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SLUR OR FALSE FRIEND? AN ASSESSMENT OF "FALSE FRIENDS"
ARGUMENTS

Bachelor's Thesis in Philosophy

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Introduction

In English there is a group of words that are called *slurs*. These words target people based on their group membership, picking out a certain ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, etc., and communicate the speakers' negative attitudes about them (Hom, 2010; Bolinger, 2015).¹ Throughout this Bachelor's thesis, I will be using examples of offensive language. I do not endorse the use of this kind of vocabulary in either Estonian or English but utilising the terms in arguments is necessary for explaining their behaviour in a social context.

There is no consensus about whether *slurs* as a category exist in Estonian and there are disagreements about Estonian words that sound similar to English slurs. One of these words is *neeger* that closely resembles *nigger* in pronunciation and spelling. The characteristics people debate are *derogatoriness* and *offensiveness*. In this thesis I will take a word to be derogatory iff it communicates a negative evaluation of the target, regardless of the speaker's beliefs about the situation (Hom & May, 2013, p. 210). Derogating someone would mean that a specific speech act is committed through which individuals are attributed negative characteristics (Hom & May, 2018). A word is offensive iff using it elicits a psychological response in the target to content that is negative. Offensiveness is psychological and behavioural – A can be offended by claim x while B is not offended (*ibid.*). A word can be derogatory, yet not offensive in a particular context and offensive for some person Y, yet not derogatory.

My central claim in this Bachelor's thesis is that the false friends arguments presented by Priimägi (2013; Linnar..., 2017), Pullerits (2013) and Ots (2012) are unsound. Proponents of these arguments claim that *neeger* is a false friend of *nigger* because the former does not satisfy necessary conditions that the latter does. I will argue that this premise is false and that *neeger* also meets the criteria *nigger* is held to. My defence of this claim falls into two sections. In the first section, I will define false friends and sketch out two false friends arguments: *the linguistic authority argument* and *the cultural differences argument*.

I claim that *the linguistic authority argument* assumes two conditions on a word being slur-like: firstly, if a word is slur-like, then the dictionary listing must feature the relevant marker.

¹ Hereinafter, I will not take communicating to be factive, i.e. I do not assume that the communicated content P is true.

Secondly, *neeger* is unmarked in the dictionary. In this thesis, I will focus more on *the cultural differences argument* but also claim that none of the examined philosophical accounts (Hom (2008; 2010, 2012); Hom & May 2013, 2018), Camp (2013; 2018), Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018), Nunberg (2018), Schlenker (2007), Cepollaro (2015); Potts (2005; 2007), McCready (2010); Anderson & Lepore (2013; Anderson, 2018)) consider dictionary practices to be relevant to whether a word is a slur. Because of this, the lack of a marker implies neither that the word is slur-like nor that it is not.

I claim that *the cultural differences argument* also assumes two conditions on a word being slur-like. Firstly, if a word is slur-like, there need to exist (or have existed) oppressive racist practices. Secondly, there are and have been no such practices in Estonia. In section two I will outline four philosophical accounts of slurs: Hom's (2008; 2010, 2012; Hom & May 2013, 2018) truth-conditional account, Camp's dual act view (2013; 2018), Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's (2018) discourse roles theory and Nunberg's (2018) group affiliation theory. For each of the theories, I will show that the conditions of the socio-cultural context that necessarily must be fulfilled for a word to be considered a slur are indeed met by *neeger* and the Estonian context. Because of this, the cultural differences false friends argument will prove to be unsound. Based on this assessment, it cannot be shown that differences in the cultural context surrounding *neeger* and *nigger* amount to differences in meaning.

At the end of section 2.1, I will consider *the inappropriate theory* counterargument according to which, there could be accounts of slurs that support false friends arguments – these have been simply omitted. I will then show that it does not succeed in proving my argumentation unsound because it leads one to conclude that there can be no Estonian slur-like words. Additionally, in 2.1.5, I will assess different data about the Estonian social context.

Finally, I will summarise the conclusions of this Bachelor's thesis. Additionally, I will consider three further research options. These include analysing dictionary practices, examining potential semantic ambiguity and elaborating on the possibility of doing analytic philosophy in Estonian.

1. The false friends argument: preliminaries

In this section I set up my defence of the thesis that the necessary conditions satisfied by *nigger* as a slur are also satisfied by *neeger* and the practices surrounding its use. In order to see why someone might claim otherwise, I will explain what is meant by calling one word a false friend of another. Secondly, I will outline two arguments – *the linguistic authority* and *the cultural differences argument* that share the conclusion that *neeger* is a false friend of *nigger*. This will provide a basis for assessing the soundness of the false friends arguments in section two.

1.1 What are false friends

In order to see what claiming that *neeger* is a false friend of *nigger* entails, I will briefly sketch out the concept of false friends.² Two words are false friends iff they are very similar in form but their meanings diverge (Chaminzo-Dominguez & Nerlich, 2002). *Similar in form* means that two words are alike in terms of either pronunciation, grammar or both.³ The similarity in form is a necessary condition for classifying a word pairing as false friends.⁴ However, there are also cases where in addition to form, the two words also share some aspects in their meaning, these are semantic false friends. In my thesis, I am interested in cross-linguistic semantic false friends, i.e. the false friends relation between two words that are not in the same language and partly overlap in meaning.

To make the idea clearer, I will present some Estonian-English examples of semantic false friends. Consider *decade* and *dekaad*, the English word means *a period of ten years* and the Estonian *a period of ten days* – both words signify a period of time and the period comprises ten units of time. Only the measures differ.⁵ Another example is *lust* (palatalised /s/ in Estonian, means ‘desire, fun’) and *lust* (‘strong sexual desire’ in English).

² The term itself (*faux amis* in French) was coined by Maxime Koessler and Jules Derocquigny in 1928 (Chaminzo-Dominguez, 2008).

³ With cross-linguistic false friends, identical spelling and/or pronunciation is quite uncommon if the etymologies of the languages are different. This kind of categorisation allows me to group together homophones and homographs.

⁴ Consider *loud* (/laʊd/) and *laud*, the first means 'making a lot of noise' and the second 'desk or table'.

⁵ The belief that *dekaad* is a period of ten years seems to be “spreading like wildfire in the media” (Künstler, 2018). Some example titles (Pullerits, 2016) include: “The *dekaad* of power of Toomas Hendrik Ilves”, “A *dekaad* of bone and joint diseases 2000-2010”, where the English *decade* has clearly rubbed off on the Estonian *dekaad*.

Based on the proposed definition and examples, if *neeger* and *nigger* were false friends, then that would mean that they carry the following features: they a) are similar in form; b) are different in meaning; c) can but need not share some aspects of meaning. The definition of false friends does not require me to make condition (c) more specific. The proponents of false friends arguments in Estonia do not elaborate on whether they take *neeger* to have some characteristics besides similarity in form in common with *nigger*. However, they claim that the two words' features diverge significantly when it comes to connotations and permissibility of use. I will therefore take the false friends arguments to claim that the central meaning of *neeger* and *nigger* differ, i.e. upon arguing that the argument is unsound, I will be claiming that it cannot be shown on the provided bases that their central meaning diverge.

1.2 False friends arguments

In this subsection I will present two ways people have argued for the claim that *neeger* and *nigger* are false friends. To avoid cluttering the presented arguments, I will eschew the implicit assumptions that *neeger* and *nigger* sound similar and are thus similar in form, and that *nigger* is derogatory and taboo (Hom 2008; Anderson & Lepore, 2013). Based on data from the media and linguistic corpora, it could be argued that meaning ambiguity exists. However, since the debates focus on *the* correct meaning (my emphasis) and none of the authors of the articles mention the possibility that there can be several correct meanings, throughout this thesis I will assume that Ots (2012), Pullerits (2013) and Priimägi (2013; Linnar..., 2017) believe *neeger* to only have one meaning.⁶ Because of the scope of this thesis, I will only touch upon the possible ambiguity in considering further research options. The first argument comes from a coordinator at the Centre of Practical Language Planning Egle Pullerits (2013, also based on Teder, 2013a).

(1) Linguistic authority

P1: All Estonian words are neutral by default, unless marked differently in ÕS.

P2: No markers are added to *neeger* in the ÕS.

C1: *Neeger* is neutral. (from P1 and P2)

P3: If a word is neutral, then it is not derogatory.

⁶ All arguments were presented either in response to someone defending the claim that *neeger* is derogatory or in the context of establishing whether Estonian dictionary Õigekeelsussõnaraamat (ÕS) should take note of potential derision.

P4: *Neeger* is not derogatory.

P5: If word A is derogatory and word B is not, A and B differ in meaning.

C2: *Neeger* and *nigger* differ in meaning. (from P4-P5)

P6: Two words A and B are false friends iff they are similar in form, yet different in meaning.

C3: *Neeger* and *nigger* are false friends. (from C2, P6)

The truth of P5 could be contended – arguably, some theories of word meaning would not say that the derogatory element contributes to meaning. However, this is not my primary concern upon outlining this argument because all proponents of false friends arguments implicitly assume that the two words are intrinsically dissimilar in other aspects besides the derogatory element too, they simply offer no explicit formulation of a defence of claims that would explain how they precisely differ.

Although Pullerits's argument does not explicitly state a conditional according to which for a word to be a slur, it must bear the relevant marker, it is implicitly assumed. That is because Pullerits takes whether a word's neutrality to be determined by the dictionary, a slur-like word that is arguably non-neutral must also be marked as such. This linguistic practice and dictionary authority relationship can be understood in two ways. Firstly, dictionaries could be seen as descriptive documents of word usage. If that was the case, then it could be assumed that usage reflects word meaning but the dictionaries do not construct said meaning. Secondly, dictionaries might not only record meanings but also determine semantic facts. This would be the case if dictionaries were taken to be authorities in the community and social environment.⁷

None of the examined philosophical accounts make dictionary practices relevant in determining slur-status and because of that, they cannot be used to defend the false friends arguments.⁸ It could be argued that even so, it might be the case that in Estonia, dictionaries actually are good guides to uses and that people do defer to them as authorities – and thus that at least in the Estonian context Pullerits's argument succeeds. While an interesting way of reasoning, because of the scope of thesis, I will not further elaborate on this. This is because

⁷ For a defence of social externalism, according to which social institutions determine word meaning, see Burge (1979) and Burge (1986).

⁸ Nunberg (2018) does elaborate on dictionary practices, yet uses them as an analogy – if a word bears a marker in the dictionary, the classification is similar to mentally categorising words.

my aim in this paper is to prove the unsoundness of the false friends arguments by showing that the necessary conditions satisfied by *nigger* are satisfied by *neeger*. Since none of the accounts takes a derogatory marker to be a necessary condition for *nigger* to be a slur, this discussion is secondary to my main goal in this paper. However, I will return to further examine the *linguistic authority argument* in the conclusion of the thesis. The second argument is *the cultural differences argument*.

(2) Cultural differences

P1: If a word for denoting a racial group is derogatory, then its users must be or must have been engaged in oppressive racist practices targeting the relevant racial group.⁹

P2: The users of *neeger* are not or have not been engaged in such oppressive racist practices.

C1: *Neeger* is not derogatory. (from P1 and P2)

P3: If word A is derogatory and word B is not, then A and B differ in meaning.¹⁰

C2: *Neeger* and *nigger* differ in meaning. (from C1 and P3)

P4: Two words A and B are false friends iff they are similar in form, yet different in meaning.

C3: *Neeger* and *nigger* are false friends. (from C2 and P4)¹¹

This is a combination of the arguments put forward by Ots (2012) and Priimägi (2013; Linnar..., 2017). I have merged the two together because they both claim that *neeger* does not bear a slur-like feature – either derogatoriness (Ots), or taboo-status (Priimägi) –, because of the lack of oppressive racist practices in Estonia.

As previously outlined, this argument has two central premises – firstly, P1, according to which oppressive racist practices are necessary for considering a word derogatory and secondly, P2 – that these practices have not existed in Estonia. The false friends claim is thus that *neeger* is not the same kind of slur-like word as *nigger* because of the lack of oppressive racist practices.

⁹ Hereinafter, I have translated Estonian *halvustav* as *derogatory*. Personal correspondence with EKI has confirmed that this is an acceptable translation.

¹⁰ See justification for P5 of *the linguistic authority argument*.

¹¹ Both authors explicitly appeal to the false friends argument. According to Ots (2012), the similarity between *neeger* and *nigger* is similar to that of *vakk* and *fuck* or *prikk* and *prick*, if people took offense upon hearing someone say the neutral Estonian nouns, then it would simply be a mistake. Priimägi claims (2013, p. 51) that the OK gesture is insulting in Southern France and it would be a mistake to think it is positive – supposedly something similar is happening with *neeger* and *nigger*.

Upon assessing the truth of both of these premises, the nature of *oppressive racist practices* should be examined. According to Ots (2012), Estonians "have had no fights or quarrels" with black people, so there is no reason for the two groups to use derogatory language to address each other. According to Priimägi (2013, p. 51), people in the U.S have refrained from using *nigger* "because of the collective guilt of white people in America for their engagement in racism and slavery". Based on this, it seems that the differences between Estonia and the U.S stem from historically trackable conflicts between the targeted group and the speaker group.

In the first section I have explained what the false friends status means and shown two different ways people have argued for *neeger* not being derogatory or taboo. It is important to note that if one accepts that these false friends arguments are sound, then conclusions about *neeger* being permissible to use and not being derogatory commit proponents of these views to implicit assumptions about the semantics and pragmatics of slur-like words. That is because they assume a kind of theory according to which certain social context and dictionary practices are necessary for a word to be slur-like, however, the Estonian context and practices do not satisfy these criteria. In the next section, I will focus on making explicit the conditions proponents of *the cultural differences argument* assume and assess whether these criteria align with conditions set up by theories of anglophone slurs.

2. Assessing the false friends arguments

In what follows, accounts of *slurs* are discussed to assess the false friends arguments. *Slur* is a piece of metalanguage that differs from words like *derogatory* or *pejorative*. In Estonian, there is no precise translation of *slur*. A possible equivalent would be *vaenunimi* (roughly meaning *hate name*) (Laineste, 2008), however, few people acknowledge this neologism. Because the category of *Estonian slurs* has never been established, there are also no “paradigmatic” cases to compare *neeger* against.¹³ However, that does not mean that there are no slurs in Estonian. In this thesis, I claim that the false friends arguments presented in section one are unsound because it is not the case that the necessary conditions for a word to be a slur are satisfied by *nigger* and not satisfied by *neeger* – the Estonian word also meets these conditions, making it impossible to prove on these bases that it is not the same kind of word as *nigger*.

In this section, I will be using philosophical accounts of slurs to defend this claim. As mentioned in section one, both false friends arguments include two crucial conditions: a conditional about a necessary condition *neeger* would have to fulfil to be a slur-like word and the claim that the consequent of the conditional is false. Based on that, the philosophical theories are used for two reasons: firstly, to see, if the condition postulated by the Estonian accounts is relevant and necessary for an anglophone word to be considered a slur and secondly, to assess, if it is really the case that *neeger* fails to satisfy this criterion.

2.1 Appealing to cultural differences

In this subsection, I will be assessing *the cultural differences argument*. I will begin by outlining the crux of the argument. I will then examine four accounts of anglophone slurs to figure out which of them also put focus on the socio-cultural context. This will help me establish whether the conditions necessary for a word to be a slur-like according to the proponents of false friends arguments can really be considered criteria for attributing words slur-status.

According to *the cultural differences argument* (Ots, 2012; Priimägi, 2013; Linnar..., 2017), *neeger* is a false friend of *nigger* because there are important differences between the meanings

¹³ Languages can contain slur-like words without them being explicitly dubbed slurs, e.g. Italian philosophers have published papers titled “Slurs: Un’introduzione” (Bianchi, 2013), which indicates that there is no precise word in Italian that corresponds to *slur* in English but that the topic is still relevant.

of the two words – while *nigger* is derogatory, *neeger* is not. This difference supposedly arises from the Estonian cultural context differing from that of anglophone countries, proponents of the argument believe that oppressive racist practices exist in the latter but not in the former. Out of the considered theories, only the views that make the existence of racist practices necessary for a word to be a slur could possibly help support the false friends arguments. These are: the truth-conditional account (Hom 2008; 2010; 2012, Hom & May 2013; 2018), perspectival account (Camp 2013, 2018), the discourse roles account (Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2018) and the group affiliation account (Nunberg, 2018).¹⁴

2.1.1 Hom's truth-conditional account

For every account of slurs listed in section two, I will be using a three-step strategy for assessing *the cultural differences argument*. Firstly, I will provide an overview of the relevant philosophical account; secondly, I will show that it implies that the existence of oppressive practices is a necessary condition for a word to be a slur, i.e. that only if there are such practices, can there be a thick externalist meaning attributed to slurs. Finally, I will show that this necessary condition is satisfied by the Estonian context. In order to present all data points describing the Estonian context succinctly together, I will first present all the theories and then turn to the third step of the strategy, namely the assessment of whether the conditions upon the social context are satisfied in Estonia. In 2.1.5, I will show that the proponents of the false friends arguments who assume that *neeger* is not the same kind of slur-like word as *nigger* because it does not satisfy the necessary conditions *nigger* does, are mistaken. That is, the cultural differences between Estonia and the U.S should not lead one to conclude that there are differences in meaning or that *neeger* is a false friend of *nigger*.

¹⁴ Omitted theories include the presupposition, conventional implicature (CI) and prohibition account. A presupposition is an implicit assumption – while asserting P, the speaker is also entering something else, presupposition Q, to the conversational background (Stalnaker, 1974). A CI is the object of the act of implying something beyond literal word meaning in virtue of the conventional meaning of the words (Grice, 1991). The first two accounts claim that slurs refer to group membership and contribute either a presupposition or CI that communicates a negative attitude (Potts, 2005). I have omitted these accounts for two reasons. Firstly, both views claim that contribution of negative content depends on word meaning and its development, rather than oppression relations. Secondly, neither of the views establishes a causal chain underlying a word becoming a slur. Since proponents of *the cultural differences argument* only address the social setting of the speaker group and the targeted group which supposedly causally give rise to slur-status, these accounts cannot be used to support the argument. Finally, according to the prohibitionist view (Anderson & Lepore, 2013), slurs are inherently derogatory and should be prohibited in all contexts. This prohibition arises from the judgement of the targeted group of people who become targeted through historical processes. However, it is not in the scope of this thesis to delineate all ways these processes could operate.

I will begin with Hom's truth-conditional account (TCA). According to TCA, slurs express complex socially constructed properties that are part of the word's truth-conditional content (Hom, 2010, p. 180).¹⁵ Upon someone using a slur, they are saying that the person referred to "ought be subject to $p^*_1 + \dots + p^*_n$ because of being $d^*_1 + \dots + d^*_n$ all because of being npc^* ." (*ibid.*) Npc^* signifies the targeted group of people; $p^*_1 + \dots + p^*_n$ are prescriptions about how people should treat members of npc^* ; $d^*_1 + \dots + d^*_n$ are stereotypic negative characteristics applied to members of the npc^* in virtue of them being members of npc^* . So if A is called a *nigger*, then what is said is something like *A ought to be subject to exclusion from advancement on the career ladder and higher school admission conditions and ..., because of being lazy, stupid and worthless ..., all because of being black*. While npc^* is a biological characteristic of the group, characteristics $d^*_1 + \dots + d^*_n$ as well as norms $p^*_1 + \dots + p^*_n$ are determined by social conventions, beliefs and practices of the speaker group (*ibid.*, p. 16). According to Hom and May (2013; 2018), the extension of a slur, e.g. *nigger*, is always an empty set, i.e. there are no people who deserve to be attributed $d^*_1 + \dots + d^*_n$ and held to standards $p^*_1 + \dots + p^*_n$ because of their group membership.

To see what is required of the social context surrounding slurs, I will expand on what it means for Hom's externalist meaning to be socially constructed. According to Hom (2008, 2010, 2012), characteristics $d^*_1 + \dots + d^*_n$ and standards $p^*_1 + \dots + p^*_n$ arise from *social institutions of racism* (Hom, 2008, p. 17). Social institutions of racism comprise two elements: an ideology and a set of practices (*ibid.*). An ideology is a set of beliefs that ascribes negative characteristics to the targeted group (*ibid.*). These beliefs entail that npc^* are $d^*_1 + \dots + d^*_n$; in case of black people, the beliefs that they are stupid, lazy or violent. The set of practices include committing and promoting discriminatory acts against the people in npc^* . Hom (*ibid.*) claims that cases of racist treatment of black people can range from impolite language to extreme physical violence.

To reiterate, for there to be a slur (in this thick externalist sense) there must exist a racist ideology and racist practices due to which characteristics $d^*_1 + \dots + d^*_n$ and standards $p^*_1 + \dots$

¹⁵ In some of Hom's papers, *slur words* are referred to as *pejoratives*. According to Hom & May (2013, p. 293), slurring is the act of using a specific kind of pejorative linguistic expression. However, examples of slurs and pejoratives reveal that they overlap. As the category of pejoratives is wider than the category of slurs, including, e.g. also curse words (Hom, 2010), I will only use *slur words* to keep the terminology consistent. This move is justified because the initial proposal of Hom (2008) extended to racial slurs and the theory was later expanded to account for other types of pejoratives.

+ p^*_n are attributed to group npc^* - only the existence of such institution can explain why words like *nigger* continue to be used.¹⁶

The following line of reasoning could be used to counter this necessary condition: it could be argued that there has never been a social institution that is justified in attributing $d^*_1 + \dots + d^*_n$ and $p^*_1 + \dots + p^*_n$ to group npc^* . The first counterargument would hurt my case if TCA required the social institution's existence to be morally right, however, it does not – the institution need not have a valid reason for the existence of negative beliefs and practices about npc^* , TCA explains, rather than justifies the situation in which slurs are used. This is highlighted by the fact that Hom & May (2013) clearly state that the extension of *nigger* is an empty set. To return to the necessary condition according to which there has to exist a social institution for a word to be considered a slur, we could not imagine a situation where there is no such institution, i.e. no racist practices or ideology, but still a slur that fits the description put forward by TCA exists.

If proponents of TCA claim that for a word to be considered a slur, there must have existed racist practices or ideologies, then this seems to align with what *the cultural differences argument* (P1) takes to be a necessary condition for attributing a word slur status. In order to prove the argument to still be unsound, I will show that these beliefs and practices also exist in Estonia in subsection 2.1.5, i.e. that *neeger* cannot be dismissed as non-derogatory because the consequent of this conditional is false (i.e. that P2 is false). To sum up this subsection, it could be said that the necessary condition for a word to be considered a slur is that there is a social institution of racism that creates and upholds derogatory practices and beliefs. The necessity for this institution can be divided into two conditions:

- 1a) For a word to be a slur, the speaker group must have negative beliefs about the targets.

¹⁶ To make the TCA analysis clearer, consider this parallel case. In Estonia, the age of majority is 18. The precise point when kids cease to be underage is determined by a social institution. People under 18 have the characteristics of not being able to vote in parliamentary elections, consume alcohol, etc. They are all obliged to complete basic school, they need parental consent in deciding legal matters, etc. all because of being underage. *Underage* picks out a certain group of people with specific features who are perceived in a certain way because of the social institution that regulates their rights. This analysis is similar to a TCA view of slurs but there is one major difference. In case of slurs, as opposed to *underage*, there is no one who actually falls in the category of npc^* , i.e. the target group.

1b) For a word to be a slur, the speaker group must engage in discriminatory practices against the targets.

2.1.2 Camp's perspectival account

In this subsection I will continue to apply the previously outlined strategy, that is, I will explain the main theses of Elizabeth Camp's dual act view (2013; 2018), outline the ways in which cultural differences are relevant to a word being considered a slur and what characteristics a social context must satisfy for a word to be a slur. Camp's theory can be interpreted in several ways and I will provide a reading that allows the English *nigger* to be classified as a slur. I will then show in 2.1.5 that Estonian *neeger* would satisfy the same conditions as *nigger*, i.e. that it cannot be considered a false friend because of differences in the surrounding social context.

A central term in Camp's account is a *perspective*. Camp (2013, 2018) describes a perspective as an intuitive way of perceiving something. A perspective (Camp, 2013, p. 335) is not a feeling, it is something that gives rise to feelings. Here is an example: in French one might opt to refer to someone with *tu* or *vous*. If the latter word is used, then the speaker signals allegiance to a perspective according to which the person referred to is perceived as superior, elder or higher in status. This kind of honorary perspective might elicit emotions like deference and respect.¹⁷

A slurring perspective comprises two characteristics, firstly, some features stand out and are more salient than others. Secondly, some features are more central and important than others (Camp, 2013, p. 336).¹⁸ The hypothesis Camp sets up is that upon using a slur, a slurring perspective is activated. That is, firstly, a lot of attention is attributed to group membership (g) and secondly, it becomes an integral part about Gs (the group of people in question) in the speaker's mind. Belonging to this group is believed to explain several features of Gs and determine the essence of Gs. In some cases, the set of characteristics common to all Gs in virtue of g constitutes a stereotype. When A says, "Niggers never show up on time," they not only find it necessary to make race a salient feature of the group of people, they also make it central

¹⁷ Perspectives might entail a larger set of phenomena perceived in a specific way, there could be scientific and political perspectives (Camp 2013, p. 337).

¹⁸ This connection might seem intuitive but there are cases where a characteristic is salient, yet not central, e.g. red hair is probably noticed immediately, but this does not usually contribute to the perceived identity of redheads.

to their identity and attribute negative characteristics to these people *because of* (my emphasis) their group membership. Depending on the context of the utterance, there are two types of possible speech acts – in case of one, group membership is at issue, in case of the other only a slurring perspective is.¹⁹

Before turning to describing what would have to obtain for a slurring perspective to be created, I will briefly return to TCA, the account described in 2.1.1, to clearly contrast Camp's perspectival account with it. TCA took the existence of a social institution comprising an ideology and racist practices to be necessary for a word to be a slur. At first glance, the perspectival account might seem similar, since it also claims that the speakers must have negative attitudes about the target group. However, for Camp, the mere existence of such beliefs is not enough, the beliefs must be a certain kind and arise because of a certain mechanism different from Hom's thick externalist explanation. When TCA required the social institutions to essentially create the categories which bear specific features, hold targets to specific standards all because of belonging to the target group, Camp requires the speakers to perceive the targets in a certain way.

This 'certain way' must be formalized into a necessary condition that would allow me to assess slur status. Taking into account that when people use slurs, the targets' group membership is made salient and central, the condition could be worded as follows: for a word to be a slur, its use must signal that only membership of a particular group is salient and central about the targeted. This description, however, is not strict enough, since non-slurs might also qualify as such.²⁰ For example, consider the aforementioned example of *tu* and *vous*. Upon using *vous*, it is also signaled that membership of some kind of social group superior to the speaker is salient, however, the description offers no explanatory power as to what this saliency amounts to. Because of this, the nature of the activated perspective must be refined, i.e. it must be explained what it really perceiving group membership as solely salient and central implies.

¹⁹ The speech act distinction arises *because of* slurring perspectives and does not constitute a necessary condition for a word to be a slur, so I will not elaborate on this aspect of Camp's view. For a more thorough description of the dual acts view, see Camp (2018).

²⁰ The aim of my thesis is to assess *neeger*, a word whose meaning is constantly debated, based on these conditions. If the necessary conditions are worded such that it is not obvious that only slurs meet them, my argument is weaker.

Camp makes explicit two kinds of beliefs that are tied to slurring perspectives – firstly, they distance and secondly, they derogate. The first condition entails that Gs, the group of people referred to by a slur, are considered others, the outgroup, compared to the people that use slurs to refer to Gs. The second characteristic can be interpreted following the definition I provided in section 1. The users express their contempt of the target in general, derision arises because of prevalent negative beliefs or attitudes according to which Gs are worthy of contempt in virtue of being Gs. Adding these two characteristics, the necessary condition could thus be worded in the following way: for a word to be a slur, its use must signal that membership of a group different than the speaker group is salient and central about the targeted and because of this, they are worthy of derogation. Implicit in this condition is that the use of a slur and communication of a slurring perspective is to be understood in a social context, i.e. that it is a pointed choice to use the word.

This formulation of the necessary conditions might still not seem demanding enough. A proponent of a competing account could say that this description does not sufficiently sketch out a view that correctly predicts slur status. While this objection deserves consideration, it does not undermine my claim about the false friends arguments being unsound. Here are to reasons for believing this. Firstly, since the variety of slurs the perspectival view aims to account for is very wide, the necessary conditions cannot be too limiting.²¹ Combined with the general mechanism of perspectives, i.e. that group membership is attributed special attention, the existence of distancing and derogating beliefs can be taken to be necessary *and* sufficient. Secondly, even if one managed to show that these two conditions are not sufficient for a word to be considered a slur, they *can* be used to show that if they do indeed obtain in case of *nigger*. The crux of my argument is that all necessary conditions satisfied by *nigger* are satisfied by *neeger*. This claim is unambitious in the sense that it is only stating that it cannot be proven that *neeger* is not the same kind of word as *nigger*, it says nothing about similarities to or differences between other slurs and *neeger*.²²

²¹ She uses examples of racial slurs, ethnic slurs, gender slurs and slurs targeting people of different sexual orientation in Camp (2013) and Camp (2018).

²² If I had claimed that *neeger* must sufficiently fulfil all characteristics of slurs, then the criticism might have been damaging.

To sum up this subsection, it can be said that for a word to be a slur, it must evoke a slurring perspective, i.e. an outlook on the targeted group that makes their skin colour salient and central. The necessary condition for a perspective to arise can thus be sketched out as follows:

2) For a word to be a slur, its use must signal that membership of a group different than the speaker group is salient and central about the targeted and because of this, they are worthy of derogation.

2.1.3 Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's discourse roles account

In this subsection, I will describe an account of slurs put forward by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) whose theory focuses on offense variation across utterances of slurs. I will then outline three necessary conditions social contexts must fulfil for a word to be a slur under this account. *Oppression* in Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) is taken to be the extent to which person A can unjustly affect person B contrary to B's interests (Lukes, 1974, p. 30). Two other terms that frame the discussion are *social roles* and *discourse roles*. *Social roles* are social constructs that are tied to status rights, responsibilities and information about permissible behaviours (Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2018, p. 2888). *Discourses* are defined as individual social interactions and based on that, *discourse roles* are considered to be short-term social roles that exist for the purpose of a particular dialogue (*ibid.*). The crux of the view is that slurs oppress via discourse role assignment (Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2018, p. 2881) which are attributed to speakers because of their specific social role as a black person.

The first condition addresses the saliency of social roles in discourses. A given social role becomes salient if the relevant social group has been systematically oppressed. We can imagine situations where the situation surrounding the discourse does justify prioritising one social role. For example, if someone with the social roles of a student and a waitress discusses the requirements of their assignment with a professor, then their social role of being a student is salient; several norms govern this discourse, e.g. she should use formal language when talking to the professor. This role is salient because the interaction is taking place at a school, the student has just finished a lecture. There are parallel slurring uses where it is *not* the discourse that justifies prioritization of skin colour but the historically oppressive practices that give rise to saliency. Imagine two bigots and a black man waiting for their appointments at the doctor's office, let's also assume that the black man is wearing a hoodie that states the name of his

university on it. One bigot whispers to the other, “I’m in the line after the nigger”.²³ The claim Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt make is that bigots always take the black person's social role as a black person rather than someone who is ill, a man, a son, or a university student to be salient.²⁴

Here the specific interaction plays no role in determining saliency, i.e. while it is common for young people at schools to be associated with student status, it is not common for men at hospitals to be automatically associated with the social role of being black. Because this role becomes central, a discourse role that disparages is also created – assuming that those who tend to perceive black people through a “racial prism”, i.e. attribute more attention to their blackness, also associate negative features with this characteristic. So based on this discussion, the first condition that has to be satisfied by the social context for a word to be considered a slur is that the targeted group’s social role as the targeted group must become salient in everyday discourses because of using the slur.

However, it is not the case that saliency of that social role *only* affects how the targeted are perceived, the attribution of a discourse role also oppresses by letting them know that they are inferior and worthy of condemnation. This is also what distinguishes the discourse roles view from Camp’s account – Camp proposes an explanation of the mechanism of slurs, they elicit slurring perspectives, but what perceiving people via perspectives does to the perceived is of lesser importance for her. It is important to note that in case of slurring, these roles are assigned merely in virtue of the person’s skin colour. It could, of course, be the case that a black person has committed a crime and does deserve to be condemned, however, slurring is not tied to any particular act or behaviour of the target.

The second condition addresses the effects slur uses have. In addition to discourse roles oppressing, they also influence the way audience members treat the target group in the future, i.e. they contribute to wider social roles (Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, p. 2896-2898). This implies that not only do social roles give rise to discourse roles, the connection works the other way around too, making racist practices a vicious circle. For example, it might be the case that if

²³ Slurs also attribute discourse roles to non-participants (Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2018, p. 2892). Even if the person that is targeted with a slur is not present, the role extends to them. For example, if A says to B *that C is a nigger* and *that people should be careful around him*, it changes the way B interprets any further mentions of C. If C were to enter the conversation after that, then he would already bear a discourse role.

²⁴ Arguably, what constitutes the social role of a black person can be understood differently. However, in this context and following Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, this role entails something historical oppression. As argued in 2.1.5, in Estonia, this social role seems to be an outgroup role.

the bigot shows others the power they can acquire as well as the emotional and physical harm they can cause, those who share a similar mindset begin to believe that these attitudes are acceptable. Slurring and attribution of subordinate discourse roles might also affect the targeted group via the perlocutionary effects the utterances have – the member of the targeted group might be verbally abused or physically assaulted (*ibid.*, p. 2897). The second necessary condition of a word to be considered a slur would thus be that the discourse role attributed to the audience via slurring perpetuates the oppressive social role.

Finally, Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt propose one characteristic of slurs that sets this account apart from other theories, including Camp's with which the discourse roles view shares several characteristics. According to the authors, "there can be no offence" and no slur-status in case of words like *limey*, *yankee* and *honky* (*ibid.*, p. 2899) because they refer to groups of people who have historically been the oppressors, rather than the oppressed. This implies that for a word to be considered a slur, the targeted group must necessarily be the oppressed, and cannot have been the oppressors.

In this subsection, I have examined the discourse roles theory put forward by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018). The account postulates a necessary connection between the social practices and a word's slur-status, the three conditions could be delineated as:

- (3a) For a word to be a slur, the targets' social role as the target must become salient in everyday discourses.
- (3b) For a word to be a slur, the targets must be the oppressed and the speakers the oppressors.
- (3c) For a word to be a slur, the slurring discourse role must perpetuate the oppressive social role.

In 2.1.5 I will show that even if the *the cultural differences argument* is justified in assuming that certain features of the social context must obtain for a word to be considered a slur (P1 holds), these conditions are equally satisfied by *neeger* and *nigger*. I will argue that in case *nigger* meets the condition (P2 is false), i.e. if the theory is suitable to account for slurs, then *neeger* meets it too.

2.1.4 Nunberg's group affiliation account

In this subsection, I will continue with the previous strategy – I will put forward the crux of theory, namely that upon slurring, people signal allegiance to a negative view about the targeted group that diverges from the beliefs of most people. Secondly, I will show that all the theory considers necessary for a word to be a slur is that there are two groups, those who use a neutral word and the slurrers. I will delineate five necessary conditions for a word to be a slur under this account.

Nunberg's (2018) account of slurs focuses on the utterers of slurs, rather than the targeted group. A central term in Nunberg's view is that of *ventriloquistic implicatures*. These implicatures appear when Grice's Maxim of Manner is flouted, i.e. the speaker fails to avoid obscurity and ambiguity (Grice 1991, p. 28), and refers to someone with a marked, rather than default word. By choosing to refer to A via conventions of a social group, group B, other than the social group whose norms define the default way of referring to A, group G, the speaker implicates affiliation with a particular social group B (Nunberg 2018, p. 38). Here is an example: by X choosing to refer to black people with *nigger*, the conventions of a bigoted social group B who belittles black people are being alluded to, rather than the conventions of the general public G who would refer to the targets by using *black*. X thus signals their allegiance to group B. The essence of Nunberg's view is that by using a slur, a type of implicature is made that can only arise in a certain social context. I will now continue to describe this social context by explaining the nature of group B and group G as well as their relationship.

According to Nunberg (2018, p. 35), group B is a community of speakers who have a specific name for a group of people – this diverges from their default name. Group B's attitudes toward the targeted shape the conventions that govern their social interactions (*ibid.*, p. 38). In addition, these conventions stem from members of group B having a conscious interest in using a specific non-default version of a word. So there must be a specific word (a), a negative attitude (b) and a conscious motivation to use the specific word (c). The *consciousness*-aspect entails members of B being aware of their beliefs (*ibid.*, p. 52) and sensing a difference between their non-default word and the word used by group G.

I will illustrate the nature of group B with the example of *nigger*. Firstly, there is a group of people – bigots, who use *nigger*. Secondly, they view blacks with contempt, i.e. feel negative attitudes towards black people (b). Thirdly, negative attitudes and the feeling of superiority motivate (c) the use of a specific word, *nigger*, (a) to distinguish group B from members of the general public who do not feel the same sort of way about black people. Group B consciously acknowledges the pointed choice of utilizing *nigger* instead of *black*.

Group G is a group who uses a “non-slurring lexicalised default” (*ibid.*, p. 40), which presupposes the existence of a neutral counterpart word as a necessary condition for a word to be considered a slur. The social norms governing interactions in group G dictate that it is expected of members to use the default word for referring to someone. So in case of black people, group G would refer to them simply by using something like *black* because this is dictated by the rules the social interactions in group G follow – referring to black people by some other, non-default word would signal allegiance with some other group.

It could be thus said that the social context that needs to obtain for a word to be a slur simply needs to include a group B and a group G. However, this is not enough: consider an example where A and her boyfriend B absolutely hate their neighbour's dog because it keeps barking throughout the night (b). Because neither A nor B can sleep due to this, they feel angry and want to actively convey their contempt of the dog (c), which is why they decide to start referring to it as a *cur* (a).²⁵ *Cur*, however, is not a slur. To avoid classifying non-slurs as slurs, Nunberg introduces an additional condition – the social category that is being referred to either with the non-default (group B) or default word (group G) must be one that is “socially disputed” (Nunberg 2018, p. 46). This means that there must be disagreement in the society about this group, and this conflict of opinion must be represented in the divergent opinions of people in group B and group G. To sum up this subsection, I have shown that postulating the existence of groups B and G entails a set of necessary conditions that must be fulfilled for a word to be considered a slur. These include:

(4a) For a word to be a slur, it must be used by a group whose views diverge from the general majority.

²⁵ *Cur* is borrowed from Frege (1980).

(4b) For a word to be a slur, it must convey the negative attitude of the dissenting group toward the targeted.

(4c) For a word to be a slur, the people using it must consciously motivated to choose the word.

(4d) For a word to be a slur, there must be a neutral alternative for referring to the target group.

(4e) For a word to be a slur, the target group must be socially disputed.

In the following subsection I will show that it is not the case that the necessary conditions satisfied by *nigger* are not satisfied by *neeger* by providing evidence that even if the conditional postulating a connection between social context and slur-status stands (P1), the relevant social context is indeed in place in Estonia (P2 is false).

2.1.5 Describing the Estonian social context

In the previous sections, I have outlined the relevant features of four philosophical accounts. This examination has shown that all of them consider social context to be important in determining slur status. However, I claim that the necessary conditions satisfied by *nigger* are also satisfied by *neeger* and provide proof for this claim by describing the Estonian social context. This will show that the conditions proponents of *the cultural differences argument* appeal to (P2), are false.

In my description of the cultural context, I will be using empirical data in the media, in linguistic corpora, digitalised archives as well as demographic studies.²⁶ Of course, this will only account for a portion of people who have publicly expressed their attitudes, however, if these data are compared to those of anglophone countries, meaningful parallels can still be drawn – in order for *the cultural differences argument* to be proven to be unsound, it would have to be the case that the Estonian context satisfies the same criteria as the anglophone. I argue that this is true and because of that, there are no differences in the surrounding practices that could lead to a difference in meaning and attribution of false friend status. Here are the necessary conditions of each account once again.

²⁶ I searched for the keyword *neeger* and then followed up the query by checking if the words have actually been used or if they are simply mentioned to make a metalinguistic point.

- (1a) For a word to be a slur, the speaker group must have negative beliefs about the targets.
- (1b) For a word to be a slur, the speaker group must engage in discriminatory practices against the targets.
- (2) For a word to be a slur, its use must signal that membership of a group different than the speaker group is salient and central about the targeted and because of this, they are worthy of derogation.
- (3a) For a word to be a slur, the targets' social role as the target must become salient in everyday discourses.
- (3b) For a word to be a slur, the targets must be the oppressed and the speakers the oppressors.
- (3c) For a word to be a slur, the slurring discourse role must perpetuate the oppressive social role.
- (4a) For a word to be a slur, it must be used by a group whose views diverge from the general majority.
- (4b) For a word to be a slur, it must convey the negative attitude of the dissenting group toward the targeted.
- (4c) For a word to be a slur, the people using it must consciously motivated to choose the word.
- (4d) For a word to be a slur, there must be a neutral alternative for referring to the target group.
- (4e) For a word to be a slur, the target group must be socially disputed.

I will divide these conditions into three groups. The first group comprises (1a), (2), (3a), (4a) and (4e). This set of conditions addresses beliefs have about black people. To show that these conditions are really fulfilled, the following evidence must be provided: there has to be a group of people who distances themselves from blacks and has negative beliefs about them. These beliefs include considering black people being black central to their identity and seeing their skin colour as reason to find them worthy of contempt. The nature of blacks must be socially disputed, i.e. it must not be the case that everyone in Estonia holds these kinds of negative beliefs.

The second group comprises (1b), (3b) and (3c) and addresses the supposedly racist practices in Estonia. In order for these criteria to be fulfilled, it needs to be the case that Estonians have verbally or physically abused blacks, that there is a power dynamic where the speakers are the oppressors and the targeted the oppressed and that uses of *neeger* perpetuate racist practices in virtue of this power dynamic.

Finally, the third set of conditions comprises (4b), (4c) and (4d) which all address characteristics of specific words and their use, rather than the underlying beliefs of social groups. For these conditions to obtain, it must be the case that *neeger* is used hatefully, that there is an alternative that could be used in place of *neeger* and that it is a conscious choice to opt for *neeger*.

I will now go through all three sets of conditions and provide evidence for the satisfaction of each criterion. Firstly, I will address the existence of negative beliefs about blacks in Estonia. One group that openly expresses allegiance to these beliefs comprises conservative nationalists and followers of the EKRE party. For a long time, the party's immigration policy slogan was "Kui on must, näita ust" (*If they're black, show them the door*) (Teder, 2013b) and similar attitudes are prevalent among party leaders and followers alike. For example, Mart Helme (Mihkels, 2018), the head of the EKRE party has said that, "If one were to knock on a black person's head, the sound would be hollow," alluding to one of the aforementioned stereotypes about black people being stupid. Another example of members of the EKRE party conveying their negative attitudes toward black people comes from Jaak Madison (Madison..., 2015) who claims that in order for black soldiers in the allied forces to avoid getting insulted on the streets, they should wear their uniforms even outside the military base.

An obvious objection to these examples is that they are expressed only by a select group of people and it is not clear that the number of people who hold the described negative beliefs is sufficient. I will respond to this claim in three parts. Firstly, it is not the case in anglophone countries either that a majority of people agree with racist views. Since my argument is based on proving that there really is no dissimilarity that could lead to difference in meaning, then what is relevant is whether there does exist such a group in Estonia and in the U.S. Secondly, if one wanted to prove the prevalence of such attitudes, the 2019 parliamentary elections could be highlighted – the EKRE party secured nearly 100 000 votes (18%) (Hääletamis- ja valimistulemus, 2019).²⁷ Thirdly, survey company Saar Poll has researched how Estonians perceive foreigners and results can shed light on some general attitudes. One of the questions was about how Estonians would feel if their new neighbours were black – while only 6% of people said they would be for it, 68% of respondents claimed, they would be against this (Rahvussuhted Eestis, 2016). People were asked about a hypothetical situation and thus could only base their judgment on limited personal experience or stereotypes. It can be assumed it was primarily the skin colour of the hypothetical neighbours that made the respondents reply the way they did.

²⁷ As a comparison, the right-wing UK Independence Party has only managed to win seats in the House of Commons once since 1997 – in 2015 they won 12% of the vote (Osborn, Clarke, Franklin & Straumann, 2015).

The second set of criteria can be shown to apply by providing examples of discriminatory practices in Estonia. To begin with, several black Estonians have cited cases of verbal abuse where they are told to “crawl back to Africa” or to “get the hell out of Estonia” (Paju, 2018; Mustanahaline..., 2015). Additionally, there are cases of physical abuse. For example, Carl Tuulik, a black Estonian has described an instance where he was attacked in the street (*ibid.*). A very recent case from March 2019 also proves this point: a black person was kicked and shoved in Tartu for no other reason than being black – no conversation between the assaulted party and the assailant took place (Palmiste, 2019). An especially vivid case is described by singer Ranae Rain (Soome..., 2019): while on the tram, a stranger had sat opposite her, taken a bullet out of their pocket, shown it to her and said it was meant for her. These behaviours can be taken to reflect a feeling of superiority. The practices combined with beliefs outlined in the previous paragraph seem to uphold each other and prompt further discrimination. First example of this comes from supporters of EKRE, once again. When *neeger* is used in Uued Uudised, people subscribing to this worldview also get the sense that it is okay to use *neeger*. For example, an anonymous commenter left the following remark on an article about racist attitudes in Estonia, “They [authors of the article] and their gays and neegrud should die or go to Canada and form their own parliament there.” (comments on 5Miinust... 2019). This example is significant because it was EKRE who told people to emigrate to Canada if they were not content with EKRE’s vision of Estonia, thus making the commentator’s allegiance with the party quite apparent. A second example of these types of beliefs’ effect on racist practices comes from police lieutenant Maarja Punak according to whom the number of racist speech and public hatred has increased in recent months (Nemsitsveridze, 2019). This can be tied to the increased prevalence of public condemnation of blacks and immigrants.²⁸

This cluster of examples could be objected to by saying that it is not obvious that Estonians have historically been the oppressors and blacks the oppressed. This claim originates from Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt (2018) according to whom this historical oppressor-oppressed relationship is required for the oppressive discourse roles to arise. Therefore, this objection is defended by appealing to the claim that there would be no basis for a specific social role to become salient in the discourse and for this saliency to amount to a negative assessment of the target if there has been no such historical imbalance. My reply to this counterargument includes

²⁸ Besides the change in political power, it does not seem like any other objective factors have influenced Estonians’ opinions, i.e. there has not been an influx of immigrants or crimes committed by immigrants, etc. which could prompt a change in attitudes and practices.

relating the discussion back to my central thesis – it is not my aim to show that *neeger* is a slur, I am arguing that the discussed necessary conditions do not provide a basis for establishing a difference between *nigger* and *neeger*. Since the condition is accepted in the case of English slurs and *nigger*, even if it does not predict words like *honky* and *limey* to be slurs, then it can be accepted in the Estonian context on the same basis too. However, a more meaningful argument could be made for the claim that such oppressor-oppressed dichotomy does exist. In both Estonia and the U.S, the speaker group, white people, have never been oppressed by blacks so the relation between the groups is a similar kind. Additionally, although there is no such legislation in place, there are no laws to defend black people from racist hate speech, either, and the prevalence of negative attitudes in history is also telling.²⁹

The third and final set of conditions addressed the actual usage of *neeger*. I claim that data shows that there exists a neutral alternative to *neeger*, that is *mustanahaline*. Proof for its neutrality is twofold. Firstly, black Estonians prefer *mustanahaline* (e.g. Paju, 2018). Secondly, databases like Linguee and Glosbe reveal that in formal contexts, *mustanahaline* is always used instead of *neeger*. *Mustanahaline* appears in diverse contexts, while *neeger* is only listed as a part of a subtitle database. Sources using *mustanahaline* include European Medicines Agency, European Parliament Proceedings and EU Law databases. However, this only shows that in formal language, *neeger* is not used. Additional proof of using *neeger* being a pointed choice comes from the fact that uses of *neeger* are very prevalent on the conservative news page Uued Uudised, compared to mainstream media. *Neeger* is used in 66 articles and *mustanahaline* in 21 on this site. Some examples, “In what sense are neegrud or muslims in Estonia better than people from Pihkva or Novgorod who don't even respect us enough to learn Estonian” (Massiimmigratsiooniga..., 2018), “if a young woman's throat is slit by a neeger from the Congo /--/, then it might be understandable in their own cultural context, since their mentality and upbringing prompt this” (Eurooplase...,2019), “one in every ten neegers has got a job /--/ but the little value they bring to the table is used to provide for the nine freeloaders” (Eesti..., 2018).

²⁹ Instances of *neeger* reveal negative attitudes toward black people in the early 20th century. An example from Eesti Spordileht, a sports magazine, “/--/ *Neegrud* who almost always are members of the lousiest group of people... /--/ *Neegrud* hate endurance sports because of their intrinsic laziness” (Neeger Ameerika spordielus, 1933, p. 153).

One could object to this data by claiming that it is not clear that all uses of *neeger* are negative. Arguably, there are situations where *neeger* is simply used as a general term for black persons. An acknowledged Estonian word for denoting the black people in Estonia is *negriidne*, so it is apparent why people might think that *neeger* is simply a member of the class of *negriidne* race. I will respond to this objection by once again stressing my objective in this thesis – it is to show that the necessary conditions satisfied by *nigger* are also met by *neeger*. As stated in the beginning of section one, I assume proponents of the false friends arguments to reject meaning ambiguity and I claim that they fail to show how differences in social context could lead to differences in meaning – it is not obvious that there are absolutely no non-derogatory uses of *nigger*; the established necessary conditions are not demanding enough to rule out ambiguity. Whether *neeger* has a neutral meaning needs further empirical research which is out of the scope of this thesis.

Finally, I will consider a general objection – *the inappropriate theory* counterargument. In this thesis, I am assessing whether the conditions assumed by proponents of the false friends arguments are supported by the philosophical accounts of slurs outlined here. However, a case could be made for the claim that even though these accounts fail to support false friends arguments, it is not in principle impossible for there to be an account according to which there are relevant differences between Estonia and the anglophone context in the fulfillment of necessary conditions for a word to be a slur. In order to truly show that *the cultural differences argument* is unsound, it must be proven that the semantic and pragmatic qualities assumed by proponents of these arguments cannot be accounted for by any reasonable theory of slurs. This is a possibility that I cannot fully examine due to the scope of this thesis. However, I will briefly go through one possible reply to this objection.

In order for a theory to support the assumptions proponents of this argument make, it should postulate that for a word to be a slur, people targeted by it must have been legally oppressed by the speaker group or in severe conflict with the speakers (see section 1 for reasons Ots and Priimägi provide). This is because as previously established, these are the criteria the Estonian social context does not fulfil, and it is a central assumption of the false friends argument that Estonian indeed fails to satisfy these conditions (P2). I claim that a theory like this would render no Estonian word slur-like. This is because Estonia is a country that has been annexed many times and been under the force of other nations, yet has never legally controlled any other peoples via discriminatory legislation. Of course, there are negative attitudes toward some

groups of people because of their race or ethnicity, however, none of these groups has been “formally” oppressed by Estonians, there is no history of chattel slavery. Therefore, if this was the kind of theory assumed, we would be forced to conclude that there are no derogatory words for Russians, Asian and Roma people in Estonian because none have faced the type of discrimination required by the theory assumed by false friends arguments. It is highly unlikely that kind of theory would satisfy proponents of false friends arguments. Firstly, they seem to assume that a category of slur-like words like this does exist in principle – otherwise the discussion would be pointless – and secondly, there are intuitively several words that exhibit precisely these characteristics. These include, for example, a wide variety of words referring to Russians, including *venku*, *tibla*, *vanka*, *ivan*, *sibul*, etc., but also words referring to Asians (*pilu*, *pilusilm*, *kili*). This provides further support for my claim that it is the argument itself that is unsound.

Conclusion

In this final section, I will summarise the main argument of the thesis and proposing some future research ideas. In the previous sections, I focused on a kind of false friends arguments that stresses the characteristics of the social and cultural context the word appears in. I concluded that because the conditions satisfied by *nigger* and the anglophone context were also satisfied by *neeger* and the Estonian cultural setting, differences in practices did not amount to differences in meaning, i.e. *neeger* cannot be considered a false friend of *nigger*. This means that even if there are accounts of slurs that could support P1 in *the cultural differences argument*, P2 would be shown to be false if P1 is interpreted following these accounts. Showing that the false friend relation does not hold does not automatically show that *neeger* is a slur or that it should not be used. It merely implies that *neeger* and *nigger* do share significant characteristics and offence does not simply arise from the linguistic incompetence of the targeted.

Since these debates in Estonian society continue to arise with the increasing number of racist incidents, further exploring the research topic is crucial. I will now outline three potential research areas. These include looking into dictionary practices, examining semantic ambiguity and the possibility of doing analytic philosophy in Estonian. These topics are worth further research from the perspective of this thesis because they provide insight into other possible ways false friends arguments could be supported or doubted.

Firstly, I will return to *the linguistic authority argument* that I dismissed in section 2.1 because no examined account of slurs made linguistic markers in dictionaries a necessary condition on slur-status. Although in this thesis I did not focus on ways dictionaries could determine semantic facts, it would be an interesting research area to look into dictionary practices in Estonia and anglophone countries. This comparison could help determine what kind of role Estonians ascribe to dictionaries and thus figure out whether there is an interpretation under which appealing to a lack of linguistic markers could serve as proof of a word not being slur-like. Additionally, an analysis of Estonian dictionary entries of words that are conventionally believed to be derogatory and people intentionally avoid would shed light on how accurate of a record of usage dictionaries really are.

Secondly, an issue that was not fully addressed in the first two sections was the possibility that *neeger* is semantically ambiguous. Although the potential existence of non-derogatory uses should not lead one to conclude that the arguments put forward in this thesis are pointless – there are even non-derogatory appropriated uses of *nigger* –, it would be worth considering what kind of ambiguity there might be in case of *neeger*. For example, following Anderson (2018), it might be the case that slurs are used to perform two kinds of different speech acts, i.e. calling and addressing. It is also possible that slurs might be presuppositionally ambiguous (Sennet, 2016). In any case, to refine linguistic intuitions, the judgments of Estonian speakers as well as those targeted by *neeger* should also be examined.

Finally, in this thesis I have shown that four accounts of slurs consider the social context of both Estonia and anglophone countries to be such that it satisfies the criteria for a word in said context to be a slur. However, besides a brief note on the omitted theories, I have not touched upon why accounts centred around CIs or presuppositions have not been explicitly addressed in this thesis. One reason for this is that the ‘tests’ these two accounts use to assess slurs include comparing how their derogatory aspect scopes out under negation, in conditionals, etc. However, it is unclear whether the linguistic constructions in Estonian straightforwardly model those in English (e.g. *kui...siis* vs *if...then*). This poses a larger question for analytical philosophy done in different languages. According to Pérez (2018, p. 10), “language is not a neutral vehicle for our thoughts”. It might be the case that in my analysis of Estonian and English words I have not paid enough attention to how the different languages themselves affect the ideas, concepts and proposals put forward. Altogether these remarks point to a necessity for refining our understanding of formal semantics for Estonian in the future. Comparing slur-like words could be of help in clarifying these distinctions.

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HALVUSTAV TERMIN VÕI VIRVASÕNA? “VIRVASÕNA ARGUMENTIDE” HINDAMINE

Resümee

Eesti keeles ei ole vastet sõnale *slur*, mis inglise keeles viitab halvustava tähendusvarjundiga sõnale, mille sihtmärgiks võivad olla näiteks eri rassidest, rahvustest või seksuaalse orientatsiooniga inimesed. Bakalaureusetöö keskne uurimiseesmärk on võrrelda Eesti meedias poleemikat tekitanud sõna *neeger* omadusi ingliskeelse sõna *nigger* omadega. Ingliskeelse sõna semantilisi omadusi kirjeldavad keelefilosoofilised vaenunimede teooriad (*accounts of slurs*), mille järgi on teatavad sõna omadused või selle sotsiaalse konteksti omapärad, milles sõna esineb, tarvilikud tingimused, et seda pidada vaenusõnaks, st ka halvustavaks, solvavaks ja keelatuks. Töös kaitsen väidet, et kõik tarvilikud tingimused, mida rahuldab *nigger*, on täidetud ka sõna *neeger* poolt.

Eesti meedias on korduvalt väidetud (Pullerits, 2013; Primärgi, 2013; Ots, 2012), et *neeger* ei ole halvustav termin, ent võib sellisena näida tulenevalt foneetilisest ja grammatilisest sarnasusest ingliskeelse vaenusnimega – sellised sõnapaarid, mis on kõlalt sarnased, ent tähenduselt erinevad, on virvasõnad. Kõigi virvasõna argumentide ühine tunnus on, et vaenunime staatuse omistamiseks peavad olema täidetud teatud tingimused – sõna peab esinema kindlas sotsiaalses kontekstis või olema sõnaraamatus lingvistilise markeriga; Eesti ja *neeger* väidetavalt neid kriteeriumeid ei täida. Tõestamaks, et argumendid ei ole tõesed, kirjeldan töös nelja filosoofilist vaadet: tõetingimuslikku teooriat (Hom 2008, 2010, 2012), perspektiivikeskset teooriat (Camp, 2013; 2018), diskursuse rollide teooriat (Popa-Wyatt ja Wyatt, 2018) ja grupikuuluvuse teooriat (Nunberg, 2018). Töös näitan, et juhul kui need teooriad sobivad paradigmaatilise vaenusõna *nigger*'i omaduste kirjeldamiseks, on need kriteeriumid relevantsed ka *neegri* omaduste kirjeldamisel; lisaks on postuleeritud vaenunime staatuse omistamise tingimused täidetud. Viimaks kaalun võimalikke edasisi uurimissuundi, näiteks eesti keeles analüütilise filosoofia tegemise võimalikkust.

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