

# The Meaning of Sociolinguistic Register: Is It Semantic?

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## Abstract:

This entry covers the meaning of sociolinguistic register. It begins with a series of examples—such as, for instance, the contrast in content among “poop”, “shit” and “excrement”—and then provides a mostly theory-neutral explication of the technical term “register”. Next, the entry addresses a central issue about this variety of meaning, namely whether it counts as “semantic” or not. In addressing this question, we suggest, on the one hand and tentatively, that the sort of meaning-difference found among near synonyms like “bow wow”, “dog” and “canine” does indeed attach to the expression type, as part of its standing conventional meaning. On the other hand, we conjecture that register-style meanings are nonetheless not truth-conditional.

## Key Points

- Introduce the notion of “sociolinguistic register”.
- Explore what its central characteristics are, as a meaning-involving phenomenon.
- Address the question of whether this sort of meaning counts as “semantic”.
- Note two approaches to the meaning of sociolinguistic register consistent with the simplified data presented, namely register-type meaning as *emotive* and as *use-theoretic*.

## Introduction

Our question in this entry is whether or not the meaning of words marked with sociolinguistic register is a matter of semantics. The question is a mouthful and hence merits detailed spelling out. We thus begin by explaining it, providing a mostly theory-neutral explication of the theoretical terms “register” and “semantics”. We thereby survey some of the small but key literature in theoretical linguistics and philosophy of language on the topic of register. We then offer a *pro tem* answer to our question, to the effect that register-type meaning should be treated as a kind of type-encoded linguistic content that does not invoke truth-conditions. Again, what that answer amounts to may not be clear yet but should become straightforward by the end.

## Explaining the Question

To explicate the question of “register”, one might remark that it pertains to the style of language used. Is a word formal or vulgar? Is it slang? What kind of speaker would use it, and in what circumstances? These all pertain to the register-type content of a term. Ultimately, however, it’s probably best to start with a long series of examples. We can thereafter extract fairly uncontroversial lessons. So, consider<sup>1</sup>:

1. Set of kind-names
  - a) “bow wow”/ “dog”/ “canine”
  - b) “shit”/ “excrement”/ “poop”/ “feces”
  - c) “perspiration”/ “sweat”
  - d) “contusion”/ “bruise”
  - e) “beer”/ “brewsky”
  - f) “belly button”/ “navel”/ “umbilicus”
2. (Nearly) co-extensive predicates (adjectives and verbs)
  - a) “dead”/ “deceased”
  - b) “to fuck”/ “to copulate”
  - c) “to get”/ “to obtain”
  - d) “to let go”/ “to fire”/ “to sack”

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<sup>1</sup>The list immediately below would be admitted, at least by many language theorists, to belong together in a single class, the registered terms. Readers are warned, however, that it’s certainly possible to take only some of these as paradigm cases of sociolinguistic register, holding that others exemplify some merely related phenomenon. The word “register” is used in too many ways within linguistics to expect unanimous agreement even about which things are genuine examples. We should underscore, in particular, a quite different usage of the term in dialectology, wherein it pertains to varieties differentiation. Thus, just as one can contrast dialects historically (e.g., Shakespearean English vs. Victorian English), and one can contrast them geographically (Canadian English vs. Australian English), sociolinguists sometimes focus on social variations: e.g., working class English in Canada in 2024, or the argot of Toronto’s police officers. Such “sociolects” are sometimes called “registers”. This is definitely a legitimate use of the technical term. However, our topic pertains directly not to this, but to a sub-kind of linguistic meaning.

3. Informal versus honorific pronouns (singular second-person nominative)
  - a) “tu” / “vous” (French)
  - b) “vos” / “tú” / “usted” (Southern Cone Spanish)
4. Constructions (more vs. less formal)
  - a) Passive versus. Active: “The tofu scramble was eaten by Saima” / “Saima ate the tofu scramble”
  - b) Contraction: “is not” / “isn’t” / “ain’t”; “walking” / “walkin’”; “want to” / “wanna”
5. Proper Names
  - a) “Jack Kennedy” / “JFK” / “John Fitzgerald Kennedy”
  - b) “Sly” / “Sylvester Stallone”

Notice three key features. First, each member of the group seems to be very similar in meaning. In particular, the names in (1b) all co-refer to the same noxious substance. More than that, it has seemed to many that any possible situation where there is poop is a situation where there is shit and vice versa. To consider a second example, while we might not readily apply “deceased” to all and only the satisfiers of “dead”—some competent English speakers might reserve the former as a predicate applied to important human beings, refusing to apply it, say, to a battery—“dead” and “deceased” seem, at first glance, to be *near* synonyms. Whether it is ordinary nouns and verbs as in (1)–(3), constructions as in (4), or proper names as in (5), each entry belongs to a system of options within which all entries express the same fundamental idea. Second, a registered word such as “fuck” has a range of vulgar cousins, including “shit” and “cock” (as applied to male genitals). The cousins are all, in a sense to be explained below, apt for the same socio-cultural situation type. Thus, to give another example, “kitty”, “poop” and “bunny” share a register marking: all are apt for child-oriented discourse situations. Finally, the nearly synonymous members of the system of options are apt for *different* social discourse situations: e.g., “Leporidae”, “rabbit” and “bunny” are apt for contrasting ones.

What exactly is the difference among the discourse situations? That is a delicate matter, and only a well-developed sociolinguistics will ultimately reveal what, say, the child-oriented situations all share, so as to yield the contrast between “poop” and “shit”. Here, we must rest content with another example. The words in (2b) apply to pretty much the same activity. Nonetheless, it would most definitely be frowned upon if one used the verb “to fuck” in a situation where a speaker should have used “to copulate”, e.g., during a political speech in parliament. On the other hand, in an explicit adult film, “Copulate with me!” would be odd.

That’s a first pass. Three clarifications are in order.

Talk of features may suggest that every lexical item is marked either + or – for the various registers. That is not the case. The word “Montevideo” is not subject to register-marking at all, we suspect, and the word “pen” is not marked with respect to, say, level of politeness. “Pen” isn’t marked [–formal, +vulgar] but it isn’t marked [+formal, –vulgar] either. The absence of register-marking is related, in part, to the fact that register-type content typically arises when there exists a set of contrasting options for roughly the same thing. Thus, insofar as “Montevideo” does not contrast with any other name, and “pen” doesn’t have an informal, vulgar co-referring lexical cousin, they lack register-marking. More surprisingly, a set of wording options does not seem to be sufficient for register-type meaning either: there seem to be rare cases of alternative phraseologies which are well and truly synonyms, such that they are neutral when it comes to register. For instance, the terms “walleye” and “pickerel” in Canadian English do offer two options for referring to the same fish species, yet they don’t seem to exhibit contrasting levels of formality, vulgarity, etc. (One could say something similar about “chick pea” and “garbanzo bean”.) To give another example, here of alternative constructions, in various dialects of Spanish, “Yo vi a María” and “Yo la vi a María” are equivalent ways of saying *I saw María*. Including or leaving out “la” (“her”) makes no difference even to the style of talk exchange.

The word “apt” needs further explanation too. The issue isn’t ethical. There are, e.g., situations in which “shit”, “fuck” and “cock” are the sociolinguistically correct words, even if one finds them ethically objectionable. To illustrate with even more jarring examples, and begging pardon for exposing readers to really unwelcome words, some theorists have suggested that racial and ethnic slurs and their potential neutral counterparts differ only in register. (See [Diaz-Legaspe et al., 2020](#).) The terms in (6a) refer to the same group of people, goes the idea, but only the slur is marked with the register features [+derogatory], [–formal] and [+slang]. If that’s right, we may add the following to our list of examples of register-marked lexical items:

6. Words for racial groups
  - a) “Hispanic” / “spic”
  - b) “Chinese” / “chink”
  - c) “Jewish” / “kike” / “hebe”

To repeat: in saying that there are situations where “spic”, “chink” or “kike” are “apt”, the intent is not to suggest that these are ever ethically appropriate to a situation. Indeed, some writers think that words like the slurs in (6 a–c) shouldn’t even appear as examples in scholarly articles, so “normatively inapt” are they! (We recognize the point, but obviously we haven’t yet been persuaded.) Nonetheless, even those theorists concede that there are situations in which the slurs would be unsurprising, given the discourse situation. In brief, “apt” roughly equals something like “to be expected in this kind of speech situation”. (Revisiting the clarification above, there seem to be words that are unsurprising at every possible speech situation—including “pen”, “Montevideo” and “walleye”. This is because they lack register features.)

Mentioning appropriate situations leads to an important third clarification about terminology. Register is a feature of a bit of language: in the usage we are concerned with, it is words and grammatical constructions that are marked with register. As such, it would be a use/mention confusion to say that a social situation in the world is registered. For instance, a setting where one is talking to a child is not itself

“registered” as [+child-oriented] or [-vulgar]: rather, it’s the words “poop”, “bow wow”, “pee pee”, etc., which carry register. That said, there is parallel sociolinguistic nomenclature to describe the world as opposed to our words for it. The vocabulary traces to **Halliday (1978)**. His “field” refers to the subject matter under discussion (e.g., we are discussing diseases), “mode” refers to the channel of communicating (e.g., text message, video recording, spoken poem), and “tenor” refers to the participants in the discourse and their interpersonal relationships (e.g., a worker and his boss, a cardiologist and her patient). To spell out this idea, here’s another example of the relationship we refer to as “being appropriate for”, or as mentioned above, “being apt for”: where the field is canines, the mode is a children’s poem, and the tenor includes a parent and a child being read to, the term appropriate for this situation will be the first rather than the third term in the system of options “bow wow”/ “dog”/ “canine”.<sup>2</sup>

Having explained the first of our technical terms, we turn now to the other one: the meaning of “semantic”. The term is notoriously ambiguous. In particular, we will highlight two ways in which it is used in the linguistics literature. Following **Diaz-Legaspe et al. (2020)**, we will label semantics<sub>Type</sub> the standing meaning of the expression in the shared language. As our choice of label suggests, this is what the expression type means, “timelessly”, as opposed to what people mean by various and sundry tokens of it. Semantics<sub>Type</sub> is meaning that is fixed by linguistic convention rather than by context and speakers’ intentions. In contrast, semantics<sub>Truth</sub> pertains only to propositional content, i.e., the circumstances in which the representation in question is true/false. Examples will help to highlight the contrasting senses. “Hello”, “hey”, “amen”, “hurray”, and “gesundheit” all have semantics<sub>Type</sub>. They mean something in English. They are far from gibberish. However, it is at least initially attractive to deny that such words refer to any entity in the world or are capable of being true or false. They have neither sense nor reference, it appears. If that’s right, they entirely lack semantics<sub>Truth</sub>. Here’s another example. Sentences (7a) and (7b) clearly differ in meaning:

7. Contrasting Illocutionary Forces
  - a) Joshua does smoke
  - b) Does Joshua smoke?

Contrasting or not, many philosophers and linguists would hold that the two sentences correspond to the same worldly situation, which we might notate informally as *SMOKE (JOSHUA)*. Hence, the sentences have the same semantics<sub>Truth</sub>, but different semantics<sub>Type</sub>.

We may come at the two meanings of “semantics” another way, in terms of the famous sub-categories from **Grice’s (1975)** “Logic and Conversation”. Both his conventional implicatures and what is said are part of the conventionalized content of sentences for Grice, and thus reflect (not pragmatics but rather) semantics<sub>Type</sub>. To mention an especially famous example, (8) suggests as a matter of its conventional, standing meaning in English that there’s a conflict between poverty and honesty:

8. Jane is poor, but Jane is honest

Given this, the difference between “and” versus “but” is a matter of semantics<sub>Type</sub>. However, many writers take it that (8) has as its truth conditions just the conjunction *POOR (JANE) & HONEST (JANE)*. If they are right, “but” contributes nothing to semantics<sub>Truth</sub> beyond what “and” does. Taking another example, Grice’s conversational implicatures are emphatically not part of semantics<sub>Type</sub>. For instance, if Abby asks François “Can you cook?” and he answers, “I am French”, the sentence type “I am French” is not taken by Grice to encode anything about cooking in its conventional, standing meaning. Instead, conversational implicatures are paradigmatic speaker meanings, as opposed to meanings that attach to the expressions in the language. To take another example, suppose Saima asks, “Was the movie good?” and Uma responds:

9. I enjoyed the popcorn

Here again, the conversational implicature is not part of the semantics<sub>Type</sub> of (9). Then again, and though Grice himself likely wouldn’t have put things this way, these conversational implicatures both seem straightforwardly propositional, hence count by our definition as a matter of semantics<sub>Truth</sub>. Specifically, the thoughts/truths conversationally implicated might be represented as, respectively, *CAN-COOK (FRANÇOIS)* and *NOT-GOOD (MOVIE)*.

To sum up so far, our guiding question is about whether sociolinguistic register is a semantic phenomenon. At this point, we have only been explaining the question, and in two stages. We briefly explicated the notion of “register”. Starting with some widely (but not universally) accepted examples, we said that register often involves a system of contrasting words/constructions, such that the items in the system have very similar core meanings—yet exhibit another kind of “meaning” as well, shared by other terms pertaining to the same register (e.g., [+formal] or [+child-oriented] or [+vulgar]). Speakers choose one option over the others because that word is better suited

<sup>2</sup>For an excellent survey of register from a logico-philosophical point of view, see **Predelli, 2013**: Ch. 5. He there introduces the notion of “bias”, which seems to be the same notion as our “aptness”. The existence of sociolinguistic register, in varying senses of that term, has been emphasized in Functional linguistics since the 1970s. In Analytic philosophy of language, the phenomenon was identified already in Frege’s classic “On Sense and Reference” (1892) and again in his “Thought” (1918), though under another name: Frege writes of “Färbung” (colouring) and “Beleuchtung” (shading). His example of words sharing reference and sense but differing in these are “horse”, “steed”, and “nag”. Michael Dummett spells out Frege’s idea, calling the kind of meaning at issue “tone”. He writes: “The choice between such twins serves to convey, and sometimes also to evoke, an attitude to the subject or, more particularly to the hearers. It serves to define the proposed *style* of discourse, which, in turn, determines the kind of thing that may appropriately be said... These complex social aspects of linguistic interchange are signaled by our choice of words; and, in so far as it is capable of serving to give such a signal, that capacity is part of the meaning of a word. When a dictionary notes, after its definition of a word, “archaic”, “vulgar”, or the like, it is, quite properly, indicating its tone” (1991, p. 122). We will mostly agree with Dummett in what follows, though we employ alternative terminology. For more on Frege/Dummett and tone, see **Kortum (2013)**.

(“apt”) to the discourse situation, where this includes all of Halliday’s field, mode and tenor. Thus, revisiting (1b), there is the system of word-options “poop”, “shit”, and “feces”, marked respectively [+child-oriented, –vulgar, –clinical/scientific], [–child-oriented, +vulgar, –clinical/scientific], and [–child-oriented, –vulgar, +clinical/scientific]. Consider, in this light, a situation that involves speaking to children about feces, as opposed to writing about it for a medical journal. The apt choice is “poop”, because it is the option within the system marked with the register which is apt to that constellation of linguistic medium, addressee and subject matter. The second stage was to explain what “semantics” means. We highlighted two senses: pertaining to the standing, conventional content of the expression in the shared language, and pertaining somehow or other to truth-conditions. Given this, we can now turn to answering our central question.

The reader is warned that, from this point forward, the article moves from mostly theory-neutral exposition to taking a (somewhat controversial) stand.

## Answering Our Question

Given the foregoing, there are actually two questions that need addressing:

**Q<sub>Type</sub>:** Is the meaning of words marked with a sociolinguistic register a matter of conventionally encoded standing content?

**Q<sub>Truth</sub>:** Is the meaning of words marked with a sociolinguistic register a matter of reference and truth conditions?

There isn’t universal agreement on these questions, but it’s widely believed that register is “semantic” in the first sense but is not “semantic” in the second. This is Stefano Predelli’s (2013) view. It is also our position, as we’ll now explain.

We take it that the meaning is indeed encoded in the type. As a linguistic argument, notice that the meaning attaches to all tokens of the word (at least on the relevant sense of that word, e.g., “cock” as used for a penis, not as used for a bird). Even if not said to a child, “There’s poop on the lawn” remains [+child-oriented]. And even if said with warm feelings, “spic” is still a derogatory word. A more psychological consideration is that, e.g., part of knowing what “bow wow” means is knowing that it is apt for talking with children. Relatedly, it’s part of mastering the English language to realize that, e.g., the nasty slur “kike” should be avoided in polite, respectful discourse, and that one should use “Jewish person” instead. Here’s a third example: a second language learner who understood the verbs “to fuck” and “to copulate” to entirely share in meaning is missing something important about what the words themselves encode. Coming at the point another way, there is a difference in conventionalized meaning between the English words “sweat” and “perspiration”, such that only one of these is the correct translation of the Spanish “sudor” (namely, the first). Hence, a learner who took the two to be complete synonyms in English would be making a linguistic mistake (even though the words seemingly stand for the same substance, and “Juana is sweating” and “Juana is perspiring” apparently have the same truth-conditional content). We arrive quickly at the conclusion, then, that register does pertain to semantics<sub>Type</sub>.

Turning next to the issue of truth-conditional content, though there isn’t universal agreement on this, we are convinced that register-type meaning is not propositional. Let’s start with a brute appeal to intuition. It strikes many people that sociolinguistic register is “alethically inert”, to use Sander’s nice term. He writes:

“Register... seems alethically inert: uttering [‘The bow wow was snoring the whole afternoon’] when you are not talking to a child is plainly weird, but you might still express a true proposition about the behaviour of a particular dog” (2022: 14).

His point is most obvious when applied to contrasting constructions, such as “is not” versus the corresponding contraction “isn’t”, or “walking” versus “walkin’”. Clearly, there is no difference in truth-conditions between (10a) and (10b):

### 10. Constructions

- a) She is not walking home
- b) She ain’t walkin’ home

There’s merely a difference in style, specifically a contrast with respect to level of formality. Equally obvious is that the truth-conditional contribution of “JFK” and “Jack Kennedy” are the same. As hinted above, the point seems to us to hold even of lexical items marked with contrasting registers. “There is shit on the lawn”, “There is excrement on the lawn”, and “There is poop on the lawn” strike us and many other native speakers as corresponding to the very same worldly state of affairs.

One’s intuitive sense of where the difference in meaning lies can be reinforced with some arguments. First, there doesn’t seem to exist a plausible candidate to account for any alleged difference in truth conditions between (10a) and (10b). Insofar as one can even come up with a possible candidate property designed to contrast “is not walking” from “ain’t walkin’”, it will seem too specific and *ad hoc*.

Secondly, register-marked terms demonstrate a different logical behavior compared to the propositional aspect of words. Sander (2025, p. 10ff) points out, in particular, that building the appropriate situation into the truth-conditions as a conjunct gives a bizarre result. If we interpret the meaning of “the bow wow was snoring” as “the dog was snoring and I am addressing a child”, we would expect the negation of the first sentence to be equally the negation of the second sentence—assuming register-meanings behave like regular propositional ones. However, that doesn’t seem to be the case: interpreting “the bow wow wasn’t snoring” as “the dog wasn’t snoring or I am not addressing a child” is simply bizarre.

Thirdly, we don’t get a predicted redundancy. If, contrary to our own preferred view, one treats [+child-oriented] as part of the proposition expressed by the word “bow wow”, we predict a familiar redundancy in a sentence such as “the bow wow is snoring and I’m talking to a child”. However, the predicted redundancy is absent: there doesn’t quite seem to be a *repetition* of the propositional content *I AM*

*TALKING TO A CHILD.* To take another example, “Juana has a contusion, and I am speaking in a medical context” is not repetitive in the way we would expect it to be, if “contusion” expressed a propositional content such as THE SPEAKER IS TALKING IN A CLINICAL SETTING. This line of reasoning is subtle. To clarify, consider again the interrogative (7a), “Are you hungry?” It’s widely agreed that this sentence does not express the proposition I AM ASKING A QUESTION: in some sense, the sentence “suggests” this, but not by encoding the proposition in its truth conditions. There is, granted, a sense in which the interrogative sentence “Are you hungry?” carries twice over “the information that the speaker asking”, but it doesn’t seem that (7a) expresses precisely the proposition that (11) does:

11. That you are hungry and I am asking a question

The same point about a lack of propositional repetition applies to “bow wow”, “contusion” and all the rest (Introducing helpful jargon from **Predelli (2013)**, it seems that “the bow wow is snoring” “settles” that one’s speech is child-oriented, but it doesn’t “entail” the latter proposition.).

Lastly, register is an example of **Potts’ (2005)** “scopelessness”. Continuing with Sander’s example, it attaches the [+child-oriented] aspect to the context of the *speaker*, not to David’s belief. In this respect, there’s a parallel with other expressions, such as the pure indexicals “I”, “here” and “now”, which also seem to “scope out” of attitude verbs. Take (12):

12. David believes that I am here now

As **Kaplan (1989)** noted long ago, when a speaker says (12), the referent of “I” is not David but rather the speaker herself; and the time and place denoted by “here”/ “now” is the speaker’s context of utterance, not David’s. Similarly, even though “bow wow” is embedded under the propositional attitude verb “believe” in “David believes that the bow wow is barking”, the agent is tailoring her choice of terms not to the field, mode and tenor of the situation where David might have expressed himself, but rather to the discourse situation in which the speaker is now reporting the belief. But what explains the scopelessness of “bow wow” and other registered words? The word isn’t an indexical, so why isn’t the “extra” contribution of “bow wow” screened off by “believes”/ “said”, as one might expect? A promising answer is that, unlike mere truth-conditional content, the added register-type meaning manifests itself even under embedding. Put otherwise, a word doesn’t cease to be vulgar, or derogatory, or what-have-you, just because it appears in a speech or belief report. Thus, taking their meaning-contribution to be non-truth-conditional explains why registered words and registered constructions can sometimes behave in this special way.

## Epilogue: A Positive View and Why It Matters

We have been tentatively urging that sociolinguistic register is a matter of semantics<sub>Type</sub> but is not a matter of semantics<sub>Truth</sub>. The issues which naturally arise next are: Wherein lies the difference in semantics<sub>Type</sub>, if it isn’t a matter of propositional content? And why does it matter what additional kind of meaning register-marked words exhibit? There are two main answers to “Wherein lies the difference?” in the literature, and we’ll close out the paper by explaining them. We’ll also at least gesture at the “Why does it matter?” issue.

Some theorists think of each term within a system of registered words as expressing contrasting emotions. Call this emotivism about register-type meaning. Thus, goes the idea, someone who opts for “sweat”/“shit” over “perspiration”/“excrement” may be expressing dislike of the former pair. We haven’t space to address this option at length here, but we will note some familiar problems that its proponents will need to address. First, though it must be conceded that a person may be motivated to opt for a register-marked word because they feel an emotion or want to evoke one, our question is whether or not the term itself, as a matter of its standing meaning, is a vehicle for expressing or evoking emotion. To this question, we can echo some of the above arguments to see why register may not be emotive. Just consulting our native speaker intuitions, there isn’t generally an emotional difference among the stylistic alternatives. True, there are certainly instances where there is an emotional charge in the context (e.g., “fuck” said as an exclamation). However, focusing once again on the meaning of the registered item itself, it seems that such words are not just “alethically inert” but “emotionally inert”. Suppose we try to look for emotion-based differences between stylistic alternatives. We would only arrive at results that seem quite implausible, such as, e.g., that the person who says “poop” is feeling warm and fuzzy about excrement. In summary, although emotion plays a role in the motivation that may lead the speaker to choose a certain alternative over another, just as curiosity may lead one to use an interrogative, the emotivist must overcome the challenge that the words themselves don’t seem universally to carry any particular emotive proclivity, whether expressing an emotion or evoking certain mental attitudes in addressees.

The remaining option is to grant that register-type meaning is *sui generis*, in the sense that it isn’t reducible to either propositional or emotive content. Rather, register involves a novel kind of use-theoretic meaning. The contrast in meaning belongs, in this regard, in the same class as the difference between an interrogative like (7b) and its corresponding declarative. Just as many theorists would take “Does Joshua smoke?” to be marked in the shared language as an expression which is apt for posing questions, a word like “feces” is marked as a word apt for use in clinical/scientific discourse situations. Or again, just as knowing the meaning of “hello” and “amen” is a matter of knowing when and where to use them, so is knowing the meaning of “shit” versus “excrement”. A use-theoretic story may even capture the difference between a neutral word for a group and a corresponding slurring term, as proposed in **Diaz-Legaspe et al. (2020)**.

If either the emotive or the use-theoretic view is right, two important consequences immediately arise. With respect to lexical semantics, i.e., the theory of morpheme and word meaning, meaning pluralism looks to be true: there is no one essence to linguistic meaning, but instead there are a plurality of kinds of lexical meaning. Indeed, maybe we need at least truth conditions, emotional potential and *sui generis* use-theoretic meaning, if theorists are to capture all the meaning-facets of, say, “Did you buy another fucking boat?” With respect

to compositional semantics—i.e., the theory of how meanings of complex expressions get fixed on the basis of part-meanings and syntactic structure—the usual machinery of composition needs to be revised to allow for the calculation of the meaning of complexes containing registered terms. If *sui generis* use-theoretic meaning or emotive meaning is a genuine phenomenon, the familiar truth-conditional machinery will no longer be sufficient. (See McCready, 2019 for a promising attempt at a compositional semantics appropriate to register-type meaning.)

We won't say more about these potential consequences, except to flag that they may provide reasons why some theorists want to strongly resist the above *pro tem* answers to our questions  $Q_{\text{Type}}$  and  $Q_{\text{Truth}}$ .<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

To conclude, we began with some examples of sociolinguistic register, abstracted out some hallmarks of the meaning of sociolinguistic register—viz., a set of options with (roughly) the same intension/extension, each to be expected in different social settings according to the Field, Mode and Tenor of the respective discourse situation—and ended by stressing that, by our lights, a difference in register is neither a matter of propositional content of any sort nor is it a matter of expressive meaning.

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