

The Conception of Race in White Supremacist Discourse: A Critical Corpus Analysis with Teaching Implications

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study analyzes the conception of race in a corpus of white supremacist (WS) discourse and the linguistic resources used to support it. To examine the conception of race in the corpus, we first discuss a number of views within the philosophy of race. We then perform a quantitative analysis of race terms, including an analysis of word frequency, keyness, collocates, and n-grams, and a qualitative analysis of the data. The analysis demonstrates that WSs implicitly portray races as unequal through the semantic prosodies of racial terms. They also utilize explicit means by appealing to putative morally relevant biological differences between races. We conclude that WSs hold an essentialist conception of race. This study extends these insights to the classroom by offering practical suggestions for how teachers and learners might use similar materials to challenge everyday racial stereotypes and to identify racist ideology in other domains.

Introduction

With the presence of white supremacy in full view within public discourse, there is arguably an impetus on educators to help students investigate, take a critical eye to, and interrogate both widespread and individually held beliefs about race. This is no less the case for ESL and EFL teachers. The issue of immigration intersects with issues of race. Immigrant populations suffer stigmatization with respect to their language abilities and national origin, and many ESL learners are race minorities in their new countries. Thus, the populations which ESL teachers in particular are situated to help are often the very targets of white supremacist (WS) discourse. Moreover, in varying contexts, many EFL learners continue to encounter racist ideologies informed by the legacies of colonialism and white supremacy, and it is arguably the responsibility of EFL teachers to help learners unravel the ways that such ideologies affect the lives and thinking of learners. We proposed to take up the task of creating a small specialized corpus of WS



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discourse in the form of opinion pieces from WS blogs and book samples in order to interpret some of the patterns which emerge from the data. We also proceeded in our research with the goal of developing suggestions for how well-selected WS texts can be used in the classroom to interrogate broader racist ideologies and to problematize conceptions of race.

Conceptions of Race

WSs believe that race is real. In particular, as we will see, WSs hold a *race essentialist* conception of race, which further implies a stance of *race conservatism*. However, it will be helpful to first unpack the claim that race is real. This claim in fact invites quite a few serious questions. For example, what is race?; for race to be real, what needs to be true?; and why should anyone believe in the reality of race? In order to locate WS's essentialist conception of race, it is first necessary to chart out some surrounding conceptual terrain. Our view is that in order to fully understand *race realism* (the view that race is real), *race conservatism* (the view that race talk should continue), or *race essentialism* (the view that all and only members of a race share an essence), it is equally important to understand what the conceptual alternatives are to these sets of beliefs, namely, *race skepticism* (the view that races do not exist), *race eliminativism* (the view that race talk should end), and *race constructionism* (the view that race is socially based or races are social kinds). We hope to make these concepts clear momentarily. We will work with the conceptual boundaries outlined by Mallon (2004, 2006, 2007) in our discussion as we will delve into the philosophy of race to make sense of these concepts.

What is Race and What Must be True for Races to Exist?

Anthony Appiah (1996) has formulated the most well-known and influential view of race skepticism.¹ Appiah first appealed to two leading views of reference, the “ideational” view (e.g., Russell, 1911; Frege, 1948; Searle, 1958) and the “referential” view (e.g., Kripke, 1972; Putnam, 1975; Soames, 2002). According to the *ideational view*, the meanings of certain words (kind terms and names), e.g., *tiger*, *witch*, or *Santa Claus* are each associated with a concept, description, or set of descriptions, e.g., “large, carnivorous feline predator with black stripes originating in Asia...” in the case of *tiger*. According to the ideational view, a word expresses a concept, while a concept determines a referent if a referent exists (see Figure 1).² On the one hand, a person may grasp the concept expressed by a word which has a referent, such as when a person understands the meaning of the word *tiger*. On the other hand, a person may grasp a concept expressed by a word which does not determine a referent. This is the case even if a person believes that there is such a referent. For example, people may grasp the concepts expressed by *witch* and *Santa Claus* and believe that witches and Santa Claus exist even though the concepts expressed by these terms do not refer to anything in the real world. In contrast, the *referential view* holds that the meaning of a name or a kind term is just that to which the word directly refers rather than a concept or description. For example, the meaning of *tiger* is (the set of) all tigers in the world. The referential view is often paired with a causal-historical account of reference fixing. On this view, kind terms are initially used to directly refer to a kind of thing. If the kind term is successfully used to refer to a kind, the practice of using the term to refer to something is passed on to others in the same speech community and to their descendants. For example, someone once used the word *mammoth*

to refer to mammoths, and certain speech communities continue to use the term to directly refer to mammoths because they have learned the practice from others. Even when the mammoths have gone extinct, people can still refer to the set of all mammoths which once existed by employing the referential practices which they acquired from others in the speech community and entertain propositions expressed by sentences or utterances containing the word *mammoth*.³ Sometimes, speakers are unsuccessful in using kind terms to refer to things. For example, in this view, the kind term *witch* itself never refers to actual witches (since there are no witches for people to refer to), despite the fact that some people in the speech community may attempt to refer to witches.⁴

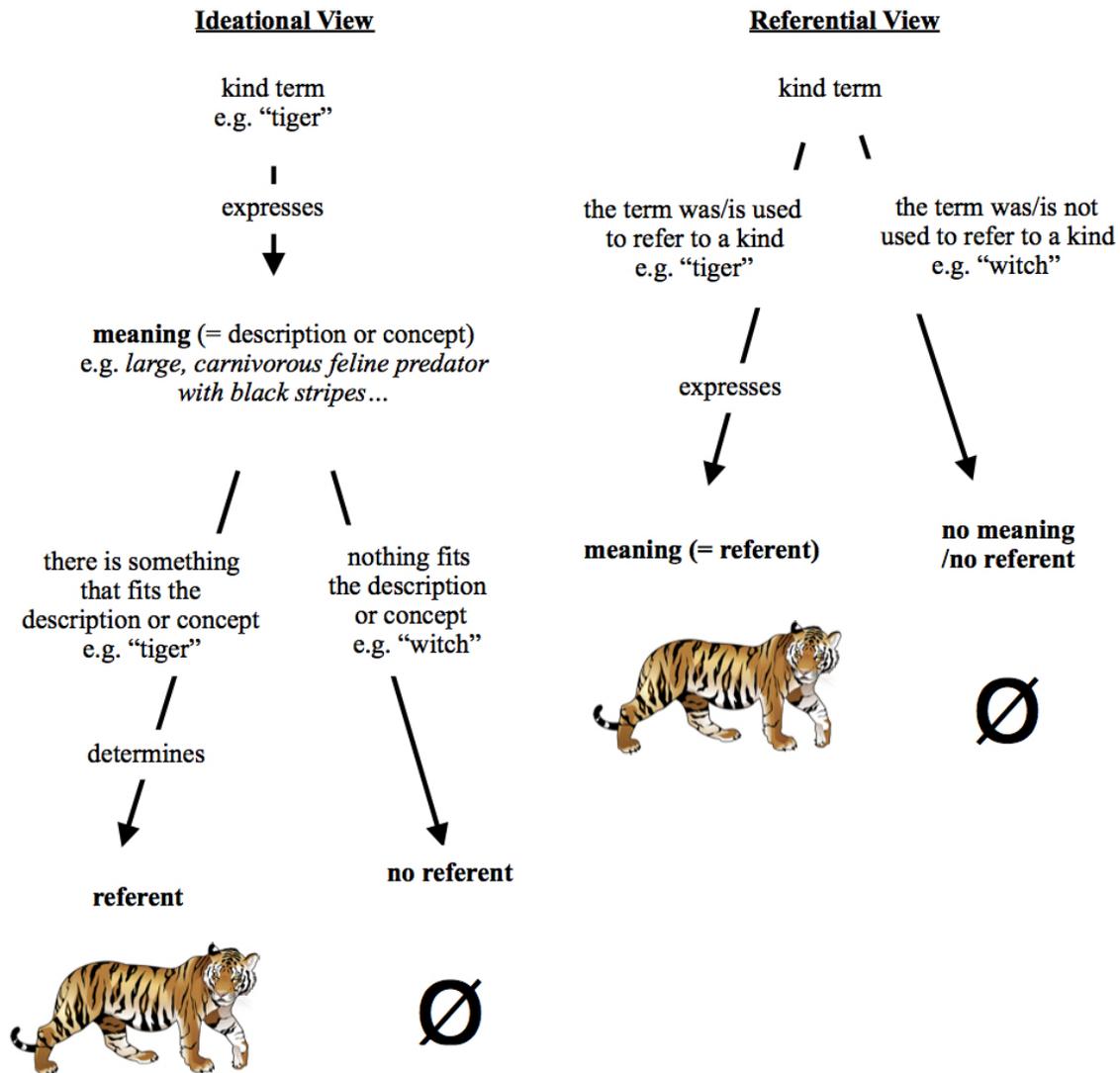


Figure 1. Meaning and Reference in Two Theories of Reference
(image source: <http://designatprinting.com/tiger-clip-art>)

Before we discuss how these two views of reference can shed light on the meaning of “race,” it is important to consider the fact that the introduction of race talk was charged with views of *race essentialism*, which Appiah calls “racialism.” Appiah (1996) described race essentialism as a set of beliefs holding that

we could divide human beings into a small number of groups, called ‘races,’ in such a way that the members of these groups shared certain fundamental, heritable, physical, moral, intellectual, and cultural characteristics with one another that they did not share with members of any other race.
(p. 54)

A race essentialist believes that there are biologically inheritable race essences which are passed down by race members to all their descendants. These are supposed to materialize as morally significant, natural (and perhaps genetic) bio-behavioral dispositions. Examples of morally significant bio-behavioral dispositions include those related to intelligence, criminality, temperament, and so on. In short, a race essentialist believes that all people of a given race share an essence which necessarily restricts and fully determines whom the race members can become in terms of behavior, character, and culture.

Appiah claimed that the contemporary folk concept of race, although perhaps not as radical as its historical predecessor, is made up of the detritus of earlier essentialist conceptions of race (Appiah, 1996, p. 38). Following the ideational view of reference, race kind terms have referents only if things in the world match our folk concept of race, that is, race kind terms refer only if the genes responsible for skin color, hair texture, and so on are responsible for morally relevant dispositions. Since there is no such systematic relation and nothing in the world matches our folk concept of race, race kind terms do not have referents. Hence, if the ideational view of reference is true, then there are no races.

Appiah offered two proposals for the referential view. First, he appeals to population genetics, which understands races as being local communities of potentially interbreeding individuals (Appiah 1996, pp. 72-73). With this understanding of race in mind, it is not plausible that race terms were successfully used to pick out such kinds, since there are no such communities (with few exceptions, e.g., the Amish) historically or contemporarily isolated to this degree.⁵ Thus, race kind terms do not have referents, i.e., they have no meanings, and there are no races. Second, we might claim that referents of race kind terms are fixed by the morphological features dominant in certain geographic locales, such as Africa, Europe, Asia, and so on (Appiah 1996, pp. 73-74). The problem here is that there is a great deal of genetic variation across people who would be ascribed the same race to the point that there is nearly as much variation within ascribed racial groups as there is between such groups. Thus, races do not constitute (natural) kinds. It follows from the referential view paired with a causal-historical account of reference fixing that race kind terms were never used to refer to anything. Equivalently, it can be said that race kind terms have no meanings, and these claims entail that races do not exist.

In broad strokes, Appiah’s argument is as follows. If the ideational view is true, then there are no races. If the referential view is true, then there are no races. Since either the ideational or referential view of race is true, races do not exist. The claim that races do not exist leads race skeptics to assert the normative claim that the concept of race should be jettisoned, i.e., race eliminativism. The reasoning behind the latter claim is that talk about race must always be fallacious or deceptive, since races do not exist.

Social constructionist views⁶ consider races to be socially based rather than naturally based (e.g., Mallon, 2006; Haslanger, 2000; Mills, 1998; Piper, 1992). To be a social kind does not make a kind any less real than a natural kind. According to these views, races are social kinds constructed and supported by social practices, beliefs, and dispositions.

Mallon (2006) outlined three social constructionist views of race. Drawing from Mallon's own (2004) work and Charles Mills's (1998) work, Mallon (2006) identified the first social constructionist view as *thin constructionism*, in which races exist "in virtue of superficial properties that are prototypically linked with race" (p. 534) along with the treatment of these properties as racially significant by members of a community. Thin constructionism is grounded in an analysis of how individuals are ascribed a race, which includes appeals to differences in skin tone, hair color and texture, self-awareness of perceived ancestral origin, experience, self-identification, and so on. For instance, it is the darker skin tone, the kinky black hair, the self-identification as a black person, etc., that makes a black person black *vis-a-vis* the ordinary concept of race and everyday practices of race ascription. On a thin constructionist view, this is sufficient to account for the objective reality of races. The account is constructionist in the sense that it is the social significance of these race ascription practices and the employment of the ordinary concept of race rather than the superficial properties themselves which do the work of making sense of the reality of races. That is, the account appeals to human culture and decisions to account for the constructed reality of race.

The second social constructionist view of race is the *interactive kind* view. "Interactive" here refers to the interaction between the social ascription of race and the sort of experiences such racial ascriptions cause. According to this view, it is due to the fact that we are socially ascribed a race status that we have racial experiences. To illustrate, it is the socially ascribed status of a black person as a black person that may cause a black person to be followed by the police, encounter suspicion at the grocery store, or be judged as unintelligent or criminal. Piper (1992) explained,

What joins me to other blacks, then, and other blacks to another, is not a set of physical characteristics, for there is none that all blacks share. Rather it is the shared experience of being visually or cognitively *identified* as black by a white racist society, and the punitive and damaging effects of that identification [original emphasis] (p. 30-31).

In short, according to the *interactive kind* view, the shared experiences of racial oppression (Young, 1990; Haslanger, 2004) caused by race ascriptions in a racist society makes race a social kind.

Drawing from Root's (2000) work, Mallon (2006) distinguished the third kind of social constructionist view of race, namely, *institutional constructionism*. According to this view, races are social kinds because they are an institution of a particular society. Root (2000) notes that for the same reasons that there were no races in ancient Athens, since Greeks did not classify people according to race, many people considered black in the U.S. may not be considered black in Brazil. This is because the institution of race has different characteristics in the U.S and in Brazil. In the U.S., a person whose father is black and mother is white (such as one of the authors of this paper) is considered black in the U.S. but a distinct race in Brazil. The main difference between interactive accounts and institutional accounts is that "While interactive accounts emphasize the causal effects of labeling, institutional accounts of race hold that labeling is conceptually or logically required" (Mallon, 2006, p. 536).

Why Should Anyone Believe (or Not Believe) in the Reality of Race?

We have examined different views of what makes races social kinds, yet it is also vital to briefly investigate the normative claims associated with these views. The race skeptic believes that we should do away with race talk, since it must always be deceptive (race eliminativism). The race essentialist believes in the reality of race first, and thus he must believe that race talk should continue (race conservatism). The social constructionist reverses this order of analysis because normative claims are meant to account for why one should believe in the reality of race. Haslanger (2005) claimed that “we should adopt a constructionist account not because it provides an analysis of our ordinary discourse, but because it offers numerous political and theoretical advantages” (p. 11). This claim is quite different from the assumptions of the race skeptic, who bases her claim that races do not exist on an analysis of the meanings of race terms and how they are used. The social constructionist, then, believes that the political and theoretical advantages of the social constructionist view motivate the adoption of the view rather than the view’s ability to accurately track the linguistic practices of people who use race kind terms. For example, one might believe that it is important to preserve race talk and the belief in the reality of race because it is important for certain political projects which aim to achieve racial equality and social justice. The normative claims backing such political projects motivate the adoption of a social constructionist view of race, which allows those who support such political projects to assert the reality of race without being race essentialists. With the conceptual terrain around various answers to questions such as “what is race?,” “for race to be real, what needs to be true?,” and “why should anyone believe in the reality of race?” mapped out, it is time to move on to answer the question of how WS views fit into this picture.

Research Questions

With the conceptual mapping of race outlined above, we pose the following research questions to guide an analysis of how race is talked about in actual WS discourse.

1. What linguistic resources are used in current WS discourse to talk about race?
2. What conception of race is embedded in current WS discourse?

Methodology

We employed corpus analysis using a specialized corpus of WS discourse, which included written samples from two different sources: Internet blog posts and published books. We identified WS literature through a very simple method. We determined if a blog was WS by examining its superficial features, e.g., prominent displays of swastikas, Klu Klux Klan imagery, and so on. Our reasoning was that these superficial features include symbols which WS use to self-identify as WSs. Thus, we were using a principle of self-identification as a guide in the selection our writing samples. We then followed a trail of links which such sites provided to sister sites, using the same principle of self-identification and the same use of links to find more WS blogs, until the compilation of our corpus was complete. We also sought out writing from some popular figures in the news—like David Duke, the ex-leader of The Klu Klux Klan, but we did not collect samples from sources which might simply be considered politically right leaning, since these may

not represent WS discourse. We gathered 11 book samples written between 1966 and 2017. All the books were written by American authors. The blogs we chose were from 2005 to 2018, and these were written by authors from a variety of countries, including Australia, European countries, and the U.S. The total number of blogs posts collected was 90. All of the sources of WS texts were written in English in a post-civil rights era, and they can be said to reflect a strand of current WS discourse (see Appendix for the list of books and blogs cited in this paper). From these sources, we compiled a mini corpus of 238,547 tokens.

After compiling our corpus, we analyzed it by using version 3.4.4 of AntConc concordancer (Anthony, 2017). We first undertook a quantitative analysis by focusing on the features of word frequency, keyness, collocations, and n-grams. To identify keyness, we used a reference corpus composed of news articles from a news outlet which caters to ESL and EFL learners (Newsela®).⁷ The rationale behind using such a reference corpus is that mainstream news sources offer a neutral site for comparison. Using insights gleaned from our quantitative analysis, we undertook a qualitative analysis by searching words which were especially salient to WS discourse, which led to further insights regarding current white-supremacist discourse, especially its essentialist conception of race.

Findings

Race Terms' Frequency and Keyness in White Supremacist Discourse

Table 1
Content Words Among the Top 100 Words by Frequency

Content Words in Top 100 Word List	Frequency	Frequency Ranking
<i>white*</i>	1890	13
<i>people</i>	1059	28
<i>black*</i>	875	34
<i>one</i>	725	39
<i>whites*</i>	643	47
<i>race</i>	572	57
<i>Jewish*</i>	543	58
<i>Jews*</i>	455	69
<i>racial</i>	432	72
<i>American</i>	403	76
<i>America</i>	353	84
<i>blacks*</i>	342	86
<i>time</i>	303	92
<i>said</i>	274	98

Note. Race terms are marked with an asterisk.

Our quantitative analysis yielded the insight that race terms are highly salient in WS discourse. In other words, WS discourse contains race talk. This is shown in Table 1, which contains the 14 content words among the top 100 words from the corpus. Of these 14 words, two are directly about race (*race* and *racial*) and six are race terms, which we define broadly as words that are used to denote a race or ethnicity, such as *white*, *black*, and *Jewish*. The high frequency of these content words implies the presence of race talk in the corpus. Further, the high frequency of *America* and *American* is not altogether disassociated from race talk as it is constructed in WS discourse, but we will return to this point below.

Similar to our findings regarding word frequency, the top 100 keyness words also suggest the importance of race talk to WS discourse. A reference corpus provides a measure of the expected frequency for words in a similar genre, and keyness analysis provides information about the extent to which certain words exceed that expected frequency in the target corpus. In other words, keyness refers to the measure of uniqueness of words to a corpus relative to a reference corpus. Table 2 includes the top 100 words ranked in order of keyness, while Table 3 includes the number of each word type within the top 100 words.

Table 2
Top 100 Words Exhibiting High Keyness

Term	Keyness	Keyness Ranking
<i>white</i> *	351.128	1
<i>of</i> #	201.653	2
<i>whites</i> *	162.981	3
<i>jewish</i> *	162.424	4
<i>the</i> #	155.269	5
<i>jews</i> *	122.123	6
<i>race</i> **	107.430	7
<i>racial</i> **	103.797	8
<i>and</i> #	90.197	9
<i>black</i> *	82.121	10
<i>non</i> #	80.592	11
<i>diversity</i> **	69.433	12
<i>which</i> #	65.439	13
<i>anti</i> #	57.344	14
<i>blacks</i> *	57.235	15
<i>s</i> #	55.825	16
<i>as</i> #	49.442	17
<i>violence</i> **	48.877	18
<i>such</i> #	44.680	19
<i>ethnic</i> **	44.326	20

<i>by</i> #	42.554	21
<i>immigration</i> **	38.746	22
<i>israel</i> **	38.436	23
<i>t</i> #	38.104	24
<i>media</i> **	37.899	25
<i>population</i> **	36.867	26
<i>community</i> **	36.576	27
<i>simply</i> +	36.576	28
<i>christian</i> **	35.027	29
<i>percent</i> +	34.113	30
<i>re</i> #	33.241	31
<i>culture</i> **	33.167	32
<i>european</i> **	33.025	33
<i>who</i> #	31.653	34
<i>no</i> #	31.469	35
<i>integration</i> **	30.687	36
<i>cultural</i> **	29.757	37
<i>identity</i> **	29.137	38
<i>least</i> +	29.137	39
<i>privilege</i> **	28.827	40
<i>police</i> **	28.102	41
<i>actually</i> +	27.897	42
<i>chapter</i> +	27.587	43
<i>civilization</i> **	27.587	44
<i>even</i> +/#	26.465	45
<i>majority</i> **	26.347	46
<i>trump</i> **	25.727	47
<i>in</i> #	25.468	48
<i>interests</i> **	25.107	49
<i>modern</i> +	25.107	50
<i>racist</i> **	25.107	51
<i>mob</i> **	24.798	52
<i>nations</i> **	23.558	53
<i>western</i> **	22.938	54
<i>course</i> +	22.893	55
<i>news</i> **	22.789	56

<i>jew*</i>	22.318	57
<i>that#</i>	22.197	58
<i>races**</i>	22.069	59
<i>extinction**</i>	22.008	60
<i>policies**</i>	22.008	61
<i>local+</i>	21.388	62
<i>their#</i>	21.210	63
<i>peoples**</i>	21.078	64
<i>action+</i>	21.056	65
<i>moral**</i>	20.768	66
<i>reality+</i>	20.768	67
<i>university+</i>	20.754	68
<i>although#</i>	20.458	69
<i>charlottesville**</i>	20.148	70
<i>further#/+</i>	20.148	71
<i>hispanic*</i>	20.148	72
<i>fact+</i>	19.794	73
<i>according+</i>	19.528	74
<i>asian*</i>	19.528	75
<i>possible+</i>	19.332	76
<i>including+</i>	19.218	77
<i>term+</i>	19.218	78
<i>any#</i>	19.045	79
<i>higher+</i>	18.908	80
<i>victims**</i>	18.908	81
<i>certainly+</i>	18.598	82
<i>genetic**</i>	18.598	83
<i>members**</i>	17.995	84
<i>explained+</i>	17.978	85
<i>riot**</i>	17.978	86
<i>genocide**</i>	17.668	87
<i>liberal**</i>	17.668	88
<i>protestant**</i>	17.668	89
<i>themselves#</i>	17.541	90
<i>while#</i>	17.401	91
<i>campus+</i>	17.358	92

<i>muslim**</i>	17.358	93
<i>sex+</i>	17.358	94
<i>affirmative**</i>	17.048	95
<i>historical**</i>	17.048	96
<i>post#</i>	17.048	97
<i>religious**</i>	17.048	98
<i>sexual+</i>	17.048	99
<i>supremacism**</i>	17.048	100

Notes.

- A single asterisk (*) indicates a race term.
- A double asterisk (**) indicates a term that, based on how it is used in the corpus, is strongly related to the issue of race.
- A number sign (#) indicates either a function word or a part of a term which the concordancer treated as a separable term (e.g., “t” in “don’t”).
- A plus sign (+) indicates a content word that is not a race term.
- The combination of an asterisk and a number sign (*/#) indicates a word that may alternatively be a function or content word depending on context.

Tables 2 and 3 show that race terms and terms related to race in the context of the corpus are not only frequent but distinctively characteristic of WS discourse. Both the high frequency and high keyness of race terms suggest race conservatism, i.e., the view that race talk should continue, since both sets of values indicate that race talk is taking place.

Table 3

Word Types Within the Top 100 High Keyness Words

Race term (*)	Term related to race (**)	Function word or a part of a term (#)	Other content words (+)
9	45	24	24

Note. Terms which may be a content or function word depending on context were counted in both categories, leading to a higher total than 100%.

The Semantic Prosodies of Race Terms in White Supremacist Discourse

By analyzing the collocates of race terms, we were able to determine features of their semantic prosody in WS discourse. Semantic prosody refers to the positive or negative semantic features which words gain in the context of a given corpus in virtue of their collocates. We investigated the semantic prosody of the race terms *white*, *black*, and *Jewish* by considering their relevant collocates.⁸ We limited the collocates of these terms to those which occur either five words to the left or five words to the right of each term.

In order of frequency, collocates which are relevant to the positive or negative semantic prosody of *white* are the following: *America* (92 collocate tokens), *nice* (51 collocate tokens), *Christian* (43 collocate tokens), *American* (39 collocate tokens), and *power* (25 collocate tokens). Usage of *America* and *American* in the corpus suggest a stance of ownership. For example, one blog post on explanations of white nationalist terms relates “white America” to “The founding population of

the United States [which] was primarily Anglo-Saxon and Protestant” (Spencer, 2017). In another illustrative example, the author indicated that this putative ownership should continue and be strengthened in stating, “Since the population and culture of white America is still primarily Northern European, I would like to see immigration policies that preserve and strengthen that element” (Johnson, 2016). The term *nice* collocates with *white* to express the project of creating a separate state or states for whites in the form of a “nice white country,” as shown in the following excerpt: “Margot Metroland uses an apt phrase to describe what we want: a nice white country... what we want is to create sovereign nations for all distinct white ethnic groups” (Johnson, 2015). Moreover, the collocate *Christian* is used to invoke an idealized past which reflected values putatively associated with whiteness. The following excerpt, which uses *WCA* as an acronym for “White Christian America,” expresses this belief: “It [White Christian America] provided a shared aesthetic, a historical framework, and a moral vocabulary. WCA's vibrancy was historically one of the most prominent features of American public life” (Jones, 2016). Finally, the word *power* is used in a variety of contexts. Such contexts include rallying cries for white unity and another way to invoke an idealized past. One blog post echoed the rallying cry aspect of the collocate by stating that “We stand for White Pride, White Unity, White Power—and above all we believe that White Lives Matter!” (White lives matter, 2017). Another excerpt attempts to link a “liberal agenda” with the downfall of an idealized past wherein white men were in power. It stated,

The Sexual Revolution, Drug Culture and the No-fault Divorce initiative were as much a part of liberal agenda as the so-called Civil Rights, feminism and “Gay Rights” movements, and all not only caused but were designed to reduce White birthrates and displace Whites, particularly White men, from positions of power, prominence and authority (Mason, 2017).

In total, the collocates of the word *white* give the term a positive semantic prosody by associating whiteness with a sense of ownership of the U.S., a common race project, a common idealized past, and a rallying cry for white unity.

Interestingly, the two-grams *white extinction* (frequency 65) and *white genocide* (frequency 34) also emerged from the data. This highlights a paranoia about the toppling of white supremacy. For example, one excerpt stated that “Ideological causes of white extinction include individualism, celibacy, feminism and other forms of sex-role confusion, misplaced environmentalism, and white demonization and guilt, all of which promote reproductive failure” (Johnson, 2015). Keeping in mind the collocates of *white*, which were used to invoke an idealized past, the frequencies of *white extinction* and *white genocide* broaden this picture so that the putative fall of whites from their hegemonic position is viewed as so drastic that the very survival of whites is threatened.

In contrast, words which are relevant to the semantic prosody of the word *black* are the following: *violence* (80 collocate tokens), *mob* (63 collocate tokens), *crime* (30 collocate tokens), and *riot* (12 collocate tokens). These words dovetail with well-known stereotypes of black violence and criminality. In supporting this stereotype, one author described a conspiracy in which news organizations hide ubiquitous black-on-white crime, which the author portrayed as rampant, in stating,

newspapers, for decades, covered up black on white violence (but not white on black when it rarely happens), by not reporting the race of the attackers and often by not reporting the crimes at all. To

look at our news coverage, you'd think black against white violence was quite rare, when in reality it is the most common inter-race crime (Young, 2017).

These claims are used to justify and support the stereotype of black people, especially black men, as violently aggressive and criminal while simultaneously stoking race fears of whites that are the consequence of such stereotypes. Use of the word *mob* does similar work in the discourse, as found in a blog post whose author stated, “One of these attacks occurred in Norfolk, Virginia, where more than 30 blacks brutally beat a white couple as another 70 blacks watched and cheered them on, a typical phenomenon in these black-on-white “flash mob” attacks” (Papaherakles, 2012). Similarly, the word *crime* is used to invoke the same stereotype, as is evident in the following excerpt: “Black crime and violence against whites, gays, women, seniors, young people and lots of others is astronomically out of proportion” (Flaherty, 2015). Along the same lines, use of *riot* works to portray blacks as a dangerous group whose unchecked aggression leads to disastrous social consequences, as one author stated, “Early the next year, 2007, police fired pepper balls to break up a black-Hispanic riot at San Bernardino High School during a pep rally” (Taylor, 2011). These excerpts also depict an asymmetry between the behavior of whites and blacks in WS discourse. Innocent whites are often portrayed as the victims of violent and criminal blacks. The appearance of the n-grams *black mob* (52 tokens) and *black mob violence* (44 tokens) lend further support to this analysis. In total, these collocates infuse the word *black* with negative features of semantic prosody in WS discourse.

In turn, the semantic prosody of the word *Jewish* can be determined by an examination of its collocates, which suggest a stereotype of Jewish people as a wealthy and extremist cabal. The top collocates with *Jewish* in the corpus are *supremacism* (44 collocate tokens), *supremacists* (24 collocate tokens), *supremacist* (17 collocate tokens), *media* (17 collocate tokens) and *power* (13 collocate tokens). One author displayed the work that the term “supremacism” does in portraying Jewish people as an extremist cabal: “My assertion that there exists a powerful, cohesive, worldwide Jewish supremacism finds confirmation in evidence mostly provided by the Jewish supremacists themselves” (Duke, 2003). The media is depicted as a tool of “Jewish Supremacists,” who putatively use it to control public sentiment, as found in the following excerpt: “The Jewish dominated world media have so shielded Jewish supremacists from criticism that their most famous leaders can say such things without fear of any repercussion” (Duke, 2003). Finally, Jews are portrayed as being a dangerously powerful force with self-serving motives. One excerpt stated that “It [the role of Jews in spreading communism] also reveals the incredible cohesion and coordination of Jewish power around the world that can be mobilized for specific Jewish objectives” (Duke, 2003). The appearance of the two-gram *Jewish supremacy* (34 tokens) suggests similar conclusions. While the collocates of *black* depict blacks as violent and physically dangerous, the collocates of *Jewish* portray Jews as scheming, politically dangerous enemies. Overall, these collocates give *Jewish* a negative semantic prosody.

The semantic prosody of race terms in the corpus suggests that race terms in WS discourse express a radicalized version of the folk concept of race, expressed in wide-spread negative stereotypes of black and Jewish people. Rather than being the detritus of earlier conceptions of race, the concept of race within WS discourse is further radicalized and even elevated to the level of a systematic structure. The WS discourse establishes an inequality of races

wherein whites are positioned on top through an association of positive qualities with whiteness, while the characterization of other race groups fall in line with their negative stereotypes.

Race Essentialism in WS Discourse

We found that WS discourse embeds an essentialist conception of race, as it conceives of race as involving unequal, morally relevant biologically inheritable race essences (that is, morally relevant bio-behavioral dispositions) that can circumscribe who a person of a given race can be in terms of behavior, character, or culture. Although the corpus is littered with essentialist claims, we will be constrained to focus on a few representative excerpts.

The first excerpt describes races in terms of a race “stock,” which implies a biological basis of race. (In this and other excerpts, italic type is used to highlight analytical points.)

Excerpt 1

Race is real. Race matters. Race is the foundation of identity. “White” is shorthand for a worldwide constellation of peoples, each of which is derived from the Indo-European race, often called Aryan. “European” refers to a core stock—Celtic, Germanic, Hellenic, Latin, Nordic, and Slavic—from which related cultures and a shared civilization sprang. (Spencer, 2017)

The first relevant point to notice about this excerpt is its straightforward assertion that race is real. Of course, this claim alone does not imply the commitment to race essentialism, although it does appear to be an assertion of race realism. The second, related point is that the discourse here commits the WS to the biological reality of race by naming a racial “core stock” that consists of specific ethnic groups, such as Germanic, Nordic, and Slavic. The talk of a core race stock with particular sub-set members and the exhaustive character of the list suggests that the so-called “Aryan race” is a closed set. That is, no members from other stock, i.e., other races, are members of this set. By referring to a single “core stock,” the author also implicitly endorses singularity and purity in the conception of race. In short, this excerpt suggests that being a member of a particular core race stock is sufficient for being a member of the Indo-European race and necessary and sufficient for being “European.” This points to a strong biological conception of race, which can be better put into relief by briefly comparing it to a social constructionist view. For instance, according to *institutional constructionism*, there are no races in societies without institutions of race. In contrast, the biological account doubles as a historical account, and by taking a diachronic rather than a synchronic view of race ascription, the author does not allow for societies without races. Moreover, race institutions can change over time so that certain formerly non-white groups, e.g., Irish in the U.S., can become white. On this view, racial boundaries are at least permeable by certain groups. In contrast, by exhaustively listing the individual subset members of the core stock of Europeans, the author suggests that no other groups can join that core stock. Looking forward, this biological conception of race is essentialist if such putative biological differences are related to morally significant bio-behavioral dispositions. The majority of the excerpts which follow concern the claimed moral significance of these putative biological differences.

Race essentialism centrally involves the belief that morally relevant properties are distributed among individuals along color lines, that is, along with morphological features which play a role in race ascription. The capacity to create civilization is itself clearly a morally relevant biobehavioral disposition. Moreover, talk of civilization entails talk of the “uncivilized,” and the notions of modernity, progress, and the development of human capacities, central to the concept of civilization, imply that the uncivilized are deficient, other, and even subhuman. The uncivilized are negatively defined; lack of civilization is their defining characteristic. The assertion that civilization sprang from the “Aryan race,” then, is also a claim about the superiority of such a race. We see this line of reasoning touched on in the course of a criticism of critical theory and a defense of Australia Day, a celebration of the arrival of British ships to Australia, in which aboriginal dispossession of land and genocide are equated with the spread of civilization.

Excerpt 2

As the name implies, Critical Theory's main purpose is to criticise, that is, criticise every achievement of western civilisation, its history effectively turned on its head: *good is evil, white is black, black is good, white is evil*. One of the best examples of this is what we labour so hard to celebrate on Australia Day. The *foundation of a nation* becomes *dispossession* and the beginning of *genocide*. The *bringing of civilization* to one of the most unforgiving continents on the planet becomes *grand theft Terra Australis*. (Moffat, 2016, emphasis added)

In Excerpt 2, the author establishes binary oppositions of good versus evil and black versus white while claiming that critical theory's purpose is to reverse these oppositions. The irony of the passage is that the author attacks critical theory by establishing binary oppositions, which critical race theorists have claimed work to maintain white hegemony and power structures. In suggesting that critical theory turns these oppositions against their natural order, the WS discourse here invites the reader to reverse each polarity. Limiting the focus for a moment to the apparently unnatural (or anti-historical) predication of good of black and evil of white, the natural predication suggested here is evil of black and good of white. Similarly, the author establishes the dichotomies of (1) dispossession and genocide versus the founding of a nation and (2) the bringing of civilization versus land theft. Again, the phrase “turn on its head” invites the reader to reverse what the authors portrays as orthodoxy. Dispossession, genocide, and land theft become accomplishments of Western civilization once one accepts that establishing Australia was the spreading of civilization. Assuming that the author is cognizant of these fairly obvious entailments, there appears to be an open and unapologetic ownership of the charge that he or she claims that races are unequal. This claim, which might be called ideological racism, is not itself a conception of what races are, although it does work as a normative claim suggesting how society should be ordered (with whites on top). Rather, it is the conjunction of the claim that morally relevant properties are disproportionately distributed along racial lines with the claim that race is biological that entails a particular type of essentialism. Indeed, it again appears to be race essentialism akin to the radical historical predecessor of the contemporary folk concept of race discussed earlier. This can be compared with what we might call “weak race essentialism,”

wherein races are conceived of in biological terms yet in which moral properties are equally distributed. On this conception of race, while all members of a race share an essence only with other members of the same race, race essences simply make races different rather than inferior or superior with respect to each other. Such differences might constitute different “racial characters,” each of which is associated with different biobehavioral dispositions yet which are in the end morally equivalent to each other. The point of mentioning this weak conception is to put into full relief what we might call “strong race essentialism,” which is just the conjunction of the claims that races are unequal and all race members share an essence. Strong race essentialism is on display in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3

And is it not crystal clear that *great races* produce *great civilizations*? And is it at all inaccurate to state that *3rd-world people* create *3rd-world nations*? (Hess, 2017)

The phrase *third world* was once used to denote countries which were not either the U.S. or the Soviet Union, but it has taken on a negative connotation which amounts to the notion of deficiency or perhaps even being uncivilized. It is important to note that “3rd world” races do not contingently produce “3-world nations.” Rather, this is a matter of genetic necessity, as shown in Excerpts 4 and 5, which are part of the same extended excerpt.

Excerpt 4

Other Aryan *barbarians*, the Latins most notable among them, occupied the Italian peninsula, eventually evolving the Roman *civilization*. To the north, the Germanic and Celtic peoples remained in a state of *barbarism* longer than their southern neighbors. Yet in time, they too, rose from their humble beginnings and gave birth to *Western Civilization*...But all of these ancient peoples, even while still in a *pre-civilized* state, carried the *genetic potential for civilization* within them. It only remained for the right circumstances to arise that would allow this spark to burst forth into a glorious flame. (Harting, 2017)

The “Aryan race” is here described as carrying a “genetic potential” for “Western civilization.” We also see here the beginning of a distinction between pre-civilized and uncivilized. Pre-civilized people are those who carry a genotypical potential for civilization which has yet to be expressed through behavior, i.e., those who have the disposition to create civilization. The author then immediately explained that savages are permanently outside of the confines of civilization (Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5

The term “*barbarian*” correctly refers to those who are *pre-civilized*, that is, to those who are *capable of higher civilization*, but who have not yet attained it. “*Savage*” on the other hand, refers to those who not only *lack civilization*, but who also *lack the innate capacity to become civilized*. If we go back far enough in time, the ancient Aryan peoples who migrated into Europe from their original homeland were barbarians... Yet not all of the peoples of the

Earth have the potential to develop a higher civilization. Some, like the races of sub-Saharan Africa, are essentially savages when left to their own devices. They can only become civilized in a superficial sense: the veneer of civilization among American Blacks, for example, is paper-thin. . . . And if, as now seems horribly possible, that *higher race* were to disappear from the face of this planet, then the *civilization* that it created would likewise *vanish*, and a *long age of darkness* will descend upon whatever humans remain. (Harting, 2017)

According to the author, while barbarism can be a transient state, savagery is permanent. In the passage, pre-civilized Aryans are identified as barbarians, who carry the genetic potential for civilization, while other races are indexed as savages, who can only become civilized in a “superficial sense.” The superficially civilized savage is like fools gold, which might be taken for gold because of its accidental, i.e., non-essential, properties yet which can never undergo a structural change whereby it becomes gold. Similarly, the author's reasoning is that while a non-white may be taken to act in a civilized manner, no non-white person can be truly civilized because they lack the genes which would make them so. The author's comment that were the “higher race” to disappear civilization would vanish works contrary to the available essentialist notion that different races may be associated with unique civilizations. Civilization is here monolithic and race-specific. Moreover, the uncivilized characterization of “races of sub-Saharan Africa” is not in any way exceptional to those putative races, since no race would apparently be able to recreate civilization after whites vanish (last sentence of Excerpt 5). The epistemological and modal characteristics of these essentialist claims can also be used to uncover their implications.

The embedded claim that whites are superior to non-whites is framed as an *a posteriori*, necessary truth. It is *a posteriori* in the sense that you have to go out in the world to find out who has the capacity for civilization. This facet of the claim makes room for the WS to appeal to the historical legacy of white supremacy to support its claim that whites produce civilization (Excerpt 2). The claim is framed as a necessary truth in that the same genes responsible for the “genetic potential” to make civilization (Excerpt 4) are the ones responsible for making a person “Aryan.” In other words, a white person could not exist without having the capacity to make civilization just as a non-white person could not exist without having no disposition for civilization (or without a disposition for being uncivilized). Thus, civilization-making is an essential property of whites. Framing things in this way, the essentialist is able to elevate the truth of the claim that whites have properties which make them superior to any other races in the actual world to a necessary truth. In other words, no matter how the world might be arranged differently, whites would be superior as long as there are non-whites to compare them to.

With the foregoing in consideration, there are two remarks which deserve some emphasis. The conception of strong race essentialism, which is inherently racist, is an entailment of the particular configuration of the conception of race in WS discourse, while WS essentialist claims are a readymade justification for racist beliefs. Thus, although we located strong race essentialism in our attempt to identify the conception of race within WS discourse, it is not a conception which can be lifted whole cloth for inspection from the racist beliefs which it mutually reinforces;

it should always be considered in its ideological context. The second remark derives from the fact that since WSs are a social and political group with their own social and political ends, we can expect their strong race essentialist conception to inform these ends.

Essentialism plays a prescriptive force in determining the political ends of WSs. One potential end flows from the conjunction of the claims that civilization should be brought to the uncivilized and that savages do not have the capacity for civilization. An extreme form of the normative entailment of these two claims is genocide, and the corpus indeed contained justifications of past genocides along these lines (see Excerpt 2). Another political project which has been put forward by WSs is racial separation (Excerpt 6).

Excerpt 6

Racism, properly understood, is the acknowledgement of the reality of objective, *biological differences between the races*, differences that are so profound that race mingling inevitably causes hatred and violence, thus *race separation* is the best way to preserve all races. (Johnson, 2016)

In this passage, it is the essentialist claims which do the work of prescribing the ends of WS political projects. The author works from the essentialist biological claim to a claim about what ought to be, i.e., racial separation. Essentialism, then, guides the WS worldview of what should be. Further, as a part of web of mutually reinforcing racist beliefs, race essentialism suggests what means are morally acceptable for making the world so.

Summary

Although the conclusions of this discussion may not come as a surprise, an analysis of corpus data often has the effect of bringing to light things that *ex post facto* seem obvious. One of the driving reasons behind doing corpus analysis is to expose implicit ideologies behind words for a critical evaluation of discourse, and hopefully this analysis has gone some way to that end. An analysis of corpus excerpts shows that WS discourse contains a strong race essentialist conception, while the word frequency and keyness data suggest race conservatism ideology. The resources which WSs use to support their essentialist conception range from those implicit in the discourse to those explicit in the discourse. The implicit resources involve the ways that races are represented rather than described in WS discourse. One implicit resource of WSs took the form of negative features of semantic prosody of non-white race terms and their association with well-known negative stereotypes. At the same time, the semantic prosody of the word *white* exhibits positive features, with superordinate collocates relative to those of non-white race terms. The explicit, descriptive resources which the WS makes use of involve genetic and biological conceptions of putative race differences. Moreover, the types of evidence which the WS uses to support this conception, e.g., the creation of “civilization,” show that these genetic or biological conceptions are both morally relevant and unequally distributed. Finally, we noticed that the conception of race in WS discourse cannot be decontextualized from racist beliefs and that this version of essentialism guides the political projects of WSs.

Teaching Implications

The above analysis of race and racism in WS discourse leads to several teaching implications. First, an explanation of essentialist thinking and the arguments for it can be presented to students through authentic data. The validity of these beliefs and arguments can then be questioned by prompting students to consider facts about human genetic make-up, human migration, and so on. To this end, problem-posing educational practices in which teachers are positioned as co-learners with students with an aim to help them develop the critical consciousness to understanding the interplay of social and cultural forces which affect their lives in order to improve them, can prove valuable (Freire, 1970). In this case, improving life conditions may involve creating a space wherein unjust beliefs that students may be exposed to or even share can be rejected or jettisoned in favor of more egalitarian beliefs.

Second, a unit on stereotypes in which the qualities associated with different groups could be constructed to draw out the stereotypes that students may already have. As a concrete example, Nguyen and Kellogg (2010) showed that learning the term *stereotype* in an ESL classroom led to discourse in which stereotypes were problematized, which led learners to jettison stereotypes as they “displayed and negotiated stances toward the issues at hand, constructed and reconstructed a sense of self, and drew on an array of textual and personal sources” (p. 70). No doubt, in the course of negotiating stances and constructing and reconstructing the self, there are many fertile moments for change and life improvement. Students might recognize that stereotypes are shared through commonsense beliefs about the world which are often fallacious. For instance, after learning the term *stereotype*, questions such as “what stereotypes are there about black people” can prompt discussion, and then questions regarding whether *all* black people are a certain way can be examined. Other important questions include how stereotypes are propagated, what social function they serve, and how we can combat stereotypes.

Third, students might be given activities which allow them to understand the fear which some whites have that their positions are deteriorating. For example, following the strain of problem-posing education once again, pictures of despondent white workers might prompt discussions of what the person is feeling, why he is feeling that way, what social problem the picture represents, and what we can do about the problem. This realia could accompany a discussion circle in which students and teacher alike engage the problem. A similar tactic could be exploited in taking authentic texts as the launching point of such a discussion.

Fourth, simply explaining to students the data with regard to word frequency and n-grams can alert students to the distinctive features of WS literature which might be dissembled in the guise of a politically neutral or legitimate news source. This can fortify students to identify WS discourse which they might encounter in their everyday lives. In order to challenge WS discourse, it is crucial that learners be enabled to identify it as it becomes more transparently mainstreamed in the contemporary social milieu.

Finally, we are particularly enthusiastic about the potential to help foster an understanding of the conceptual relationship between WS discourse and ideologies which learners may have access to in virtue of their commonsense. Teachers might guide students to recognize that race essentialism maps on the ordinary concept of race, which includes both the notion of racial inequality and the notion of a biological basis. Similarly, the stereotypes which

were found in the WS discourse map on widely-shared racial and ethnic stereotypes. By seeing this connection and learning to identify essentialist thought and use of stereotypes, learners might be prompted to identify racist ideologies in familiar domains. Of course, the comments here should not be taken to be exhaustive of the rich potential corpus analysis provides for illuminating fractious race tensions, but hopefully these comments and pedagogical suggestions have gone some way in showing how it and similar corpora can be used to engage a contentious though vital topic within ESL and even EFL classrooms.

Endnotes

- ¹ For another influential formulation of race skepticism, see Zack (1994).
- ² According to the ideational view, a concept is an abstract object (like a set or a number) which is distinct from the ideas of individuals.
- ³ The referential view is under the umbrella of propositional semantics. According to this view, the meanings of sentences and utterances and that which we entertain or believe, doubt, or take any other propositional attitude toward are truth-functional propositions. The question of the nature of propositions themselves is controversial.
- ⁴ The claim that a term can have no meaning yet be understood by people in a speech community is a puzzle to which referential have proposed various solutions. For example, see Braun's (1993) and the essays in Everett and Hofweber's (2002).
- ⁵ Such communities which exist in isolation to this degree, e.g., the Amish, clearly do not line up with race categories as understood by people who make everyday race ascriptions.
- ⁶ According to Mallon (2007), "Social constructionists are particularly interested in phenomena that are contingent upon human culture and human decisions" (p. 94).
- ⁷ We thank Eri Noguchi and Yuka Saruwatari for the use of their corpus as a reference corpus.
- ⁸ We did not include an analysis of the collocates of *Hispanic* or *Asian* because these did not appear at a frequency high enough to draw valid conclusions.

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