be true or false.

By contrast, flagship examples of hybrid expressives are *slurs* like “Kraut” or “faggot.” Slurs are standardly taken to convey both evaluative and descriptive content: “Kraut” conveys both the same as “German” and some negative evaluation of Germans. As we will see, though, it is controversial whether the evaluative dimension of hybrid expressives is to be seen as genuinely expressive, like that of “ouch.” We begin by considering pure expressives and turn to hybrid expressives in later sections.

Consider the sentence in (5).

(5) You didn't close the damn window!

Consensus has it that (5) is true if and only if the addressee did not close the window. This corresponds to the thought that *what is said* by (5), its truth-conditional content, is that the addressee did not close the window. Yet clearly, due to the presence of "damn," (5) also conveys something like that the speaker was annoyed that the addressee did not close the window, or perhaps that she is annoyed at the window itself for some reason. Still, few would think that this additional content has influence on the truth conditions of (5). So even if the speaker was not annoyed, or loves the window, (5) is still true as long as the addressee did not close it.

Even so, an utterance of (5) clearly conveys or communicates propositional, or descriptive, information corresponding to its evaluative dimension. When someone utters (5), the information that they are annoyed is conveyed to others. Similarly, when someone exclaims "Ouch!" the information that they feel pain is conveyed to others. One way to see this is to note that such information typically becomes common ground as a result of utterances of pure expressives, and can be felicitously presupposed in subsequent conversation. For instance, it is unproblematic to ask, "Why/where do you feel pain?" after an utterance of "Ouch!," thereby presupposing that the addressee feels pain.

Further, we take it to be uncontroversial that pure expressives do not assert such contents. (-> EXPRESSIVITY AND SPEECH ACT THEORY, this volume) If someone exclaims "Ouch!" upon burning their hand, they have not asserted that they feel pain, unlike an utterance of "I'm in pain." If someone mutters "You didn't close the damn window!" upon entering a room, they are not asserting that they are annoyed. And so on.

3 Insincere Pure Expressives

Can an utterance of a pure expressive be a lie? It is important to be clear about what is at stake with this question. In particular, the question is whether an expressive utterance can be a lie *in virtue of* its evaluative content.⁴ For instance, it is obvious that (5) is a lie if the speaker knows that the addressee did close the window. This means that to examine whether one can lie with a pure expressive, we need to consider examples where the

⁴ Cf. Viebahn (2020, 731).

descriptive content of the relevant utterance (if there is one) is something the speaker believes to be true, while the evaluative content is false. For ease of reference, we refer to such utterances as *insincere pure expressives*.

Consider the following example of an insincere pure expressive:

Doctor

Peter doesn't want to go to school. He would rather go to the beach and meet some friends. He goes to his doctor and tells him that he fell on his knee the day before. When the doctor touches his knee and asks if it hurts, he screams,

(9) Ouch!

Yet, even though Peter did actually fall on his knee the day before, he feels no pain at all.

Did Peter lie to the doctor? Undeniably, Peter was being misleading or deceptive, and his utterance is unquestionably insincere. Yet we think judgments are not at all clear concerning the further issue of whether his utterance is an outright lie. Compare the contrast between (1) and (2). While (1) is clearly a lie, and (2) is clearly not a lie, (9) does not obviously appear to fit into either category. Our judgments do not seem to count (9) as clearly a lie, nor as clearly a non-lie.

The same can be seen for other pure expressives, as in this story:

Window

Ed is going on a business trip. Going in and out of the house packing his car, he has the window to the kitchen open in order to let in some air before leaving. Finally, he is ready. He locks the door, gets in his car and drives away. But he forgot to close the kitchen window. His wife, Shelly, comes home and finds the window open. Since it's a hot day, and it's only been a short while since Ed left, she's quite happy the window is open. Yet she wants Ed to think she is annoyed about it to make him feel guilty about going away. So she calls Ed, and tells him in an irritated tone,

(10) You didn't close the damn window!

As in the Doctor case, Shelly is undeniably being misleading and insincere. Even so, judgments about whether she lied are arguably unclear. Again, it is at least safe to say that (10) is neither on a par with (1) nor on a par with (2) in this respect. Rather, judgments about whether (10) is a lie or a case of merely misleading do not seem to be decisive.

As a further feature of the volatility of judgments in this area, we can note that whether or not one thinks insincere pure expressives are instances of lying or not appears to be influenced by which examples they are contrasted with. For instance, if one compares the case of Doctor with the following story, one can be pushed toward thinking that (9) is a lie:

Peter doesn't want to go to school. He would rather go to the beach and meet some friends. He goes to his doctor and tells him that he fell on his knee the day before. When the doctor touches his knee and asks if it hurts, he says,

(11) I couldn't go running this morning.

Yet, even though Peter did actually fall on his knee the day before, he feels no pain at all. Even so, he was unable to go running this morning because his mother told him to clean up the garage.

By contrast, if one compares Doctor with the following case, then (9) can look like a case of misleading but not lying:

Peter doesn't want to go to school. He would rather go to the beach and meet some friends. He goes to his doctor and tells him that he fell on his knee the day before. When the doctor touches his knee and asks if it hurts, he screams,

(12) It hurts awfully!

Yet, even though Peter did actually fall on his knee the day before, he feels no pain at all.

While cases, like (2), that involve conversational implicature are clear cases of merely misleading and cases that involve outright assertion, like (1), are clear cases of lying, judgments with respect to case involving expressive content are not clear cut. Instead, it appears that judgments count these cases neither as clear lies nor as clear non-lies.

4 Reacting to Unclear Judgments

How should we react to this unclarity of judgments concerning cases involving insincere pure expressives? There are three main options:⁵

Option 1. Insincere pure expressives are not lies.

Option 2. Insincere pure expressives are lies.

Option 3. Insincere pure expressives are neither lies nor not lies.

Before proceeding, we should make a comment here about what we mean by “unclear judgments.” When we say that our judgments about insincere pure expressives are unclear, we do not mean that we have clear judgments to the effect that such utterances are neither lies nor not lies. If that were the case - and assuming we should trust our clear judgments in this area - Option 3 would be the only right option.

Rather, what we mean is that we do not have a clear judgment that an insincere pure expressive is a lie, nor a clear judgment that it is not. Indeed, the fact that our judgments seem to be influenced by contrasts, as illustrated by (11)-(12), strongly suggests that we do not have clear judgments to the effect that insincere pure expressives are in-between cases, but rather our judgments about insincere pure expressives are themselves unclear. As such, at least *prima facie*, each of the three options are available.

It is worth mentioning that judgments about the kind of cases we are discussing here have been subject to some, albeit still limited, empirical investigation. For instance, Reins

⁵ A fourth option is a mixed response according to which some insincere pure expressives are lies while others are merely misleading. This option may be motivated by observations concerning pure expressives of different strengths. Thanks to a reviewer for mentioning this.

and Wiegmann (2021) and Viebahn et al. (2021) have conducted studies of judgments concerning the lying-misleading distinction. We refrain from discussing these studies here. Correspondingly, we are not claiming that the judgments we discuss are those of “ordinary speakers.” Rather, we discuss the judgments that we think are most fitting.⁶

Given the assumption that the relevant evaluative content is not asserted, Option 1 makes insincere pure expressives conform to (AL). In particular, the argument would be that, since we have independent reasons to agree with (AL), insincere pure expressives should be classified as non-lies, despite the unclarity of judgments. This is not to *disagree* with our judgments. After all, we do not judge the cases as lies. Instead, this attitude is one that gives theoretical reasons for counting a phenomenon as belonging to a particular category, even though we do not have a clear pre-theoretical judgment that it does (or that it does not).

By the same token, insincere pure expressives show that there are cases where no disbelieved proposition is asserted and yet we do not judge the relevant utterance as clearly a non-lie. Yet instead of concluding from this that insincere pure expressives should nevertheless be counted as non-lies, due to the success of (AL) in other cases, one might conclude that (AL) is wrong. So one might rethink the clear cases, like (1) and (2), and conclude that the lying-misleading distinction should not be characterized in terms of assertion. And one might conclude that the best theory is one that implies Option 2.

One alternative to assertion-based theories of the lying-misleading distinction is the view that the distinction should be characterized in terms of *commitments*. Here is a version of the view defended by Viebahn (2021):

The Commitment-Based Definition of Lying (CL)

A lies to B if and only if there is a proposition p such that

(CL1) A intentionally communicates that p to B, and

(CL2) A believes that p is false, and

(CL3) A commits herself to p .

⁶ See also Stokke (2024) for some discussion.

According to (CL), the lying-misleading distinction tracks the fact that different ways of conveying information behave differently when it comes to commitment. Here is Viebahn's characterization of commitment, in this sense:

A speaker commits herself to a proposition (in the sense relevant for the lying-misleading distinction) iff she takes on a responsibility to justify (or defend) that she *knows* the proposition in question. [...] Specifically, she has taken on the relevant kind of responsibility with respect to a proposition iff she cannot consistently dismiss audience challenges to justify her knowledge of that proposition. (Viebahn, 2021, 302)

This approach gets the difference between (1) and (2) right, since only in the former case does the speaker commit to a disbelieved proposition.

Yet this notion of commitment does not obviously apply to examples of insincere pure expressives. For instance, Viebahn's characterization of commitment cited above implies that, when uttering (9), Peter cannot dismiss audience challenges to justify his knowing that his knee hurts. Yet such challenges would hardly be intelligible to begin with, and so arguably can be dismissed, even though this is not the relevant test. He might reasonably say, "What do you mean, how do I know I feel pain? I just do!" The same arguably applies to the case of (10) in that it is at best confused to ask how Shelly knows that she is annoyed that Ed did not close the window.⁷

However, we will assume here that a suitable notion of commitment can be made plausible, and so we take it that expressives typically engender commitments of the relevant kind. In (9) the speaker commits to the proposition that his knee hurts. In (10) the speaker commits to being annoyed that Ed did not close the window. Indeed, in neither case does it make sense to deny that one has conveyed the pertinent information, so the speaker commits to the pertinent proposition at least in the following sense: they cannot *explicitly cancel* what they have conveyed.

⁷ There may be other tests in the vicinity that do better. For instance, it is less clear that one cannot intelligibly ask, "Are you sure your knee hurts?" and this kind of challenge might be used to characterize commitment for "ouch" and related expressions. We will not discuss this here, though, since as we say, we assume that a commitment view can be made plausible for expressives.

In other words, proponents of (CL) should embrace Option 2: (9) and (10) are both lies. And parallel to what we said about endorsing Option 1 on the basis of (AL), this view can point to the fact that (9) and (10) are not intuitively clear non-lies.

By contrast, while Option 3 most directly takes the pattern of judgments seriously, it requires an explanation of why the cases fall between lying and non-lying. Supposing we accept (AL), do we want to conclude that, somehow, evaluative content is neither asserted nor not asserted? This is to reject what we have assumed to be the standard view on which expressive content is not asserted. Similarly, whatever one's preferred notion of commitment, it is not obvious how one could argue that speakers sometimes neither commit nor do not commit to a particular proposition that they intentionally communicated to someone.

While there is much more to be said about the prospects of such a view, we want to set aside Option 3, and instead focus on the contrast between options 1 and 2 in what follows.

5 One or Two Notions of Lying?

Both Option 1 and Option 2 react to the unclarity of judgments concerning insincere pure expressives by noting that, since judgments are unclear, we should allow some theoretical notion of lying that we think is independently motivated² to take a stand on the relevant utterances. Option 1 suggests that we follow (AL) in classifying them as non-lies. Option 2 maintains that we should let (CL) decide that they are lies.

At the same time, each side should have something to say about why judgments are unclear. As we describe below, there is a symmetry here between the two options: they can each point to the possibility that, roughly, intuitions are influenced by the alternative notion of lying. In turn, this means that deciding between Option 1 and Option 2 requires appealing to a wider range of factors.

For ease of reference, let us call an utterance that is a lie according to (AL) an *a-lie*, and an utterance that is a lie according to (CL) a *c-lie*. Given this, one might argue that the reason we think (1) is clearly a lie and (2) is clearly a non-lie is that the former is both an *a-lie* and a *c-lie*, whereas the latter is neither. By contrast, (9) and (10) are *c-lies* but not *a-lies*.

So the proponent of (AL) might suggest that, while insincere pure expressives are not lies because they do not involve disbelieved assertions, judgments about these cases are unclear because they are influenced by the fact that they are c-lies. And conversely, a defender of (CL) might suggest that, even though insincere pure expressives are lies, we lack clear judgments to this effect because intuitions are influenced by the fact that such utterances fall short of a-lying.

More concretely, take (9). Someone sympathetic to (AL) can say that Peter is not lying, since he is not asserting anything he believes to be false. In turn, if asked why we do not have clear judgments about such cases, she will say the reason is that they differ from cases, like (2), that involve cancelability and where the speaker is not committed to the relevant content. A proponent of (CL) will make the parallel argument that (9) is a lie because Peter commits to the proposition that his knee hurts, and the reason judgments are unclear is because they differ from cases like (1) where the disbelieved content is explicitly asserted. And similarly for (10).

6 Breaking the Symmetry

Given this symmetry, how should we decide between the two strategies? In principle, a wide range of factors might play a role here, some concerning theory-building, some having to do with other considerations. Here we will discuss two potential factors. Both of these favor (AL) and Option 1, albeit inconclusively. Yet we do not want to rule out that there may be other factors that tend toward breaking the symmetry in favor of Option 2. Our intention here is to illustrate the way in which this kind of stalemate can lead one to appeal to other factors.

First, one thought is that we should avoid attributing lies to speakers if we can. Option 1 is unquestionably more charitable in this respect. Indeed, as we said above, the adherent of Option 1 will agree that utterances like (9) and (10) are highly misleading, and she can even agree that they are more misleading than cases of false implicatures like (2) due to the lack of commitment (or explicit cancellability, if one likes). To be sure, we are not suggesting that this consideration is entirely clear-cut, and it might well be asked why we should think that it would be preferable to attribute merely misleading to speakers rather than lying. Yet we think that it is at least part of our common sense thinking about

insincere speech that lying *per se* has a kind of special status, as witnessed by the fact the lying-misleading distinction is enshrined in our legal systems, and the way many people prefer misleading to lying in many cases.

So perhaps we should say that the symmetry is at least destabilized by the fact that Option 1 only attributes misleadingness and not also lying to the speakers. Again, we can emphasize that we do not intuitively think that insincere pure expressives are clear cases of lying, and hence a theory that classifies them as highly misleading non-lies is better than a theory according to which they are downright lies.

More generally, theories like (CL) make the category of lying much wider than the assertion-based notion enshrined in (AL). Consider the case of questions, which we mentioned at the outset. Here is an example from Viebahn (2020):

A beggar approaches a passer-by to ask him for money. Although the beggar has no children, he asks the passer-by:

(13) Could you spare one pound for my ill son?

The passer-by comes to believe that the beggar has an ill son.

According to Viebahn, (13) is a lie. Indeed, it is clear that the speaker commits himself to the disbelieved proposition that he has an ill son, which he intentionally communicates to the passer-by. So (CL) entails that he is lying.

Yet judgments about (13) are arguably at best just as unclear as judgments about insincere pure expressives.⁸ At least it is safe to say that there is no sense in which (13) is intuitively on a par with (1). Nor with (2), to be sure. Rather, as with (9) and (10), (13) is a case where we do not have a clear judgment of lying nor a clear judgment of non-lying.

At the same time, according to almost all philosophers and linguists, the proposition that the speaker has an ill son is not asserted by the interrogative in (13). So (AL)

⁸ By contrast, Viebahn et al. (2021) present evidence that they claim supports the conclusion that ordinary speakers judge cases like (13) as lies. Reins and Wiegmann (2021) likewise report evidence showing that many judge false implicatures as lies. See Stokke (2024) for some discussion.

unambiguously implies that (13) is not a lie. Hence the symmetry between Option 1 and Option 2 is found for cases of interrogatives like (13), too. Despite the unclarity of judgments, (CL) attributes lying where (AL) attributes merely misleading (albeit to a high degree).

(13) is a case of *presupposing* disbelieved information. Accordingly, as should be obvious, (CL) counts all cases of presupposing disbelieved information as lies – even when their non-presuppositional content is believed to be true.⁹ As such, (CL) implies that lying is much more widespread than it is according to (AL). Only for cases like (2), where the speaker does not commit to disbelieved information, does (CL) agree with (AL) that the speaker was merely being misleading.

In fact, Viebahn's (2020), (2021) own view is more radical in that he takes cases like (13) to be evidence that presupposed information is *asserted* – that is, that presuppositions can be asserted.¹⁰ (-> EXPRESSIVITY AND PRESUPPOSITIONS, this volume) As such, this view not only proliferates lies but proliferates assertions. And moreover, in doing so, it asks us to reject one of the cornerstones of linguistics and philosophy of language going back at least as far as Frege (1997 [1892]), namely the distinction between assertion and presupposition.¹¹ (-> EXPRESSIVITY AND EARLY PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE, this volume)

Yet even if one wants to stop short of this wholesale rejection of a core tradition in the intersection between philosophy and linguistics, and agree that interrogatives do not assert their presuppositions, a proponent of (CL), and hence of Option 2, will still ascribe lying to speakers who we do not judge as clearly liars.

A second factor in breaking the symmetry might be considerations concerning the original contrast between asserting disbelieved information, as in (1), and merely conversationally implicating something one believes to be false, as in (2).

⁹ Viebahn (2020) accepts a slightly attenuated version according to which most cases of this kind are lies, but some are not. We prefer to discuss the stronger stance here, but we acknowledge that there are more nuanced versions on offer.

¹⁰ See e.g. Viebahn (2020, 744-745).

¹¹ Many proponents of commitment-based views of assertion endorse this distinction. See e.g. MacFarlane (2010, 82). See also Stokke (2024) for discussion.

(1) Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?

Mark. No, I'm not going.

(2) Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?

Mark. I have to work.

For many theorists, at least one reason why (2) does not assert that Mark is not going to the party is that, as it is often put, he did not *say* that he was not going to the party.¹² In accordance with what we said earlier, by this one means that that information is not involved in the truth-conditional content of "I have to work," given the context. Rather, what is said by Mark's utterance in (2) is simply that he has to work.

Moreover, the distinction between saying that *p* and asserting that *p* is motivated by the classic observation that which speech act is performed by a particular utterance is underdetermined by what is said by the relevant sentence, or sentences. This was the observation that Geach (1965) took from Frege (1997 [1918]) according to which the *content* of an utterance is distinct from its linguistic *force*.

In the case of declarative sentences, the observation is that you can say that *p* without asserting that *p*. This is how we describe what happens in cases like joking or irony. If a standup comedian on stage doing her act utters,

(14) Obama went bungee jumping.

she has not asserted that Obama went bungee jumping, even though she clearly said that. Indeed, her utterance is true if and only if Obama went bungee jumping. Yet force is distinct from content in the sense that one may utter a sentence that is true if and only if *p* without thereby having put forward that *p* as a claim about what is actually true.

This well-entrenched picture likewise explains why (9) does not assert that Peter's knee hurts, and why (10) does not assert that Shelly is annoyed that Ed did not close the window. Namely, this information is not part of the truth-conditional content of these utterances. This is trivial for (9), which does not have truth-conditions at all. But even for

¹² See e.g. Fallis (2009), Saul (2012), Stokke (2013), (2018).

(10), as we said earlier, most will agree that the truth-conditional content, or what is said, by Shelly's utterance is merely that Ed did not close the window.

By contrast, the proponent of Option 2 needs to explain why (2) does not engender a commitment to not going to the party, while (9) commits Peter to the information that his knee hurts, and (10) commits Shelly to the information that she is annoyed. Yet she cannot appeal to a notion like what is said, or truth-conditional content, since as we have just described, the relevant disbelieved information is not said by any of these utterances. So the defender of (CL) and Option 2 faces the challenge of giving a non-question-begging explanation for why there is no commitment in (2) while, according to her, there is commitment in (9) and (10).

We emphatically do not want to claim that this challenge cannot be met. We have already tentatively suggested that the notion of explicit cancellability might be able to do the job. What we are arguing is that, since our judgments do not regard (9) and (10) as clearly lies or clearly non-lies, other considerations are needed to break the symmetry between the options, and at least *prima facie* one might think that such considerations are at least more readily available to the assertion-based view.

As we will see next, though, the situation becomes more complicated once we consider a wider range of cases.

7 Hybrid Expressives

So far we have only considered pure expressives like "ouch" and "damn," i.e. expressions that only convey expressive content. We now turn to hybrid expressives: expressions that have both descriptive and evaluative content. The paradigm examples of such expressions are *slurs* such as "Kraut," "faggot," or "honky." Similarly, *honorifics* in some languages, like Japanese, have been seen as hybrid expressives.¹³ Here we confine ourselves almost exclusively to discussing slurs. (-> EXPRESSIVITY AND SLURS, this volume)

Slurs have a descriptive dimension: "Kraut" conveys the same descriptive content as "German," "faggot" the same as "male homosexual," and "honky" the same as "white"

¹³ See McCready (2010).

(or “Caucasian”).¹⁴ Yet, in addition, these expressions also undeniably convey evaluative content concerning the speaker’s attitude toward the relevant person or group of people. While this is commonly accepted, it is controversial how the additional content of slurs should be understood.

When discussing pure expressives earlier, we assumed that using such words communicates propositional information. For instance, we have assumed that, in (9), Peter conveys that his knee hurts, and in (10) Shelly conveys that she is annoyed. This we take to be undeniable, even though most likely pure expressives in and of themselves only have genuinely expressive content.

We take it to be equally safe to assume that using a hybrid expressive conveys not only descriptive information but also evaluative information.¹⁵ For example, take (15).

(15) My neighbors are Krauts.

It should be uncontroversial that (15) conveys on the one hand that the speaker’s neighbors are German, and on the other hand that the speaker does not like Germans (or something like that). If you do not infer both kinds of information on hearing (15), you are not competent with the word “Kraut” (assuming you are competent with the rest).

Moreover, it is clear that the speaker of (15) commits herself to both pieces of information. There is no way she can deny having intended to convey both that her neighbors are German and that she does not like Germans. (As for pure expressives, we can note again that it is not clear that a challenge to justify how she *knows* that she does not like Germans is an applicable test for these cases. But we set this aside.)

Most will also agree that (15) *asserts* that the speaker’s neighbors are Germans. Indeed, a proponent of (AL) will think that if the speaker knows full well that her neighbors are

¹⁴ Some writers, like Damirjian (2021), have questioned whether slurs have neutral counterparts. These arguments mostly concern whether slurs have the same extension as such counterpart words. We are not concerned with this here, in that we focus mostly on discussing the other, evaluative dimension of the meaning of slurs.

¹⁵ McCready (2010, 2) calls this “mixed content.”

Swedish, but wants to make her listener think that they are German, her utterance of (15) is a lie. And indeed, this is the case even if the speaker in fact does not like Germans.

However, when it comes to the evaluative content, such as that the speaker of (15) does not like Germans, it is more debatable whether this kind of information conveyed by hybrid expressives is to be seen as asserted or not. Here we will contrast two views. Following Bach (2018) we will call these views *hybrid expressivism* and *loaded descriptivism*, respectively.

Hybrid expressivists see the evaluative dimension of slurs as genuinely expressive, akin to that conveyed by pure expressives like “ouch” and “damn.”¹⁶ On this view, a sentence like (16a) functions like (16b):

- (16) a. The Krauts called the police.
b. The Germans [*booh to Germans!*] called the police.

So, as far as their evaluative dimension is concerned, words like “Kraut” are on a par with pure expressives like “ouch.” That is, even though “Kraut” semantically encodes the same as “German,” it has an expressive dimension that does not contribute to truth-conditional content. Again, this view need not deny that uttering (16a) also has the result of propositional information that the speaker does not like Germans. Just as uttering “ouch,” even if purely expressives, likewise results in communicating that the speaker is in pain.

Loaded descriptivism is the view that the additional content of slurs is ordinary propositional content conveyed in the manner of an *aside*, or *parenthetical* remark. On this view, a sentence like (16a) is analyzed along the lines of (16c):

- c. The Germans, I don’t like Germans, called the police.

As is common, it is useful to illustrate this view by comparing *non-restrictive relative clauses*.

¹⁶Jeshion (2013), Gutzmann (2015), among others.

On the now widely accepted approach of Potts (2005), non-restrictive relative clauses contribute a *secondary*, or *supplementary*, propositional content that is isolated from the *primary*, or *at-issue*, content of the utterance.¹⁷ Take (17).

(17) François, who is French, is cooking dinner.

According to this standard view, (17) conveys the primary content that François is cooking dinner, and the secondary content that François is French. The truth-values of each are independent, and accordingly the truth-value of (17) as a whole is represented as a pair, so the status of (17) will be $\langle 1, 1 \rangle$ if and only if both assertions are true, and so on for the three other possibilities. Moreover, it is often agreed that both primary and secondary contents of this kind are asserted.¹⁸

Loaded descriptivists can argue that slurs function in the same way. That is, when using a slur, the speaker asserts a primary proposition involving the descriptive content of the slur and also asserts a secondary content involving the slur's evaluative content.

8 Insincere Hybrid Expressives

Can one lie by using a hybrid expressive like a slur? Corresponding to pure expressives, we need to consider utterances involving *insincere hybrid expressives* where the speaker disbelieves the relevant evaluative content while believing the descriptive content. For example, an utterance of (15) is an insincere hybrid expressive if the speaker knows that her neighbors are indeed German and she has nothing against Germans.

Given that, as we said, speakers undeniably commit to both kinds of contents when using slurs, (CL) straightforwardly predicts that insincere hybrid expressives are lies. If you utter (15) despite having nothing against Germans, you commit to a false propositional content, which you intentionally communicate. But moreover, this is so regardless of whether one accepts hybrid expressivism or loaded descriptivism about slurs.

¹⁷ Potts (2005) argues that such secondary contents are *conventional implicatures*. We refrain from discussing this notion here, and confine ourselves to the more neutral label of “secondary,” or “not at-issue” content.

¹⁸ See e.g. Potts (2005, 24), Stokke (2017). But see Bach (2018) for a different approach.

This choice, however, makes a difference for what (AL) predicts concerning lying with slurs. If one accepts hybrid expressivism, the view that the evaluative content of slurs is a *bona fide* expressive dimension – as in *booh to Germans!* - such content is not asserted. Hence, on this view, (AL) predicts that insincere hybrid expressives are not lies. If one accepts loaded descriptivism, (AL) predicts that insincere hybrid expressives are lies, since (AL) does not differentiate between primary and secondary assertions.

The latter result may look *prima facie* attractive. (AL) likewise predicts that utterances like (17) are lies if the secondary assertion is something the speaker believes to be false. This is indeed what we do find, as seen from cases like (18).¹⁹

(18) Lance Armstrong, an Arkansan, won the 2003 Tour de France.

Imagine that the speaker knows that Armstrong won the 2003 tour and also knows that Armstrong is Texan but wants to mislead the hearer into believing he is an Arkansan. In that case, (18) is clearly a lie.

However, for insincere hybrid expressives, we think the pattern of judgments is strikingly similar to the case of pure expressives. Take the following example:

Neighbors

Peter lives in Austria and all his friends have a pretty negative attitude towards Germans. He himself has spent a year abroad in Cologne. He liked it very much there and thinks that Germans are pleasant people. However, he doesn't want to stick out, so when he spends time with his friends, he follows them in talking in a pejorative way about Germans. One day, he has a rowdy party at his apartment, and his German neighbors call the police. The next day he tells his friends,

(19) My Kraut neighbors called the police last night.

Peter was undeniably being misleading and insincere in uttering (19), given that he does not find Germans unlikable. Yet, again, we think judgments concerning whether his utterance is a lie are unclear. That is, we do not think (19) is intuitively clearly a lie, nor

¹⁹ From Stokke (2017, 143).

clearly not a lie. As for pure expressives, cases like (19) are neither intuitively on a par with (1) nor intuitively on a par with (2).

This contrasts sharply with cases like (18), where the speaker conveys, indeed asserts, a secondary content that she believes to be false via a non-restrictive relative clause. While (18) is clearly a lie in virtue of this disbelieved secondary assertion, (19) is an unclear case just like the cases of insincere pure expressives considered earlier.

9 Loaded Secondary Assertions

We suggested earlier that one factor that may be weighed up in attempts to break the symmetry between (CL) and (AL) as regards insincere pure expressives is the idea that we should not attribute lies to speakers if we can avoid doing so. Since judgments are unclear, *ceteris paribus*, we should prefer a view that refrains from counting (9) and (10) as lies, while agreeing that they are highly misleading.

For all we have said so far, the only combination of views that gives the parallel result for insincere hybrid expressives is the conjunction of hybrid expressivism and (AL). That is, to argue that hybrid expressives do not assert their evaluative contents, and that lying requires assertion, thereby classifying utterances such as (19) as non-lies.

Yet it is not clear that we want to decide between views of slurs on this basis. That is, even if charity considerations in the face of unclear judgments may be relevant to whether we should ascribe lying or merely misleading to speakers, one might not think that such considerations should play a role in deciding on what looks like purely linguistic questions, such as whether the evaluative contents of slurs is asserted or not.

At the same time, as we have seen, non-restrictive relative clauses give rise to clear lies, and hence (AL) cannot be restricted to primary assertions.²⁰ Rather, for (AL) to be able to agree that non-restrictive relative clauses can be lies, while counting insincere hybrid expressives as non-lies, one will need a principled way of arguing that these two kinds of secondary assertions are relevantly different.

²⁰ See also Stokke (2017).

Bach (2018) points to one such difference:

Sentences containing slurs also have a secondary propositional content, but with them that secondary content is not given separate linguistic expression—it's loaded into the slur. (Bach, 2018, 65)

(This is the origin of the term “loaded descriptivism.”) If (AL) can be modified so as to include only assertions that are not “loaded” or “not given separate linguistic expression” in Bach's sense, one would have a view that agrees that non-restrictive relative clauses can be lies but counts insincere hybrid expressive as non-lies. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to attempt to meet this challenge in detail. Yet we want to end by gesturing at one rough idea.

As we saw in Section 6, most proponents of (AL) think that a necessary condition on assertion is that the relevant content be *said*, where this is typically understood along the lines of being (entailed by) the compositional meaning of the words used. Consider again (17).

(17) François, who is French, is cooking dinner.

We take it to be plausible that (17) *says* both that François is cooking dinner and that François is French. Correspondingly, on the seminal treatment in Potts (2005), secondary contents are compositionally derived along a separate parse-structure, terminating in a pair of truth-conditions, as briefly mentioned in Section 7.

McCready (2010) has demonstrated that Pott's system does not apply to slurs without modifications. The core of the problem is that, in Pott's system, secondary items (or types) operate on primary, at-issue items. So, for example, the secondary proposition that François is French is derived for (17), roughly, by operation on the at-issue element “François.”

Yet, as McCready observes, no such at-issue element is present for slurs to operate on. Instead, McCready argues that an at-issue element that can be an argument to the relevant secondary meaning is introduced by the slur itself. For instance, McCready

(2010, 16) suggests that “Kraut” introduces the property of being German as an at-issue item (the superscript a means “at-issue,” as in Pott’s system):

$$\lambda x. \text{German}(x) : \langle e, t \rangle^a$$

This at-issue element in turn becomes the argument to a higher-order property, “bad” (where c means “not at-issue”):

$$\lambda P. \text{bad}(P) : \langle \langle e, t \rangle^a, t \rangle$$

This allows for the derivation of the pair of contents: that x is German and that it is bad to be German. So when in turn composed with the rest of the clause, we get a pair of truth-conditions such as, roughly, $\langle A$ ’s neighbors are German, A dislikes Germans \rangle .

Given this, one suggestion is to restrict (AL) to asserted contents that are derived compositionally in the way originally envisioned by Potts, that is, where the relevant not-at-issue element operates on an at-issue element that is present at surface form, such as “François” in (17) – or if one likes, an at-issue element not introduced by the relevant secondary element itself. So, since the not-at-issue dimension of “Kraut” operates on the at-issue element “German,” which is introduced into the composition by the slur itself, the argument would be, the derived secondary content “A dislikes Germans” is not asserted, at least in the sense relevant to the lying-misleading distinction.

It is plausible that a proposal along these lines is at least feasible, and moreover, it is motivated by the observations made by McCready (2010), as well as the more intuitive differences noted by Bach. The upshot is that, if what we have just sketched can be developed, (AL) is able to count insincere hybrid expressives as non-lies, regardless of whether we ultimately want to endorse hybrid expressivism or loaded descriptivism, while counting disbelieved non-restrictive relative clauses as lies – as is intuitively correct. By contrast, (CL) counts all such cases as lies, as for all other cases of committing to disbelieved information.

10 Conclusion

According to the standard view, lying requires that the pertinent disbelieved content is asserted, whereas merely misleading does not. Expressives form an interesting test class for the standard view: expressive content is usually regarded as not asserted, hence the presence of expressives lies would prove the standard view wrong while their absence would further support it. We have suggested that our intuitions regarding expressive lies are not clear cut. Accordingly, we cannot rely on such intuitions alone in order to decide whether the standard view is correct or whether, for instance, a commitment based view is preferable. We have outlined some considerations that one might point to in settling the question independently of our intuitions. In our view, these considerations speak in favor of a standard, assertion based, view of lying, and against a non-standard, commitment based, view. Closer examination might bring to light other considerations that change the argumentative situation. Our aim has been to show what factors might decide the debate when the intuitive basis for it is insufficient.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the editors and two anonymous reviewers for this collection. Also thanks to Nils Franzén for useful discussion.

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