H

HATE SPEECH

Hate speech is a significant new categorizing term, denoting the deliberate or concerted use of provocative slurs or offensive epithets. First recorded in 1988 in the United States, it obviously reflects awareness of the power of language as the bearer of prejudice. However, the practice of stigmatizing foreigners, believers of "alien" religions, homosexuals, and outsiders in general has been established and *de rigueur* in English-speaking societies for centuries. The entry for **ethnic insults** shows that terms like *infidel, bugger, coolie,* and *Jew* in its various opprobrious senses have been in use for over four hundred years. More significantly, these and other hostile terms like *dago, hottentot, frog, kaffir, nigger,* and *coon,* first recorded in the period 1600–1800, were also included in major dictionaries, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) (1884–1928) and *Webster II* (1934), usually without comment. These omissions indicate both a general insensitivity to such words and an assumption that a lexicographer's function did not extend to giving usage labels for racist terms.

There was in the past no generic term to describe or denote this linguistic activity. The earliest word, *nickname,* is now inadequate in that nicknames can be personal or general, affectionate as well as hostile or demeaning. As the entry for **nicknames** shows, the earlier uses were generally hostile, provocative, or contemptuous. Francis Grose, in his *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785), was the first lexicographer to include epithets for ethnic groups, including the Irish, Scots, Welsh, Jews, Catholics, Dutch, blacks, and gypsies. His entry for Jew, for example, runs: "An overreaching dealer, or hard, sharp fellow; an extortioner." He also included *molly,* an early slang term for a homosexual: "an effeminate fellow, a sodomite."

Consequently, perhaps the most significant feature of this phenomenon is the recency of such categorizing descriptions as *hate speech, linguistic xenophobia, ethnophaulism, ethnic insult,* and *homophobia.* All these terms have been generated in recent decades in the United States, reflecting greater sensitivity to this issue and a considerable volume of research devoted to it. In the United Kingdom there has been research, notably by Eric Partridge, from the 1930s, but by contrast, critical categories and usage labels have been far slower to develop. *Hate speech* itself is, of course, a more direct, accessible, and condemning formula than such earlier categories as *linguistic xenophobia, ethnophaulism, ethnic insult,* and *homophobia,* which have the disadvantage of being opaque and not readily comprehensible because of their classical roots.

Ethnophaulism, meaning a nickname used for an ethnic group, is still not recorded in many standard dictionaries, not having developed a general currency outside specialist research. The term was coined by a psychologist, A.A. Roback, who carried out the first research into ethnic slurs in the United States in 1944. In the first quantitative study of nicknames for ethnic groups in a society, Erdman Palmore in 1962 advanced the proposition that "There is a close correlation between the amount of prejudice against an outgroup and the number of ethnophaulisms for it" (442). While this seems plausible, it can also be a circular argument, namely the explanation of a linguistic fact by an assumed psychological process for which the principal evidence is the fact to be explained. Palmore rightly conceded, therefore, that "greater hostility could be expressed and reinforced by the repetitions of a small number of ethnophaulisms or by using stronger ones" (443). In addition, very few members of a speech community will know the whole range of ethnophaulisms available.

In his major study, *The Language of Ethnic Conflict* (1983), Irving Lewis Allen compiled a substantial thesaurus of over 1,000 ethnic insults for more than fifty American groups, analyzing the field rigorously from both a historical and sociological perspective in order to explain the quantitative distribution. He also acknowledged an ideological problem of pursuing such research in the United States. Given the fact that "Many of the slurs are genuinely offensive and will strike some persons of ethnic sensibility as obscene," Allen suggested that "The reluctance of social scientists to deal extensively with abusive words for ethnic groups may stem from an ambivalence about the ancient issue of conflict and consensus in society" (1983, 4). Bringing into play such important factors as immigration and urbanization stressed by H.L. Mencken and Louis Wirth before him, Allen interpreted the diversity of ethnic slurs as being a historical reflection of pluralism and diversity in a multicultural society that values assimilation, but is also based on economic competition. In his preamble he returns to the contrary pressures of assimilation and diversity. "These words also show something of the dynamism of ethnic diversity and document the strains of assimilation. In what seems a paradox, the stereotypes generated by the plural society underscore its diversity" (1983, 7).

British history has followed a different pattern, England having become the dominant nation of the United Kingdom, with the other component nations retaining their ancestral native territories. Religious conflicts, though extremely bitter and violent, were eventually contained by various settlements, with the major exception of Ireland. (Extreme examples of incitement, such as "Kill all Peelers"—"Kill all British policemen"—still occur in Northern Ireland.) Military, mercantile, and political rivalry have been focused outward, continentally and globally. All of these tensions have left semantic markers, which make up the great preponderance of xenophobic terms in English. Although immigration from the Continent has been a perennial social fact, the major influxes of Indians, Pakistanis, West Indians, and others from erstwhile member nations of the Empire is a comparatively recent phenomenon, having started in the 1960s. Yet the volume of sociological and semantic evidence from these latter sources has not yet reached the proportion available in America. The semantic field of British-based xenophobic terms that has evolved in the course of the twentieth century is small, and

is mainly focused on Continental nations: *hun, wop, boche, fritz, jerry, kraut, wog, eyetie,* the only new term being *paki.*

Homophobia, meaning hatred or fear of homosexuals and homosexuality, was coined as far back as the late 1960s, the first reference usually being given as 1969 in *Time* magazine. Being an artificial rather than a natural term, it did not develop a very strong currency until the 1990s, when it started to be used quite aggressively as part of gay awareness, a topic covered in the entry for **homosexuals**. It has subsequently generated the noun *homophobe.*

The lexicographical aspect of hate speech is obviously significant. Dr. Johnson was very critical of certain slang words or jargon infiltrating the language, but was unconcerned by obscenity and racist terms. The *OED* famously omitted *fuck* and *cunt,* which were technically illegal as well as powerfully taboo, but included a whole range of racist epithets without comment. Since then opprobrious racist terms have become the new potent area of taboo. This development is illustrated in the entry for the word **nigger**, in which dictionary policy is indicated in the comments, ranging from "colloquial" through "offensive" to "taboo." The trend from acceptance to condemnation is obvious, the turning point clearly occurring in the 1960s. Although much of the criticism leveled at *Webster III* (1961) derived from the dictionary's apparent policy of *laissez faire,* at least one attack focused on the formula "usually taken to be offensive" attached to *kike, dago, nigger,* and *coon* (see Perlmutter in Morton 1994, 238). While the social context and race of the speaker are always important, there was clearly a belief that such words themselves were normally offensive. Such a view manifestly lay behind the determined campaign against Oxford University Press to suppress the opprobrious uses of the word *Jew* in the *OED,* leading up to an unsuccessful prosecution in 1972. In the most extreme response, in 1970 Dr. David B. Guralnik, editor-in-chief of *Webster's New World Dictionary,* 2nd College Edition, omitted what he termed "those true obscenities, the terms of racial and ethnic opprobrium." No other major dictionary has followed this policy. However, Robert L. Chapman, editor of the *New Dictionary of American Slang* (1986), instituted "impact symbols" in the form of solid black triangles (▲) for "taboo" words which "are *never* to be used"; these included "terms of contempt and derision for racial or other groups" (1986, xxxiii).

Hate speech has become part of a currently evolving debate over whether the right to free speech should be curtailed in this special instance. Up to now such an infringement of civil liberties has not been supported. However, in the United Kingdom there have been moves to stamp out a related form of hate speech, namely racist chanting in football matches. Some clubs have put in place disciplinary measures including the ejection of offenders from matches. In South Africa the legal category of ***crimen injuria*** is significant in this respect.

Historically, it is possible to detect a reversal of standards. In medieval times xenophobia was often virulently expressed, especially against Muslims and Jews, notably by the terms *heathen* and *infidel.* Today such practices are completely unacceptable in tolerant Western societies. However, extremist Muslim leaders, such as Osama bin Laden, regularly use inflammatory and archaic religious terminology by referring to America as "the Antichrist," to Israelis as "Zionists," and to Christians as "Crusaders."

See also: Crimen Injuria; Heathen, Infidel, and Pagan; Jews; Nicknames; Nigger.