

Towards understanding slurs in Rioplatense Spanish

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Introduction

This poster provides the data obtained in our pilot study which is inspired in the work of Cepollaro et al. (2019), and it is our first approach to understanding the use of slurs in Rioplatense Spanish. Cepollaro et al. (2019) experimented on the offensiveness of slurs, and compared it to that of swearwords in Italian. Their results showed that, even though slurs were found to be more offensive than swearwords without any context, swearwords were found more offensive in predicative contexts such as 'X is Y'. Furthermore, their use in reported speech made both slurs and swearwords to be considered less offensive than in the other analyzed contexts.

The goal of our pilot study

To compare how Rioplatense speakers perceive the offensiveness of slurs and swearwords when presented in isolation, and compare it to the results obtained in Cepollaro et al. (2019)

Design of the pilot study

Our pilot study contains only gender and sex related slurs, because our previous corpus search showed that they are more frequent than racial slurs, and they involve a more creative process of word formation. Thus, there are more gender and sex related lexical items available.

The pilot involves 30 critical items (slurs, such as *tortillera/dyke*), 30 control items (swearwords, such as *imbécil/imbecile*), and 30 fillers (neutral words such as *profesor/teacher*). No 'default labels' were used, because there was only a very small number of default labels related to gender and sex related slurs.

Participants were asked to rate the offensiveness of the isolated words in a 7 point scale that went from non-offensive to extremely offensive, and they were asked to answer some demographic information which involved gender, age, and place of residence.

To ensure that all the data belonged to Rioplatense speakers, only inhabitants of Montevideo and Buenos Aires could evaluate the slurs.

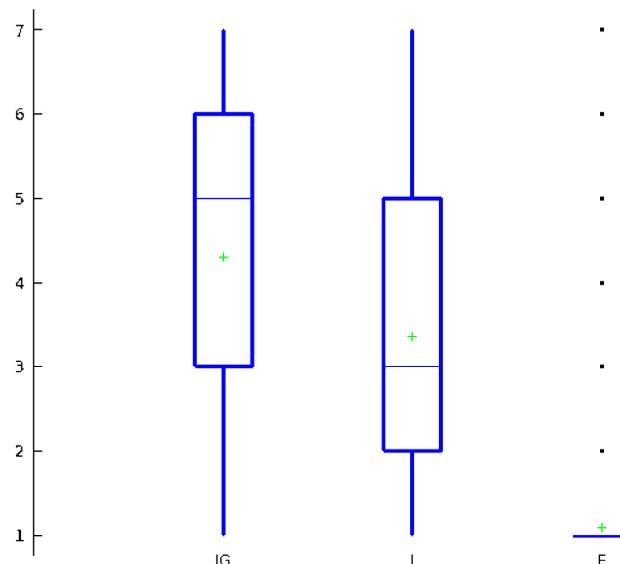
Results

Even though it is a pilot study, the data shows that Rioplatense speakers also evaluate slurs as being more offensive than swearwords in isolation. The mean of slurs was 4.29737, while the mean of swearwords was 3.35307. As may be seen, on average, they were not rated as extremely offensive. We ran a one-way anova comparing all three values (including the fillers), and the simplified results are $F=5523.2$, and $p < .0001$. Thus, they all behave differently, and H_0 is rejected. Since the p-value is very small, the chance of type 1 error (rejecting a correct H_0) is null: 0.0%. Finally, the observed effect size f is large (0.90).

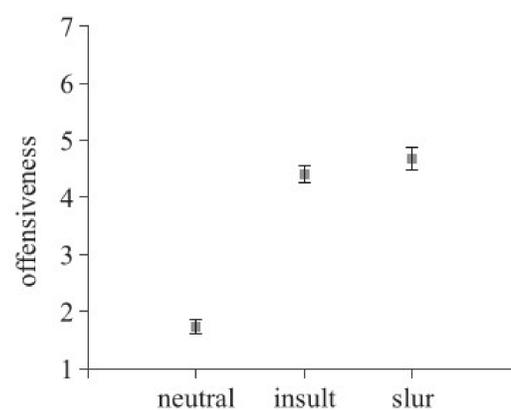
Current and future research We did a corpus search of the 10 most offensive slurs and swearwords, and we have some new observations: swearwords have a higher frequency of use than slurs, swearwords easily accept modal modification, as in *...podés ser un potencial cagador/you can be a potential fucker*, slurs do not *#podés ser un potencial maricón/#you can be a potential faggot*; both appear modified by pure expressives such as *de mierda/of shit*: *es un maricón de mierda/he is a faggot of shit* vs. *una verdadera cagona de mierda/a true coward of shit*; slurs appear in appropriated contexts, swearwords do not. These observations have yet to be analyzed, but they do seem to signal some interesting similarities, as well as some expected differences.

Finally, we will conduct an experiment to test whether Rioplatense Spanish speakers assign descriptive content only to slurs or to both.

Offensiveness of slurs (IG), versus swearwords (I), versus fillers (F) for RPS speakers:



Offensiveness in Cepollaro et al. (2019 p. 34)



. Average values of offensiveness for the different types of words. Error bars indicate standard errors.

Comparing the results of both pilots

While both Rioplatense Spanish speakers and Italian speakers consider slurs more offensive than swearwords, Italians seem to consider both swearwords and slurs to be more offensive than Rioplatense speakers.

Concluding remarks

Conducting these experiments may allow us to better understand which parts of hate speech are idiosyncratic, and which are not.

- Offensiveness (in isolation) does not seem to be idiosyncratic, but how offensive both types of insults are rated by native speakers does seem to be idiosyncratic.

Other experiments in other languages are needed to confirm both hypotheses.

References

Cepollaro, B., Sulpizio, S., and Bianchi, C. (2019). How bad is it to report a slur? An empirical investigation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 146:32–42.