NEW DIRECTIONS IN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE
Workshop — 13th and 14th November, 2024

DAY ONE — CAN SC + online

15-17:30

Marcin Lewiński (Nova Universidade de Lisboa)
Divisive Speech.
Divisive speech is discourse aimed at sowing disagreement and, potentially, antagonism between different groups. While such effects can be achieved by hidden, private communication – e.g., via virulent gossip – my focus is on open, public uses of divisive speech. Two interrelated questions emerge in such context. The first is descriptive: What are the communicative, pragmatic mechanisms that make divisive speech possible, and common, in the public sphere? The second is normative: Is there some identifiable norm that makes divisive speech problematic? In contrast to "hate", "toxic", "dangerous" or "dehumanizing" speech, I take "divisive" speech not to be inherently harmful: after all, even strong disagreement and agonism can be seen as the very vehicles of a healthy democratic polity.
I approach these questions within the framework of speech act theory, benefitting from the theory's proven potential to account for the pragmatic mechanisms of conflictual and hateful discourse (Hebert & Kukla, 2016; Kukla, 2018; Langton, 2018a, 2018b). I draw in particular on the concept of illocutionary pluralism: the idea that one token utterance performed in one specific context can have plural primary illocutionary forces (Lewiński, 2021). While some illocutionary relativists (Sbisà, 2013; Johnson, 2023a, 2023b) argue that the pluralism is contingent on contextually varied interpretations of speech acts, my goal, by contrast, is to isolate a class of complex communicative mechanisms of divisive speech which rely on illocutionary pluralism by their intended and inherent design features. I focus on two contrastive specimens: protesting (cf. Chrisman & Hubbs, 2021; Medina, 2023) and slurring (cf. Bianchi, 2014; Camp, 2013; Kukla, 2018; Nunberg, 2018). While the former is "good" and the latter "bad" speech, they both are instances of divisive speech, as they openly incite an argumentative clash between groups. And they both are illocutionarily plural, as they conventionally invite different uptake from the ingroup and the outgroup. I conclude by arguing that the manipulative potential of illocutionary pluralism relies on the fact that, in and of itself, it's a common and neutral mechanism of communication. Its treacherousness thrives on the confusion between legitimate and illegitimate uses – and the practical aim of the paper is to investigate the normative criteria for distinguishing between them.

Casey Rebecca Johnson (University of Idaho)
"Artificial" Assertions and the Doxastic Landscape.
Users interact with generative AI models, like Chatgpt, Copilot, LlaMA, and Gemini in ways that seem conversational. How do we understand these interactions? Several philosophers have argued that such models cannot assert. In this paper, I'll argue that such a commitment is counter-intuitive. I'll also demonstrate that so-called artificial assertions should be expected, if we understand illocutionary force as a relative matter. In other words, illocutionary relativism offers a principled and non-ad-hoc explanation for "artificial" assertions. These assertions (and other conversational moves) then, can teach us something about conversation, coordination, and the doxastic landscape.

DAY TWO — CAN SD + online

10:30-13:00

Martina Rosola (Universitat de Barcelona — LOGOS)
Which is the fairest of all? A critical evaluation of gender-fair strategies.
Several languages use the masculine gender for generic or unknown individuals and for mixed-gender groups. Many scholars and activists argued that this practice is problematic and different strategies have been proposed to overcome this issue. This variety requires speakers to choose among the different gender-fair strategies. To make an informed decision, speakers should know about the advantages and disadvantages of the various options. Providing such an analysis is the goal of this talk: I will address the question of what strategy is the "best", taking into account practical and ethical aspects. Through the efficiency lens, no strategy stands out as the best, but each is best suited for specific contexts. I thus argue that a pluralistic approach relying on multiple strategies, even combining them in the same text, yields the most efficient approach. This solution, though, is not the fairest: when considering ethical aspects, most strategies turn out inadequate. Only gender-neutral paraphrases, namely what I call "conservative neutrality", are truly fair both towards women and non-binary people. However, it has been argued, conservative neutrality can slip unnoticed, thus failing to challenge the male-as-the-norm bias. This practical shortcoming, I argue, can be overcome thanks to an adjustment that highlights the use conservative neutrality, thus ensuring recipients notice it.

Federico Cella (Universitat de Barcelona — LOGOS)
In collaboration with Mara Floris (Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele) and Camilla Borgna (Università di Torino).
"Who's the surgeon?" Gender stereotypes and gender-fair language in Italian speakers.
In recent years, there has been a lively debate concerning gender stereotypes and gender-fair language (GFL) in English and other European languages. An example of this debate is the surgeon riddle, which has been used to measure gender stereotypes in professions (e.g., Belle et al. 2021): "A father and his son are in a car accident. The father dies. The son is rushed to the ER. The attending surgeon looks at the boy and says, 'I can't operate on this boy. He's my son!' How can this be?". While the most plausible solution is that the surgeon is the mother, recent findings indicate that people struggle to envision the surgeon as such.
The riddle has primarily been tested in English. We tested the riddle with Italian adolescents. In our study, we compared the interpretation of a translation of the riddle with the generic masculine "Chirurgo" (surgeon) with two variants including GFL strategies: "Persona che opera" (person who operates), which is gender neutral, and "Chirurg*", which is an innovative GFL expression that does not specify the gender of its referent. We found that the GFL strategies, especially the innovative strategy, increased the likelihood of identifying the surgeon as the mother of the boy.

13-14:30 Lunch break

14:30-17:00

Anna Klieber (Cardiff University)

'Call Me by My Name!': Investigating the Harms of Deadnaming.

Deadnaming — calling a trans person by a name they have discarded — is a common problem faced by trans people, and is generally considered to be very harmful. When aiming to understand the harms of deadnaming, it is tempting to equate the issue with misgendering — using an incorrect name has similar effects to using an incorrect pronoun. This paper, however, wishes to offer a different picture: While misgendering can be (and usually is) part of the reason that deadnaming is harmful, I will defend the idea that the harm of deadnaming can be understood as an act of subordinating speech.

This exploration draws on insights developed by Ishani Maitra (2012), who establishes that acts of ordinary hate speech (uttered by people who do not hold a specific kind of formal authority) can both cause and constitute subordination – analysing both its perlocutionary and illocutionary dimension. Somewhat departing from a pure application of her framework, I will argue that deadnaming crucially derives subordinating power from the transphobic context in which it takes place. In such a context, deadnaming can cause subordination via its perlocutionary effects – leading, e.g., to stress, depression, and the legitimisation of further uses of deadnames and other gender-marked language. But crucially, deadnaming itself can constitute subordination (via its illocutionary force): drawing on Talia Mae Bettcher (2009), we will see that the act of deadnaming can be understood as a denial of a trans person's first-person authority and self-determination, in denying who they are, beyond what gender they are. Finally, provided that deadnaming happens within a deeply transphobic society, identifying both the specific mechanisms as well as specific harms by which deadnaming operates is crucial for another reason, too: Setting out this groundwork can allow us – or so we might hope – to identify ways to resist deadnaming by both disrupting its mechanisms as well as countering its harms.

Dan Zeman (Universidade do Porto)

Do the Harms of Non-derogatory Uses of Slurs Mandate Their Ban?

There is no doubt that slurs harm. They do so by denigrating their targets, by putting them down, by marginalizing them. This is why in many legislations around the world, the (derogatory) use of slurs has been banned or penalized. But slurs have non-derogatory uses as well, and many such uses have *prima facie* beneficial effects.

Recently, however, philosophers and psychologists have shown that non-derogatory uses of slurs are able to produce harm as well. In this paper, I approach the broad question of whether these uses of slurs should also be banned. I first introduce the uses of slurs that have been considered in the literature to be non-derogatory. Then I survey the recent ways in which such uses have been taken to be harmful and flag what various authors have recommended in this respect. Against this background, I engage with a recent view put forward by Alba Moreno Zurita and Eduardo Pérez-Navarro, who urge extreme caution with respect to any uses of slurs, due to their potential to normalize derogation. I show that neither they nor previous authors have paid enough attention to neutral uses of slurs, which might prove more resistant to being banned. I conclude that, although there is wide agreement about the harms of non-derogatory uses of slurs, a general argument for banning them is not currently available.