

The Relationship Between Derogatory Terms and Their Essentialism Condition

— Focusing the Terms 'X dog' in China

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Abstract: In modern China, there has been a notable shift in the usage of 'X dog', disparaging words involving the word "dog" with a noun, resulting in a progressive diminution of its negative impact. Using Lynne Tirrell's theory of derogatory terms, this paper employs a combination of literature review and corpus analysis to explore the ways in which the essentialism condition has contributed to the historical prevalence of 'X dog' as a widely used derogatory term in ancient China, and how its shifting perception has impacted its usage in the modern era. This study gives vital insights into the intricacies of linguistic and social practices in Chinese society by exposing the deep relationships between disparaging terminology and the essentialism condition. In addition, the paper discusses potential disagreements and differing perspectives regarding the usage of pejorative terminology, providing nuanced explanations and perspectives on this contentious matter. Overall, this research presents a nuanced examination of the manner in which 'X dog' and other pejorative labels are created by historical, cultural, and linguistic factors, and highlights the need for more investigation into the intricate dynamics of language use in modern China.

Keywords: derogatory term, dog, sociolinguistics, pragmatics

1. Introduction

Many philosophers and linguists have focused on the significance and purposes of disparaging phrases. In her work, Lynne Tirrell attempted to explain how disparaging language might cause harm and proposed five important characteristics of severely unfavorable terms. These are the insider/outsider function, the essentialism condition, the social embeddedness condition, the functional variation feature, and the action-engendering feature, respectively [1].

In the meantime, relevant researches, such as those conducted by Fugen Liu [2], Shuai Hong [3], and others, indicate that in ancient China, the power of 'X dog,' which consists of words with the structure of a simple noun or verb and the word "dog" and is frequently used as a derogatory term, gradually increased and became one of the most common derogatory terms. In contrast, in contemporary China, the functions of 'X dog' have shifted, and they are now widely used in daily life. Yet, the actual meaning of 'X dog' is to refer to an individual or a group as dogs, although dogs themselves have no negative connotations. The use of 'X dog' as an insult is illogical. Several

researchers, such as Wengao Sun [4], have undertaken investigations on this topic from the perspective of social culture or cognitive linguistics and reached strong findings.

Yet, previous research has typically ignored the role of the essentialism condition. According to Tirell, the essentialism condition also plays a significant role in the formation of disparaging terminology and has a significant impact on the insider/outsider function and subsequent actions. To reinforce this argument, this research will examine, through a literature review and corpus analysis, the relationship between the essentialism condition and the creation and evolution of 'X dog' in order to determine the more general relationship between the essentialism condition and disparaging phrases.

2. An Example of the Way That the Essentialism Condition Worked

In order to make sense of the basically negative situation of 'X dog,' it is vital to comprehend the ancient Chinese idea of human nature. In short, it viewed moral practice as its *raison d'être* and emphasized the good and evil in human nature, i.e., the moral dilemma was its central concern. Notwithstanding variances in what is said about morality, many ancient Chinese philosophers, especially the long-dominant Confucians, argued that morality is what differentiates humans from animals. According to Mencius in *Mencius*, LilouXia, "the difference between man and animal is slight. The common man loses this distinction, whereas the gentleman maintains it." The term "Man" in this context does not refer to a biological construct, but rather to an ideal personality that conforms to a moral norm, while animals do not [5]. As the principle of people and things permeates people's daily lives, traditional Chinese philosophy has a significant impact on education. As a result, ancient Chinese people placed a high value on morality, and there was even a proverb stating that morality was more important than life: "It is a small thing to starve to death, but a large matter to lose your virginity." In other words, to compare someone to a dog is to diminish them morally and, by consequence, to diminish the essence that makes them human. This is the primary reason why dogs and other animals were referred to in ancient China with such harsh words.

Examining the historical usage of 'X dog' is, in reality, the key to proving the intimate relationship between the essentialism state and the corresponding behaviors, such as Di dog! Why would a His Majesty's acolyte kneel to a traitor [5]?

The Di is the name of an ancient minority, and this is a classic description of an old minority as a dog. In China, there has been a concept of "morality of benefit animals" from ancient times, with the belief that the beneficence and kindness of the monarch can extend to animals. This concept is comparable to animal instrumentalism, which places animals in a subordinate position to humans. And the reason the Han nationality utilized 'X dog' to identify ethnic minorities was to characterize them as immoral creatures, generate justifications for their regulation, sinicization, and even war in an effort to diminish the autonomy of ethnic minorities. It has been determined that the aim and actions of the example are tightly tied to the essentialism condition, and that 'X dog' will lose its original action-causing ability in the absence of this condition.

After a careful analysis of the preceding example, it is clear that the essential characteristic of the essentialism condition is intricately linked to the formation and use of 'X dog' and other derogatory terms, highlighting its vital role in shaping perceptions and attitudes toward individuals or groups. In addition, this example demonstrates that the essence of essentialism can function as a potent discriminator and a precondition for specific actions or behaviors, stressing the need for a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between language and culture.

3. The Change of the Essentialism Condition and Its Influence

Before discussing modifications to the essentialism condition, it is necessary to examine the following example.

Lin Gengxin doesn't care that fans lovingly refer to him as "Lin dog" When he confessed that his roommates dubbed each other "Chen dog," "Li dog," and so on, he is called "Lin dog."

Although the 'X dog' in this example has the same structure as in the preceding example, it has a completely different connotation and is used here as a joke between friends, as is readily apparent. As stated previously, in contemporary China, 'X dog' has become a term with a variety of meanings. For example, anyone can use "student dog" to make fun of students and "single dog" to make fun of bachelors, and in the vast majority of instances, they have no actual detrimental impact. In these two examples, the relationship between the speaker and the audience is different, and the sentence context is inconsistent, but this does not change the central argument of this paper. Because they cannot explain why 'X dog' is commonly used for uses other than disparaging connotations in modern times. Here, a remarkable point is made. The absence of the essentially negative condition is the reason why 'X dog' has the right to be a catchphrase but the vast majority of other disparaging expressions do not.

As a matter of fact, there are numerous instances in which 'X dog' lost such a fundamentally unfavorable condition. On the one hand, there is a rapid revival of Taoist and Buddhist thought in modern China, which was once disregarded by many rulers. Both of these philosophies advocate that there is no essential difference between humans and animals, thereby eliminating the moral distinction between humans and dogs. On the other hand, as the Philosophy of Science and Technology and ethics developed, a variety of new perspectives on animals, such as animal rights and animal liberation, emerged [6-7]. As a result, people began to question whether animals have morality as well, and the animal rights movement now dominates the globe. This means that modern people attempt to give animals and other living beings different moral status, while simultaneously defending the moral status of animals. This circumstance has altered the Chinese people's view of the essentialism condition to some degree. Not only that, but it can also be argued that as humanism has been more widespread in recent years, people have paid more attention to the value of being human, such as intelligence, gender, race, etc., rather than comparing themselves to animals such as dogs. Nevertheless, this is not all; the discoveries of fields like biology also undermine the essentialism condition. In short, when the words 'X dog' are pronounced nowadays, they no longer contain any moral significance [8]. Although individuals continue to use other disparaging phrases, such as dog, they are not core to the meaning; rather, they function as an adjunct to other negative aspects. As an example, "Now let me teach you mongrels of dogs a lesson!"

It is evident that "dogs" plays no central part in this scenario. This language, which highlights factors such as the target's consanguinity, is not much less harmful if the term "dog" is eliminated and the word "mongrel" is used to describe others.

Briefly, the current section gives various examples to demonstrate that the absence of an intrinsically negative trait is a critical aspect in allowing a specific breed of dog, referred to as 'X dog,' to obtain acceptance among the majority of persons and finally become a popular catchphrase. Additionally, the presence of essentialism has the capacity to affect people's understanding and perception of pejorative phrases, hence influencing the power dynamics and functioning connected with them. It can be extrapolated that the absence or presence of essentialism can have a substantial effect on the adoption and use of certain language, including the evolution and social connotations of buzzwords and disparaging terms.

4. Discussion

Some may argue that the following essentialism conditions apply to every animal, yet not every animal has ever been referred to such pejorative names. In this view, the basically negative condition is merely a profound understanding, similar to numerous other philosophical concepts, and the effect of the combination of social/historical factors cannot be overlooked.

In ancient farming societies, the majority of dog-rearing individuals were not commoners but rather the wealthy.

At that time, when class distinctions were clear, the common people viewed the wealthy as frequently wealthy but not virtuous, and the image of dogs, which was no different from the tool of the wealthy, became lowly and vulgar. Consequently, such negative experiences with dogs gradually mirrored the ancient philosophical approach that invoked the power of the essential condition for 'X dog' to cause such severe harm [8]. In comparison, contemporary societal conditions have altered drastically. As a result of the continuing growth of the economy, dog ownership has grown commonplace among individuals. Dogs are also given new tasks, such as assisting people as guide dogs and drug detection dogs, and contributing to society. Since then, the social status of dogs has risen from being lowly and vulgar to becoming noble. These modifications in such a social context have an effect on the essentialism condition that allows it to function effectively.

In conclusion, while the centrality of the essentialism condition in shaping disparaging terms is emphasized, it is essential to stress that its efficacy is dependant on the availability of adequate social and historical conditions. Without these contextual elements, the essentialism condition may remain hidden and have no impact on the creation of disparaging language. This is the reason why dogs are used to illustrate the effects of essentialism rather than other animals. It emphasizes the necessity of a combination of innate qualities and social circumstances for the emergence of unfavorable connotations associated with a specific group or individual.

5. Conclusion

After reviewing Tirrell's research on the five distinct qualities of disparaging phrases, it is clear that the essentialism condition occupies a large portion and is organically linked to the other aforementioned traits. In fact, the essentialism condition can be viewed as the foundation upon which the power of pejorative terminology rests, since it tends to reinforce and maintain damaging preconceptions and prejudices about particular groups or persons. However, the dynamic nature of the essentialism condition also suggests that any change in its perception can have a profound effect on the social cognition and power of derogatory terms, as evidenced by the numerous instances in which redefining or reclaiming formerly derogatory terms effectively reduced their harmful impact. Therefore, it is evident that the essentialism condition is a crucial component of disparaging terminology, and its consequences for language use and social interactions merit further examination. This research concludes by emphasizing the significance of recognizing the role of essentialism condition in the formation of pejorative terminology and the opportunity for a shift in its perception to foster a more inclusive and fair society.

Without a doubt, doing diachronic research on disparaging terminology involves a number of obstacles that must be ignored. The Chinese language, for instance, has undergone major semantic and grammatical changes throughout the course of its growth, making it an extraordinarily complex and sophisticated system that demands careful analysis of its historical development. Hence, it is insufficient to focus exclusively on pragmatic reasons that contribute to the adoption of pejorative phrases such as 'X dog,' as this approach ignores the crucial role of historical semantics and syntax in shaping the meaning and connotations of such terms. In order to acquire a thorough knowledge of the evolution and employment of disparaging phrases in diverse historical contexts, a more holistic study

that integrates pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic elements is required. By investigating the interaction between these numerous linguistic elements, researchers can obtain insight into the social and cultural influences that affect the production and use of discriminatory terms, and ultimately develop more nuanced and effective techniques for fostering inclusive language practices. When doing diachronic study on disparaging phrases, it is essential to investigate the broader historical and linguistic context, since this can assist discover previously missed characteristics of these terms and give new light on their societal influence.

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