

Evaluative Predicates *beyond fun and tasty*

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This paper is about evaluative predicates and their interpretation. In the first part, data are presented addressing the question of which predicates should be considered as evaluative and why. Predicates under consideration range from personal taste (*tasty, fun*) and aesthetics (*beautiful*) to one-dimensional (*tall*) and multi-dimensional predicates (*healthy, smart*). The data part is concluded by a section about subjective attitude verbs like English *find* which are widely regarded as a testing ground for evaluative predicates. In the second part of this paper, a range of theoretical positions are considered including relativist accounts (Laserson 2005, Stephenson 2007) as well as different varieties of contextualist accounts (Stojanovic 2007/2017, Glanzberg 2007, Moltmann 2010, Pearson 2013, Barker 2002/2013, Umbach 2016). Finally, two prominent sources from philosophy (Kant 1790, Hare 1952) will provide a broader historical context.

Keywords

Evaluative predicates, subjective attitude verbs, faultless disagreement, relativism, contextualism

1 Introduction

In a dispute about factual matters only one of the opponents can be right. If Agata and Boban disagree about the question of whether white glue is water-soluble, as in (1a), or about the question of whether a particular sculpture is made of wood, as in (1b), they contradict each other and either Agata or Boban must be wrong. In contrast, in a dispute about matters of taste there is the intuition that in some sense either party may be right. If Agata and Boban disagree about the question of whether licorice is tasty, as in (2a), or about the question of whether a particular big wheel is fun, as in (2b), they contradict each other. However, their disagreement appears less severe since there is no matter of fact to decide who is wrong – this situation is reflected in the proverb that *there is no arguing about matters of taste*.

- (1) a. Agata: White glue is water-soluble.
Boban: No, it isn't. (You have to use turpentine.)
- b. Agata: This sculpture is made of wood.
Boban: No, it isn't. (It is made of plastic.)
- (2) a. Agata: Licorice is tasty.
Boban: No, it isn't. (It tastes terrible.)
- b. Agata: The big wheel in Plänterwald is fun.
Boban: No, it isn't. (It is boring.)

Agata's and Boban's statements in (2) are called subjective since they are about matters of taste or valuation instead of matters of fact. Disagreement about matters of taste or valuation is referred to as *faultless disagreement* by many authors in response to the intuition that either party may be right. The idea of faultless disagreement triggered an extensive discussion in semantics (as well as in philosophy) on the question of how to account for such disputes and how to spell out the semantics of predicates like *fun* and *tasty*.

Until recently the focus in the semantic literature was almost exclusively on *fun* and *tasty*. But there are many more predicates expressing taste or valuation, like *beautiful*, *good*, *sad*, *smart*, *pleasant*, *poor*, *disturbing*, *terrible*, *boring* etc. These predicates will be subsumed in this paper under the cover term of *evaluative predicates*, giving rise to two questions: First, which predicates should be included, and what are the criteria for a predicate to count as evaluative? Secondly, do all of these behave like *fun* and *tasty*, or are there differences in distribution and interpretation?

Semantic theories of subjective statements center around the issue of why in disputes about taste or valuation disagreement appears faultless – neither Agata nor Boban appear to be wrong – which in turn leads to the question of how to explain their disagreement: Is it a matter of personal experience, for example, a difference in gustatory perception, or a matter of standards, for instance, how much fun is required in order to say that something is fun? Can these differences be resolved, or do we have to accept that disagreement about taste and valuation need not lead to logical contradiction?

The first part of this paper focusses on data and the second on theories. In the first part data are presented addressing the question of which predicates should be considered as evaluative and why. Predicates under consideration range from personal taste (*tasty*, *fun*) and aesthetics (*beautiful*) to one-dimensional (*tall*) and multi-dimensional predicates (*healthy*, *smart*). The data part is concluded by a section about subjective attitude verbs like English *find* which are widely regarded as a testing ground for evaluative predicates, even though there seem to be significant cross-linguistic differences. Modal expressions, which are well-known for giving rise to subjectivity, are excluded for reasons of space.

In the second part of this paper, a range of theoretical positions are considered including relativist accounts (Lasersohn 2005, Stephenson 2007) as well as different varieties of contextualist accounts (Stojanovic 2007/2017, Glanzberg 2007, Moltmann 2010, Pearson 2013, Barker 2002/2013, Umbach 2016). Finally, two prominent sources from philosophy (Kant 1790, Hare 1952) will provide some broader historical context.

2 Data

In the last decade the range of evaluative predicates under discussion has expanded stepwise beyond *tasty* and *fun* raising the issue of diagnostics of evaluativity. Customary criteria are (a) the intuition of faultless disagreement, (b) grammaticality of experiencer arguments, (c) the acceptability of embedding under subjective attitude verbs like English *find* and, (d) the behavior of the comparative form with respect to (a)-(c).

Though none of these diagnostics is unambiguous, they give a fairly good picture: there seem to be four major classes of evaluative predicates, with prototypes *tasty*, *tall*, *healthy* / *smart* and *beautiful*. In this section, we will look at each of these classes, check the above diagnostics and try to

locate possible sources of subjectivity. The data in this section are collected from various papers (Bylinina 2017, Solt 2018, McNally&Stojanovic 2017, Kennedy 2013/2016, among others) neglecting the particular theoretical approaches. We will mainly consider adjectives in predicative positions (*this cake is tasty*) and switch freely between the terms *predicate* and *adjective* as long as there is no risk of misunderstanding. Epistemic modals are excluded. Finally, we will have a brief look at subjective attitude verbs because there are significant cross-linguistic differences interfering with their diagnostic capacity.

2.1 The range of evaluative predicates

2.1.1 Tasty

The topic of evaluative predicates gained prominence in semantics due to Lasersohn's (2005) paper on predicates of personal taste, in particular *tasty* and *fun*. Personal taste predicates require a sentient individual that has experienced the object the predicate is about. For example, Agata must have tried the (type of) cake to utter (3) felicitously. As observed in Pearson (2013), someone who has good reason to believe that shortbread is tasty but has never tried it, might say *Apparently, shortbread is tasty*, but not, *Shortbread is tasty*.

(3) Agata: This cake is tasty.

Predicates of personal taste usually take overt experiencer arguments – *fun for Agata / tasty to Boban*.¹ When there is no overt experiencer argument, a covert experiencer can be assumed which is, as a default, identified with the speaker. That is, as a default (3) is understood such that the cake is tasty to Agata. Lasersohn calls this perspective *autocentric* and points out that there is also an *exocentric* and an *acentric* perspective. The acentric one is a bird's eye perspective, we will come back to this in section 3.3. While from the autocentric perspective the experiencer is the speaker or attitude holder (if subjective sentences are embedded under attitude verbs), from the exocentric perspective the experiencer may be some other individual prominent in the discourse. Lasersohn characterizes the exocentric perspective as "standing in someone else's shoes" and gives the examples in (4) in which John tells Mary how their two-year-old son Bill enjoyed a recent trip to the amusement park.

(4) Mary: How did Bill like the rides? (=39 in Lasersohn 2005)
John: Well, the merry-go-round was fun, but the water slide was a little too scary.

Another example of an exocentric perspective is given by Stephenson (2007). In (5), we understand that it is unlikely that Sam tried the cat food and found it tasty, and that he utters the sentence on the basis of the cat's behavior taking an exocentric perspective. Still, the plain sentence *The cat food is tasty* would be marked (maybe humans cannot stand in cats' shoes).

¹ Surprisingly, German *lecker* 'tasty' resists combination with experiencer arguments although it is clearly a personal taste predicate. An experiencer argument can only be added to the verb *schmecken* 'taste', cf. (i), (ii).

(i) *Lakritze ist mir lecker / lecker für mich.

(ii) Lakritze schmeckt mir.
'Licorice is tasty to me.'

- (5) Mary: How's that new brand of cat food you bought?
 Sam: I think it's tasty [... because the cat has eaten a lot of it]. (Stephenson 2007, ex. (34))

Finally, if sentences expressing predications of personal taste are embedded under subjective attitude verbs like English *find*, the subject of the attitude verb has to correspond to the experiencer (see Sæbø 2009). This is why (6a,b) are equivalent in meaning and (6c) is odd because it implies that Lisa tried the cat food. In contrast, with epistemic attitude verbs (*think, believe*) the experiencer may be identified with some prominent entity in the discourse (exocentric perspective) and is identical to the speaker only as a default, see (6d)

- (6) a. This cake is tasty to Lisa.
 b. Lisa finds this cake tasty.
 c. # Lisa finds the cat food tasty.
 d. Lisa thinks that the cat food is tasty.

2.1.2 Tall

One hallmark of predicates of personal taste (and evaluative predicates in general) is that they are gradable, thereby raising the question of how gradability and subjectivity relate to each other. The best explored type of gradable adjectives are *dimensional* (or rather *one-dimensional*)² ones, like *tall, rich, and heavy* (see, e.g., Bierwisch 1989, Kennedy 1999). When presented in their positive form they give rise to the impression of faultless disagreement (Richard 2004, Kennedy 2013). This is shown in the dispute in (7). Note, first, that this dispute can be understood in two different ways: Agata and Boban may disagree about the relevant comparison classes, for example Lisa's classmates vs. her basketball mates, which would be more of a misunderstanding than a disagreement. But even if Agata and Boban agree about the comparison class, they may still disagree as to whether Lisa counts as tall with respect to this comparison class, that is, they may disagree about the standard of application of *tall* in this comparison class. Only then will their disagreement appear as faultless.

- (7) Agata: Lisa is tall.
 Boban: No, she isn't.

In contrast to predicates of personal taste, dimensional adjectives do not license experiencer arguments; (8a) is barely grammatical. When embedding such statements under English *find*, judgements are mixed. Following Kennedy (2013) and Fleisher (2013), (8b) is at least degraded, whereas Bylinina (2017) and McNally & Stojanovic (2017) consider these cases as unmarked. So dimensional predicates differ from personal taste predicates in failing the experiencer diagnostics and, depending on authors, also the *find* diagnostic.

- (8) a. ??? Lisa is tall for / to me.
 b. (?) I find Lisa tall.

The difference between dimensional predicates and personal taste predicates is even more obvious when considering comparative instead of positive forms. For personal taste predicates, comparatives

² In contrast to multi-dimensional adjectives.

parallel their positive forms – disagreement appears faultless, see (9), experiencer arguments are grammatical and embedding under *find* is licensed, see (10a,b). Comparatives of dimensional adjectives, however, are about factual matters – you can measure who out of Lisa and Leo is taller – and thus disagreement does not appear faultless, (11). Moreover, neither experiencer arguments nor embedding under *find* are licensed, (12a, b).

- (9) Agata: The cheese cake is tastier than the brownies.
 Boban: No, the brownies are tastier than the cheese cake. (intuitively faultless)
- (10) a. The cheese cake is tastier to me than the brownies.
 b. I find the cheese cake tastier than the brownies.
- (11) Agata: Lisa is taller than Leo.
 Boban: No, Leo is taller than Lisa. (either Agata or Boban is wrong)
- (12) a. # Lisa is taller to me than Leo.
 b. # I find Lisa taller than Leo.

2.1.3 *Healthy & smart*

Dimensional adjectives like *tall*, *large*, *long*, *heavy*, and *old*, are actually one-dimensional. They denote properties based on single dimensions which are, moreover, measurable – the adjective *tall*, for example, is based on the dimension of height, which can be measured in, e.g., centimeters. Multi-dimensional adjectives, in contrast, denote properties based on more than one dimension. A paradigm example is *healthy*, which is sensitive to multiple dimensions, for example blood pressure, cholesterol level and body-mass-index; see Sassoon (2013).³

Common tests for multi-dimensionality are modifiers like *in some/every respect*, *with respect to*, *except for*. As expected, results are negative for *tall*, (13a) – *tall in every respect* is infelicitous since *tall* has only one dimension, which is height, and the *except for* continuation fails accordingly. Adjectives like *healthy*, *smart* and *beautiful* pass the test, (13b-d). Personal taste predicates like *tasty* and *fun* also pass the test, see (13e, f), justifying the conclusion that they are multi-dimensional, too.⁴ Note that these tests apply to the positive and the comparative forms (*John is healthier/smarter/more beautiful than Mary in every respect / except for ...*).

- (13) a. ??? John is tall in every respect.
 b. John is healthy in every respect / except for his blood pressure.
 c. John is smart in every respect / except for the films he prefers.
 d. This sculpture is beautiful in every respect / except for the polished surface.
 e. (?) The cake is tasty in every respect / except for the fact that it contains raisins.
 f. The trip was fun in every respect / except for the rain.

³ Multi-dimensionality is not to be confused with ambiguity: *long* is ambiguous between a temporal and a spatial interpretation – *long time* vs. *long distance*. But it is not multidimensional, since it is interpreted only relative to one of these dimensions in each context

⁴ Though (13e) seems slightly marked, but see Solt (2018) below.

Disagreement involving multi-dimensional adjectives, as in (14), appears faultless – there seems to be no matter of fact of whether Lisa is smart or not. This is, first of all, analogous to the case of one-dimensional adjectives: Agata and Boban may disagree about the relevant comparison class, say, kids vs. teenagers. In the multi-dimensional case they may also disagree about which dimensions to take into account, for example, whether to include talent for art and music. The two types of disagreement may be dismissed as misunderstandings. But beyond comparison class and relevant dimensions there are two more factors to be considered: Agata and Boban may disagree about the standard for the application of *smart*, analogous to the case of *tall* and, secondly, they may disagree about the weight a single dimension has – how important is talent in art and music in assessing someone's smartness? This type of disagreement seems different from a misunderstanding, more prone to faultlessness.

- (14) Agata: Lisa is smart.
Boban: No, she isn't.

It was shown above that the class of multi-dimensional adjectives includes personal taste adjectives. The division line between personal taste adjectives and mere multi-dimensional ones can be drawn with the help of experiencer arguments. While personal taste adjectives license experiencer arguments, multi-dimensionals as well as one-dimensionals do not, see (15). Detailed data are provided in Bylinina (2017).⁵ Thus, unlike *tasty* and like *tall*, mere multi-dimensional adjectives block *to* or *for* PPs:

- (15) a. ??? Lisa is tall for / to me.
b. ??? Lisa is smart to me.
c. This cake is tasty to me.

The division line between one-dimensional and multi-dimensional adjectives is given by the behavior of the comparative. We saw above that comparatives of one-dimensional adjectives are not subjective – it can be measured who out of Lisa and Leo is taller. Multi-dimensional adjectives appear subjective in the positive and the comparative form. This is no surprise when considering personal taste predicates (which are multi-dimensional, see (13e,f)), since there is a (possibly covert) experiencer determining, for instance, which of two cakes is tastier. For mere multi-dimensionals like *smart* subjectivity cannot be attributed to an experiencer because experiencers are not licensed, see (15b). It can also not be attributed to the standard of application, since comparatives don't make use of a standard. Subjectivity can be explained, however, by the assignment of different weights to the individual dimensions – if discourse participants disagree on how important talent in art and music is in assessing smartness, they will not only disagree as to whether Lisa is smart but also as to whether Lisa is smarter than Leo; see Bylinina (2017) and Solt (2018). Thus, unlike one-dimensionals and like personal taste predicate, disputes involving comparatives of (mere) multi-dimensional adjectives like *smart* may appear faultless.

⁵Bylinina (2017) makes use of a Lasersohn style relativist semantics with a judge index. For predicates of personal taste she requires the judge to be identical to the experiencer, while for evaluative adjectives she says that "the core of subjectivity of evaluative adjectives has nothing to do with an experience of any sort [...] subjective assessment does not have to come with an extra argument that we find with PPTs." p.311.

Testing mere multi-dimensional adjectives with the help of embedding under English *find* yields, unfortunately, mixed results. It would be expected that they pass the test in the positive as well as in the comparative form (due to their subjectivity described above). This is confirmed in the case of *smart* but rejected in the case of the paradigm multidimensional adjective *healthy* (and questionable in the case of the paradigm aesthetic adjective *beautiful*, see 2.1.4), indicating that the relation between English *find* and subjectivity is not one-to-one (see section 2.2).

- (16) a. I find Lisa smart / smarter than Leo.
b. ?? I find Lisa healthy / healthier than Leo.

The picture up to now corresponds to that in Bylinina (2017). She distinguishes three classes of subjective adjectives, (a) the *tasty* class: adjectives are subjective both in positive and comparative form, and experiencer PPs are licensed; (b) the *smart* class: adjectives are subjective both in positive and comparative form, but experiencer PPs are not licensed; (c) the *tall* class: adjectives are subjective in the positive but not in the comparative form, and experiencer PPs are not licensed. Bylinina's classes cover the range of evaluative predicates to a large extent though there are two more findings to add: Solt's (2018) empirical study of "ordering subjectivity", i.e. subjectivity of comparatives and, secondly, McNally & Stojanovic's (2017) investigation of aesthetic adjectives.

In Solt (2018) an empirical study is presented addressing the question of which adjectives are considered as subjective when presented in the comparative form. The range of adjectives includes one-dimensionals (*tall, old, ..*) as well as different varieties of multi-dimensionals (*dirty, bumpy, sad, beautiful, tasty, ...*). The results showed that (i) comparatives of one-dimensionals are judged as objective (as expected), (ii) comparatives of personal taste adjectives and of aesthetic adjectives are judged as subjective (as expected), but that (iii) there is a large class of adjectives where judgements vary. This led Solt to the conclusion that there are two different ways of being multi-dimensional. There is a *quantificational* variety (including *healthy, dirty* and *bumpy*) the meaning of which is directly composed out of component dimensions relating to physical properties (e.g. *blood pressure*). This is the "mixed class", where judgements in the experiment vary. But there is, moreover, a *complex dimension* variety of multi-dimensionality where dimensions are factors contributing to an agent's experience or valuation.⁶ This variety includes not only personal taste adjectives (which take overt experiencer arguments) but also aesthetic and emotional adjectives (e.g., *beautiful* and *sad*). Comparative forms of these adjectives are consistently judged as being subjective.

2.1.4 Beautiful

Finally, aesthetic adjectives will be included in the classification of evaluative predicates. McNally and Stojanovic (2017) start from the observation that aesthetic predicates are multi-dimensional (17a). They provide data showing that aesthetic predicates do not as a rule combine with experiencer arguments, even if combined with a perception verb instead of a mere copula (17b).⁷ Furthermore, they show that aesthetic predicates do not readily embed under the subjective attitude verb *find*, see

⁶ Solt moreover surmises that it is the *complex dimension* variety that has what is called in Hare (1952) a *commending* function, see section 3.5.

⁷ The fact that this type of construction is acceptable in some contexts is attributed to an independent factor, see their footnote 8..

(17c), which is unexpected since aesthetic adjectives are a paradigm case of not-matter-of-fact predicates.⁸ We will come back to *find* in the next section.

One core point in McNally & Stojanovic (2017) is the observation that many adjectives that do not appear genuinely aesthetic may be used to make an aesthetic judgment. Calling a painting *dynamic*, *lifeless* or *balanced* may, but need not, be understood as an aesthetic judgement. So there is the question of what distinguishes *beautiful* from, e.g., *balanced*? McNally and Stojanovic suggest that in the case of *beautiful*, but not in the case of *balanced* a judgment is aesthetic in virtue of the lexical meaning of the adjective. The issue of how exactly to single out lexically aesthetic predicates is left open in the paper. Looking back to Solt's results we would expect that *dynamic*, *lifeless* or *balanced* belong to the "mixed class", i.e. the quantificational variety of multi-dimensional adjectives.⁹

- (17) a. The vase is beautiful in some / every respect.
 b. ??The vase is beautiful to me. / ??Miró's work looks beautiful to me.
 c. ? I find Miro's work beautiful / mediocre.

(17a = 21 and 17b = 23+24 in McNally & Stojanovic 2017)

The picture emerging from the data presented here is summarized in table 1. Though it is by no means crystal clear, the five classes in the table below seem reasonably well supported. Future work on evaluative predicates requires, first of all, detailed empirical findings (as, e.g., in Kaiser & Herron Lee 2017 and Liao et al. 2016).

	DIMENSIONAL	"MERE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL" ¹⁰		AESTHETIC	PERSONAL TASTE
	<i>tall</i>	<i>healthy</i>	<i>smart, balanced</i>	<i>beautiful</i>	<i>tasty</i>
Dimensionality	one-dimensional	multi-dimensional			
Intuition of faultless disagreement	for positive, but not for comparative	for positive as well as comparative			
Experiencer argument licensed	no	no	no	no	yes
Embedding under <i>find</i> (in English) acceptable	positive: unclear comparative: no	neither positive nor comparative	both positive and comparative	unclear	both positive and comparative
Bylinina's (2017) classes, attributing subjectivity to	<i>tall</i> class: variation of standards	--	<i>smart</i> class: varying weights of dimensions	<i>tasty</i> class: lexically subjective	
Solt's (2018) classification of multidimensionals	--	quantificational	--	complex dimension	
McNally & Stojanovic 2017 on aesthetic adjectives	--	--	occur in aesthetic judgments	lexically aesthetic	--

Table 1: Classes of evaluative predicates.

To conclude: Lasersohn focuses on predicates of personal taste since they are free of aesthetic or moral connotations.¹¹ At the same time, he postulates that an analysis of subjectivity should, in

⁸ In their corpus study on *find* they found near to no tokens of the form "*x finds y (very/...) beautiful.*"

⁹ One might then argue that being lexically aesthetic implies including a *commending* function; see section 3.5.

¹⁰ In the absence of a better term.

¹¹ "Exactly which predicates qualify as predicates of personal taste is an interesting question. The status of predicates such as *good* or *beautiful* immediately raises fundamental issues for ethics and aesthetics; [...]. But in such discussions, the main focus is naturally on the ethical or aesthetic theory, which the semantic theory

principle, apply to any case in which a disagreement cannot be decided by objective facts, that is, we have the intuition of faultlessness. Subsequent work has proven Lasersohn's position wrong: widening the range of evaluative predicates beyond *tasty* and *fun* reveals that there are differences in distribution and also in what seems to be the source of subjectivity, indicating that a uniform analysis of evaluative adjectives might not be adequate.

2.2 Subjective attitude verbs

Subjective attitude verbs like English *find* are commonly used as a diagnostic for subjectivity, which is what we did in the previous section. In fact, some authors consider the acceptability of embedding under *find* as the prime source of evidence of subjectivity. There are, however, significant cross-linguistic differences in distribution – verbs corresponding to English *find* do not behave in a uniform way across languages (and even in English judgements are shaky, see table 1) casting doubt on their diagnostic capacity.

We will compare data from English, German, French and Norwegian taken from Sæbø (2009), who presented the first cross-linguistic study on subjective attitude verbs, and also from Ducrot (1980) and from Reis (2013). Due to limitations of space we will not go into grammatical details (see, e.g., Bouchard 2012 for English and Reis 2013 for German) and will neglect particular theoretical approaches (see, e.g., Fleisher 2013 and Kennedy & Willer 2016).

Sæbø (2009) presents an analysis of subjective attitude verbs including Norwegian *synes*, Swedish *tycka*, French *trouver*, German *finden* and English *find*. They differ from attitude verbs like *believe* in rejecting complements expressing factual matters, regardless of whether the subject of the matrix verb is the speaker or a third person attitude holder; see (18).

- (18) a. * I find / *Lisa finds white glue water-soluble / that white glue is water-soluble.
b. *Ich finde / *Lisa findet Holzleim wasserlöslich / dass Holzleim wasserlöslich ist.
c. *Je trouve / *Lisa trouve que la colle est hydrosoluble.
d. *Jeg synes/ *Lisa synes (at) trelim er vannløselig.

On the other hand, subjective attitude verbs consistently accept complements expressing judgements of personal taste, regardless of whether the adjectives occur in their positive or in their comparatives form, (19).

- (19) a. I find this cake tasty / tastier than that one.
b. Ich finde diesen Kuchen lecker / leckerer als den.
c. Je trouve cela bon / cela mieux beau.
d. Jeg synes (at) det er godt/ den er bedre enn den.

Considering (one-)dimensional adjectives, comparatives are uniformly rejected (which is predicted since they express matters of fact, s. 2.1.2 above). For positive forms of dimensional adjectives,

serves merely to support, advance, or make precise. [...] If one is studying semantics for its own intrinsic interest, it seems best to set such programs aside. Accordingly, we will concentrate here on relatively mundane predicates such as *fun* and *tasty*, and leave open the status of more philosophically "charged" predicates like *good* and *beautiful*." (Lasersohn 2005, p. 645).

however, there are diverging findings: Different from, e.g., McNally & Stojanovic (2017), Kennedy (2013) claims that sentences like (20a) are marked.¹² In German as well as in French and Norwegian, complements with dimensional predicates are unmarked.

- (20) a. (?) I find Lisa tall.
b. Ich finde Lisa groß.
c. Je trouve Lisa grand.
d. Jeg synes at Lisa er stor.

Moving on to *healthy* and its equivalents, English is again restricted. The German version is unmarked. The French and the Norwegian version have, if acceptable at all, particular meanings (see footnotes).

- (21) a. *I find Lisa healthy.
b. Ich finde Lisa gesund.
c. * Je trouve Jean en bonne santé.¹³
d. * Jeg synes (at) Lisa er frisk.¹⁴

Even in the case of aesthetic predicates, English *find* seems more restricted than the other languages. The positive as well as the comparative form of *beautiful* are very rarely embedded under *find*, while the German, French and Norwegian versions are unmarked, see (22), (23).

- (22) a. ? I find the painting beautiful.
b. Ich finde das Bild schön.
c. Je trouve ce tableau magnifique.
d. Jeg synes at det er fint enn den.
- (23) a. ? I find this painting more beautiful than that one.
b. Ich finde dieses Bild schöner als das.
c. Je trouve ce tableau ci plus joli que celui là.
d. Jeg synes at den er finere enn den.

Another difference between subjective attitude verbs in English, German, French and Norwegian consists in the embedding of deontic modal sentences, which cannot be embedded under English *find*, while the corresponding versions in the other languages are fully acceptable, s. (24).

- (24) a. *I find (that) indirect taxes should be abolished.

¹² With additional degree adverbs, as in (ii), they are considered fully acceptable, cf. (10), (11) in Kennedy (2013:)

(i) (?) Anna finds her bowl of pasta big/large/small/cold.

(ii) Anna finds her bowl of pasta {surprisingly, remarkably, unusually, too} big/large/small/cold.

¹³ French informant: "To me it means something like: 'when I came back, John was healthy', and not: 'My opinion is that John is healthy.'

¹⁴ Norwegian informant: *frisk* means "in a good health condition". The sentence would be marginally acceptable if you can tell from Lisa's behavior (running, jiggling) that she gives the impression of being healthy. *Jeg synes (at) Lisa er sunn*" is o.k. but it means that she leads a healthy life.

- b. Ich finde, indirekte Steuern sollten abgeschafft werden.
- c. Je trouve que les impôts indirects devraient être abolis.
- d. Jeg synes (at) indirekte skatter bør avskaffes.

Finally, in English as well as Norwegian complements expressing metalinguistic statements are rejected, whereas in German and French they are acceptable in particular contexts, provided they occur in the form of *that*-clauses. For example, imaging a row of chair-like objects such that it starts with a throne and ends with a wooden block and neighboring objects exhibit only minimal differences (see Black 1937), and suppose that the speaker points to an object close to the end of the row requiring that this object should be considered as a chair. In this situation, the English and the Norwegian sentence in (25a, d) are ungrammatical, while the German version in (25b) is perfect and the French version in (25c) is acceptable.¹⁵

- (25) (speaker pointing to an object close to the end of a row of chair-like objects)
- a. *I find that this is a chair.
 - b. Ich finde, das ist ein Stuhl.
 - c. (?) Je trouve que c'est une chaise.
 - d. *Jeg synes (at) det er en stol.

Subjective attitude verbs differ from *believe* verbs in, first, blocking experiencer arguments and, second, requiring direct experience. Blocking of experiencer arguments, as in (26a), is taken to indicate that the experiencer is identical to the subject of the subjective attitude verb, which is the basis for Sæbø's analysis of subjective attitude verbs as judge-shifters (Sæbø 2009). Direct experience is required for an embedded sentence as well as for unembedded sentences (cf. (26b) and also the cat food example from Stephenson and the shortbread example from Pearson in section 2.1.1). However, while unembedded subjective sentences may be interpreted from an exocentric perspective, this is impossible when they are embedded under *find*: (26b) is not acceptable, which is plausible when assuming that the subject of the attitude verb is identical to the experiencer or judge, supporting Sæbø's analysis.¹⁶

¹⁵ Though the form *Je trouve que ça, c'est une chaise* (LIT 'I find that this, it is a chair') seems more natural. Below is an example from Ducrot (1980) which also suggests that a particular information structure is required when embedding a metalinguistic statement under *trouver* ('find'); (p. 69). This is no surprise taking into account that metalinguistic statements require a particular information structural context to be licensed. In Umbach (2016) evidence is presented showing that (25b) cannot be used in a situation in which the (alleged) chair is not visible to discourse participants, (p.140-141). See also Reis' example in (28f).

- (a) Je trouve que ce sont des ennemis qui sont venus. LIT: I find it is enemies who came.
- (b) * Je trouve que des ennemis sont venus. LIT: I find that enemies came.

¹⁶ Considering multi-dimensional adjectives like *smart*, direct experience is not required in the sense that the speaker must have had personal experience; (a) is o.k. if the speaker has indirect evidence, for example, Paul's results in the last exam. In contrast, aesthetic adjectives do require direct evidence – (c) would rarely be acceptable if the speaker had never seen the painting under discussion, regardless of whether embedded or not.

- (a) I find Paul smart but I never met him.
- (b) I find Paul smart. / Paul is smart. I can tell from the results of his exams.
- (c) ??? Ich finde das Bild schön / Das Bild ist schön. Aber ich hab es nie gesehen.

- (26) a. * I find licorice tasty to me.
 b. # I find licorice tasty but have I never tried it.

The direct experience requirement varies, however, with the grammar of the embedded sentence. Borkin (1973) investigates *to be* deletion in English. Though the subjective attitude verb *find* is not in focus, she presents interesting observations related to the personal experiencer requirement. Comparing (27a-c), the impression of direct experience increases: the *that* clause may be used when reporting the results of some consumer reaction test; the infinite version in (b) would be preferred if the speaker is reporting a test run by herself; finally, (c) requires direct experience of the chair by the speaker – "... the sentence becomes more of a report of an experience than the stating of a fact based on experience." (p. 46).

- (27) a. I find that this chair is uncomfortable. (= 10 in Borkin 1973)
 b. I find this chair to be uncomfortable.
 c. I find this chair uncomfortable

Reis (2013) presents an in-depth study of German *finden* including a number of syntactic details. German *finden* may embed small clauses, *that*-clauses and also V2 clauses. Reis points out that each of these forms is acceptable with sentences based on adjectives, but that small clauses are blocked when embedding deontic modals and metalinguistic statements, see (28), which are examples from Reis. Similar grammatical considerations can be found in Ducrot (1980).

- (28) a. Er findet Otto genial
 b. Er findet dass Otto genial ist / Otto ist genial.
 c. (?) Er findet Otto ein Genie
 d. Er findet, dass Otto ein Genie ist / Otto ist ein Genie.
 LIT 'He finds Otto brilliant / a genius / that Otto is a genius.'
 e. Er findet dass Otto abnehmen sollte.
 LIT 'He finds that Otto should loose weight.'
 f. Er findet dass Otto schnarcht. / Otto schnarcht.¹⁷
 LIT 'He finds that Otto snores.'

Finally, there is an observation concerning the pragmatics of subjective attitude verbs in Umbach (2016): First person present tense German *finden* blocks denial. If Agata relativizes her judgment by using *finden*, as in (29), Boban cannot plainly deny it; (29a). If he wants to deny Agata's statement, he has to use *finden* himself, as in (29b). If he wants to confirm Agata's statement, he may use *finden* or plain confirmation, cf. (29c, d). The behavior of German *finden* in (29) can analogously be observed for French *trouver*, Norwegian *synes* and English *find*. This observation is taken as evidence that

'LIT: I find the painting beautiful' / The painting is beautiful. But I have never seen it.

¹⁷ Note that, regardless of whether episodic or habitual, this sentence does not mean that the matrix subject observes Otto performing a snoring activity, but instead that the subject classifies Otto's activity as being of the type of snoring.

utterances based on subjective attitude verbs constitute individual discourse commitments that need not be shared. They are not on the table for acceptance or rejection and thus do not allow for genuine denial, but they are nevertheless public (cf. Farkas & Bruce 2010, Umbach 2016).

(29) Agata: Ich finde Lakritze lecker.
'I find licorice tasty.'

- Boban: a. # Nein, Lakritze ist nicht lecker.
'No, licorice is not tasty.'
b. Ich finde Lakritze nicht lecker.
'I don't find licorice tasty.'
c. Ich finde Lakritze auch lecker.
'I find licorice tasty, too.'
d. Ja, Lakritze ist lecker.
'Yes, licorice is tasty.'

To conclude, a summary of the findings on subjective attitude verbs is presented in table 2. English *find*, German *finden*, French *trouver* and Norwegian *synes* commonly license complements with personal taste predicates in the positive and in the comparative form. Beyond this, their behavior varies to a considerable degree. So while subjective attitude verbs are seen as a general diagnostic of evaluativity by many authors, this is sound only in the case of personal taste predicates. Moreover, with the exception of English, subjective attitude verbs may also embed deontic modals and, in German and French, metalinguistic statements. On the premise that semantics diagnostics should not be restricted to particular languages, these findings cast doubt on the capacity of subjective attitude verbs as a diagnostic for evaluative predicates.

	English <i>find</i>	German <i>finden</i>	French <i>trouver</i>	Norwegian <i>synes</i>
<i>tall</i>	no	yes	yes	yes
<i>taller</i>	no	no	no	no
<i>tasty</i>	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>tastier</i>	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>beautiful</i>	(no)	yes	yes	yes
<i>more beautiful</i>	(no)	yes	yes	yes
<i>healthy</i>	no	yes	(?)	(??)
deontic modals	no	yes	yes	yes
metalinguistic statements	no	yes	yes	no

Table 2: Acceptability of sentences embedded by subjective attitude verbs

3 Approaches in the literature

3.1 The contextualism–relativism controversy

In the second part of this paper, an overview will be given of the current approaches to the semantics of evaluative predicates and subjective sentences. When the topic of evaluativity became

prominent in semantics, the focus was nearly exclusively on the problem of faultless disagreement and the question of whether a relative notion of truth would be more adequate than a contextualist solution. This is why we start this section with Stojanovic's (2017) characterization of the intuition of faultless disagreement and of the possibilities for accounting for this intuition.

Consider the paradigm example in (30) (= 2a in the introduction). Following Stojanovic, there are three pre-theoretic intuitions to be distinguished, which each appear plausible when considered in isolation. The first one is that both Agata and Boban seem to say something correct. The second one is that they are in disagreement, which is indicated by the fact that Boban uses the particle *no* and asserts the negation of the sentence Agata asserted. The third intuition is such that, if this is a genuine disagreement, the possibility should be precluded that both Agata and Boban are right.

- (30) Agata: Licorice is tasty.
Boban: No, it isn't. It tastes terrible.

Stojanovic names three positions that each discard one of the above intuitions. "Invariantism would be the view which seeks to explain away the first intuition: it may *seem* that both parties are right, but they really aren't. Contextualism would be the view that seeks to explain away the second intuition: it may *seem* that there is disagreement, but there really isn't. Finally, relativism would be the view that does away with the third intuition, and seeks to demonstrate that there can be genuine disagreement even when both parties are right." (Stojanovic 2017, 9)

Invariantism amounts to considering the issue of whether licorice is tasty as a matter of fact, which is not claimed anywhere in semantics. Contextualism refers to contextual parameters with respect to which discourse participants may not be aligned. One prominent variety of contextualism are genericity-based approaches – participants disagree about the domain of possible experiencers. The other relevant variety are metalinguistic approaches – participants disagree about the standard of application determining the denotation of the adjectives (or about the weight of dimensions in assessing the comparative form, see section 2.1.3).¹⁸ Disagreement raised by incompatible contextual parameters can be resolved in subsequent exchange, for example by negotiating standards. Disagreement remaining after alignment is no longer faultless but instead genuine.

Relativism, in contrast to contextualism, takes the intuition of faultless disagreement at face value. Even if Boban and Agata make contradictory statements, they may both be saying something true. Relativism seems to solve suspected shortcomings of contextualism (see below) and it extends to the interpretation of epistemic modals. There are, however, serious objections, for example the problem of the competent speaker, see 3.3.3., and moreover, relativism comes at a high price, viz. a notion of truth relative to individuals.¹⁹

We will proceed by reviewing relativist accounts and contextualist accounts and finally take a step back to look at two historical sources. As in the previous section, the number of individual papers to be considered is restricted due to limitations of space.

¹⁸ These accounts are called metalinguistic in this paper because they refer to the meaning of predicates. Similarly, Barker (2002) speaks of a metalinguistic usage of sentences with gradable predicates. Stojanovic (2017) uses in addition the term *meta-semantic*. This is not to be confused with the notion of metalinguistic as in, e.g., *metalinguistic negation* (as in Horn 1985) which is understood as commenting on a speech act.

¹⁹ See Glanzberg (2007) for an outline of why early index theory was replaced by Kaplan's system of character and content and why "... arguments for relativism lead us back to the bad old days of index theory." (p.6)

3.2 Relativism

Relativism has been proposed as a way to account for the meaning of predicates of personal taste in a large number of papers including Kölbel (2002), Richard (2004), Lasersohn (2005), (2009) and Stephenson (2007). We will consider Lasersohn (2005) which is the most prominent relativist account, and Stephenson (2007), which includes epistemic modals.

Lasersohn (2005) focuses on predicates of personal taste, in particular *tasty* and *fun*. Before presenting his relativist semantics, Lasersohn explores various contextual options. The first option would be a covert experiencer argument representing the speaker, that is, *fun* is understood as ***fun-for-the-speaker***. This option is untenable because (31a) would then mean that roller coasters are fun for Sue, while (31b) would mean that roller coasters are not fun for Bob, and thus Bob's reply would not express the negation of Sue's claim, contra intuition.

The second option would be a covert experiencer argument representing a group of relevant persons to which Sue and Bob belong, say, teenagers. *Fun* would then mean ***fun-for-teenagers***. Sue's claim would be that roller coasters are fun for teenagers and Bob's reply would be a negation of Sue's claim, as required by the data. However, if polarities are reversed, this option yields unwanted results: in (32), Sue (who is a teenager) would claim that roller coasters are no fun for teenagers and Bob would reply that, yes, they are fun for teenagers, which is odd since his reply seems to suggest that he knows Sue better she knows herself.

- (31) a. Sue: Roller coasters are fun.
b. Bob: No, roller coasters are no fun.

- (32) a. Sue: Roller coasters are no fun.
b. Bob: Oh yes, they are.

The third option is such that the covert experiencer argument is generically quantified over – *fun* means ***fun_in general***. This option is ruled out because it would predict (33a) to be o.k. – generic quantification is well-known to allow for exceptions – although it is decidedly odd. Moreover, it would predict (33b) to be contradictory although it is o.k.

- (33) a. ? This is not fun, although I am having fun doing it.
b. This is fun, but most people would hate it.

There are two more options rejected by Lasersohn. One is such that an utterance of *This is fun* is not an assertion but instead some expressive act like "Whee!" or "Oh, boy!" According to this option Sue's utterance in (34a) would not be the assertion of a proposition but instead the expression of her state of mind (***oh-wow-roller-coasters***). However, in contrast to assertions, expressive acts cannot be denied – Bob's reaction in (34b) would not be understood as a denial and would in fact appear incoherent. Since subjective sentences are subject to denial and to logical reasoning, the expressive option has to be ruled out.

- (34) a. Sue: Oh wow roller coasters!
b. Bob: # No, roller coasters are no fun.

The last option considered by Lasersohn is the metalinguistic one assuming that the dispute in (31) is about the denotation of *fun*. Sue's utterance may, at least in part, be understood as suggesting that the word *fun* includes roller coasters in its denotation – ***fun_applies_to_roller_coasters*** – which is what Bob denies. Lasersohn links this option to Barker's (2002) idea that sentences may be informative not only about the issue at hand but also about the context itself, including standards of application of gradable adjectives.

The reason why Lasersohn finally rejects this option is that the disagreement in (31) can be reported as contradictory beliefs – Sue believes that roller coasters are fun while Bob believes that they are not. Presupposing a Kaplanian system (see below), beliefs are contents. For this reason, Lasersohn argues, Sue's and Bob's dispute cannot be about the meaning of *fun*, that is, about the context, and thus the metalinguistic option has to be rejected.²⁰

Lasersohn's relativist semantics is based on a Kaplanian system distinguishing between character and content. In such a system the character of an expression is a function from contexts to contents, where contents are functions from possible worlds and times to suitable denotations. For example, the character of a proposition ϕ is a function from contexts to contents, that is, to the set of functions from world-time pairs to truth values. In order to account for disputes about taste, Lasersohn extends the Kaplanian system such that it includes judge indices (individuals) in addition to world and time indices. Thus in Lasersohn's system the content of a proposition ϕ is a function from sets of world-time-individual triples (instead of sets of world-time pairs) to truth values, see (35). Accordingly, the denotation of an expression α depends on a context c , a world w , and a judge i , $[[\alpha]]^{c,w,i}$

- (35) character of a proposition ϕ : [contexts \rightarrow contents]
 content of a proposition ϕ : [(worlds \times times \times individuals) \rightarrow denotations]

In the case of evaluative predicates denotations may vary for different judges; in the case of empirical predicates (e.g. *water-soluble*) judge indices have no influence:

$$\text{for all } c, w, i, j: [[\text{water-soluble}]]^{c,w,i} = [[\text{water-soluble}]]^{c,w,j}$$

Truth conditions are defined as usual, for instance, for negation $[[\neg\phi]]^{c,w,i} = 1$ iff $[[\phi]]^{c,w,i} = 0$. Thus a proposition ϕ and its negation $\neg\phi$ cannot be simultaneously true – with respect to the same judge (and world/ time). Contradiction is defined such that two propositions, or rather, two sentence contents p and q contradict each other iff there is no world, time and judge such that they are both true, $p(w,t,i)=1$ and $q(w,t,i)=1$.

In this system the content of Sue and Bob's utterances can be contradictory – e.g. one being the negation of the other – and nevertheless be simultaneously true: Sue claims that roller coasters are fun as judged by Sue and Bob claims that they are no fun as judged by Bob, as in (36) which is a contradiction even though the two propositions are simultaneously true. This is how faultless disagreement is modelled in a relativist semantics.

- (36) $[[\text{roller-coasters are fun}]]^{c,w,Sue} = \text{true}$ & $[[\text{roller-coasters are not fun}]]^{c,w,Bob} = \text{true}$

²⁰ Lasersohn's argument is convincing in showing that, if the dispute is about the meaning of *fun*, beliefs are not adequate in reporting. However, in reporting the dispute in (31) *find* would presumably be preferred over *believe*: *Sue finds roller coasters fun while Bob does not*.

Stephenson (2007) presents a semantic interpretation of predicates of personal taste which in addition to a judge-as-index interpretation (as in Lasersohn 2005) allows for an explicit or silent experiencer argument interpretation. She starts from the observation that taste predicates are close to epistemic modals (e.g. *It might be raining*): while predicates of personal taste raise the question of whose taste is relevant, epistemic modals raise the question of whose knowledge is expressed. Stephenson suggests an interpretation of personal taste predicates such that they are two place predicates where the first argument is the individual whose taste is relevant. This argument can be filled either by the judge of evaluation (via an element PRO that is identical to the judge index) or by a silent pronoun (to be identified with an experiencer prominent in the context) or by an explicit experiencer (e.g. the referent of a *for*-phrase). The reason why judge and silent experiencer pronoun are separated is the notorious cat food example (see 2.1.1) which requires additional freedom because – on the preferred reading – the agent of the propositional attitude in (37), Sam, who in her system must be identical to the judge, differs from the individual whose taste is under consideration, i.e. the cat. The problem is solved by binding the implicit argument to the contextually salient cat, thereby yielding the interpretation that Sam (judge) thinks that the cat food is tasty for the cat as judged by Sam, $[[\text{tasty pro}_{\text{cat}}]]^{w,t,SAM}$

- (37) Mary: How's that new brand of cat food you bought?
 Sam: I think it's tasty, because the cat has eaten a lot of it.

In addition to the semantic interpretation of taste predicates, Stephenson gives a pragmatic account of how taste judgments are updated. She posits a common ground à la Stalnaker (1978, 2002) consisting of a set of pairs of worlds and judges (instead of a set of worlds) (neglecting time). Judge parameters are treated like world parameters: for every conversation, there is an actual world and an actual judge. If an assertion is accepted by the group of conversation participants the proposition is added to the common ground. At the same time the judge parameter of the proposition is shifted to the "actual judge". Thus, accepting Sue's assertion that roller coasters are fun requires that each of the discourse participants agrees that roller coasters are fun. This requirement ensures that judges other than the actual one occur only temporarily, and consensus concerning matters of taste is guaranteed throughout the common ground. Note that this has a normative flavor: in uttering (31a) Sue prompts each of the discourse participants to agree with her valuation of roller coasters – when it comes to update, faultless disagreement is no longer accepted.

3.3 Contextualist positions

The most forceful argument against the idea that disagreement in disputes about matters of taste is faultless is provided by the puzzle of the competent speaker given in Stojanovic (2007): A competent speaker of a language will know if a word involves an implicit argument or judge parameter. So why should he bother to express a denial in the first place? For example, if Boban would interpret Agata's utterance in (38) as saying that licorice is tasty to her, or by her judgment, why should he deny her assertion by asserting that licorice is not tasty to himself?

One more argument against considering disputes about taste as faultless stems from Lasersohn himself. In his (2009) paper, when talking about the difference between autocentric, exocentric and

descriptive normative interpretation – *This is fun for the speaker's community* – where the domain of generic quantification is restricted to "normal people". Thirdly, they may have a prescriptive normative interpretation – *This should be fun for the speaker's community*.

Generic accounts are also suggested by **Moltmann (2010)** and **Pearson (2013)**. Moltmann captures the intuition of faultless disagreement not by relativizing the truth value of the proposition to a judge or experiencer, but instead by "grasping the propositional content in a first-personal way, namely by applying the predicate to everyone in the domain as if to oneself." (p.1) This idea is based on her notion of *first-person-based-genericity* where sentences involving *generic one* are understood such that the speaker identifies himself with each individual in the domain quantified over. Simplifying considerably, in Moltmann's approach the sentence '*Licorice is tasty.*' means the same as '*One considers/ finds licorice tasty.*' The sentence in itself has absolute truth conditions, is either true or false. But since different speakers may attribute different properties to the individuals he/she identifies with, truth values may differ between speakers, which is, following Moltmann, the reason for the intuition of faultless disagreement.

Pearson (2013) presents another first person genericity account linking it to the semantics of attitudes *de se*. In Pearson's account, first person indexicals (covert experiencer arguments) and the judge parameter are merged. This leads to a different view on identification: while in Moltmann's account the speaker simulates the individual he/she identifies with, in Pearson's account the speaker empathizes with that individual.

3.3.2 Contextualist positions II: Metalinguistic

In contrast to the genericity-based variants of contextualism, metalinguistic variants locate the disagreement in contextual parameters determining the denotation of predicates. Prominent contextualist/metalinguistic accounts include Glanzberg (2007), Sundell (2011), and Barker (2013). **Glanzberg (2007)** defends a contextualist semantics for predicates of personal taste based on a measure function interpretation of gradable adjectives (cf. Kennedy 1999), such that the scale is parameterized by a class of experiencers *E*. For example, the meaning of *tasty* is spelled out as shown in (39) (= 15a in Glanzberg 2007).

(39) $[[\text{tasty}]]^c = \text{degree of gustatory_quality_experienced_by_}E = \lambda x.\text{tasty}_E(x)$

Glanzberg identifies (at least) two roles for the context in fixing the interpretation of *tasty* or *fun*: (a) fixing the standard (of the positive form) and (b) fixing the experiencer class. (Note that this is the option rejected by Lasersohn due to the possibility of belief reports, see 3.2). Glanzberg concludes, contra Lasersohn, that a contextualist analysis can handle disagreement about taste, and suggests to "reject the notion of faultless disagreement as absurd" (p. 16). In the second part of his paper Glanzberg discusses issues of meta-semantics, i.e. what it is that fixes the values of contextual parameters, in particular how standards are fixed and how they are negotiated (which is why his account is termed "meta-semantic" in Stojanovic 2017).

Another account analyzing disagreement about matters of taste as disagreement about standards is presented in **Sundell (2011)**. The focus in this paper is on distinguishing three types of disagreement, (i) *character disagreement*, about the character of the expression (in the Kaplanian sense, see 3.2),

(ii) *context disagreement*, about the relevant context, and (iii) *content disagreement*, about the truth of the content. Disagreement about matters of taste is, following Sundell, not about the character of the predicates and not about the content of the asserted propositions, but about the context, that is, about the thresholds of gradable predicates.

In **Egan (2010)** the focus is on the prerequisites of disputes about taste rather than the semantics of taste predicates. Still, at the end of the paper Egan presents two options to handle the semantics of sentences asserting taste judgments. The first is based on Lewis' (1979) account of propositional attitudes such that the complements of attitudinal verbs represent properties, together with Stalnaker's (1978) notions of assertion, acceptance and common ground.

The other option consists in "adopting a straightforward contextualist account of the semantics of aesthetic vocabulary, and saying that the connection between accepting S ($\neg S$) and self-attributing P ($\neg P$) is pragmatic, rather than semantic." (Egan 2010) This position implies that the dispute is not about the content of the asserted propositions, but about the question as to which propositions are asserted, that is, about the contextual standards of *tasty*, *fun* etc. Egan finally rejects this option for reasons of pragmatics: although partners in a dispute may eventually conclude that they are not sufficiently similar to come to a common judgment, their conflicting assertions remain in force.²³

The account in **Barker (2013)** is based on Barker (2002) which is well-known due to the distinction between a descriptive usage and a metalinguistic usage of propositions with gradable predicates. Barker's prominent example is shown in (40). Since *tall* is a gradable predicate there has to be a standard, i.e. threshold, given by the context to determine the denotation of the positive form. If the situation is such that information about Feynman's height is required, that is, the question under discussion is the one in (40b), then the assertion in (40a) will make use of the standard given by the context, thereby informing the addressee that Feynman's height is above the standard. This is what Barker calls the descriptive usage.

If, however, the question under discussion is the one in (40c), the assertion in (40a) will provide information about the standard of *tall*, informing the addressee that it is below Feynman's height. This is the metalinguistic usage of the sentence.

Descriptive usage of a sentence conveys information about the world while metalinguistic usage conveys information about the context (or, in Barker's terms, the discourse). Accordingly, for (40a) to address the question in (40b) speaker and addressee have to share the *tall* standard, i.e. knowledge about the context. Addressing the question in (40c), in contrast, presupposes that speaker and addressee share knowledge about Feynman's actual height (e.g., by looking at him), i.e. knowledge about the world/situation.

- | | | | |
|------|----|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| (40) | a. | Feynman is tall. | = (1) in Barker (2002) |
| | b. | What is Feynman's height? | descriptive |
| | c. | What counts as tall in this context? | metalinguistic |

To distinguish between the two usages, a notion of common ground, or context set, is required that consists of worlds and discourses (providing standards of application of predicates, among other things). Thus the common ground contains information about the world and also information about the discourse. Contents are not evaluated at simple worlds, but rather at pairs $\langle w, d \rangle$ consisting of a

²³ This problem is addressed in Umbach (2016) by making use of the discourse framework in Farkas & Bruce (2010), which includes commitment sets of individual discourse participants.

world w and a discourse d such that update may affect either worlds or discourses (or both). The contribution to the truth conditions of a gradable adjective will then depend on both coordinates:

$$[[\text{Feynman is tall}]]^{<w, d>} = \text{height}_w(\text{feynman}) > s_d(\text{tall})$$

The sentence in (40a) will be true at an evaluation point $\langle w, d \rangle$ iff Feynman's degree of height in world w exceeds the standard for tallness given by discourse d . Updating the common ground will eliminate those evaluation points that fail to satisfy the above truth conditions.

The difference between the descriptive and the metalinguistic use is vital in disputes, for example, when Agata claims that Feynman is tall and Boban denies her claim. In a descriptive use of the sentence the discourse, including the standard of *tall*, is supposed to be given, say 180cm. The disagreement between Agata and Boban then is about Feynman's actual height – let us assume that Agata believes that he is 183, while Boban believes that he is only 173. This disagreement can only be resolved by measuring. On a metalinguistic use of the sentence in (40a) Feynman's actual height is supposed to be given, say 180cm. In this case the disagreement between Agata and Boban is about the standard. Agata might believe that it is 175, while Boban believes that it is 185. This disagreement may be solved by a subsequent exchange of arguments.

While Barker (2002) considers gradable adjectives in general, the (2013) paper is about taste predicates. Disagreement about matters of taste is analyzed in Barker (2013) as disagreement about the context/discourse. This entails that statements about matters of taste have a metalinguistic usage but no descriptive usage (which is argued to be wrong in Umbach 2016). Following Barker, disagreement about the context/discourse is, first of all, about the standards of the gradable predicates, but it also includes disagreement about norms saying which aspects are relevant in determining whether a predicate applies. Barker does not plainly reject the idea of faultless disagreement but instead suggests that the intuition of faultlessness is due to the fact that none of the participants has privileged authority over the discourse.

The proposal in **Umbach (2016)** goes beyond metalinguistic accounts in acknowledging that subjective sentences can be used both ways: They can be used metalinguistically to convey information about the context (as in Barker 2013). But they can also be used descriptively to convey information about the world.

The observation that both usages are possible even with subjective adjectives is adopted from Hare (1952), see section 3.5. The idea is that evaluative adjectives are multi-dimensional in the sense that there are criteria that need to be satisfied for the adjective to apply. For example, assume that an apartment counts as beautiful (in a particular context and speaker community) if it is more than 80 sqm, and has a balcony, a large kitchen, a pleasant atmosphere and nice neighbors. The first two criteria are factual: check whether there is a balcony and whether the base area exceeds 80 sqm. The third one refers to a – context-dependent – standard: does the kitchen count as large in this context and speaker community? Since being pleasant is a matter of personal taste, the issue of the pleasant atmosphere depends on the experiencer, or group of experiencers. Finally, the question of whether the neighbors are nice is subjective in the same way as the question of whether the apartment is beautiful, leading into recursion. All in all, criteria for an apartment to be beautiful (in a specific context and speaker community) may include aspects relating to matters of fact, standards of dimensional predicates, matters of personal experience, and evaluative predicates again. It seems

reasonable to assume, however, that in the end, criteria are grounded by either facts or personal experience.²⁴

So, as in the Feynman example in (40), speakers can use subjective sentences either metalinguistically in order to negotiate standards, or descriptively in order to provide information about some worldly entity. And as in the Feynman example, the metalinguistic usage presupposes that speaker and addressee are both familiar with the apartment, and the descriptive usage presupposes that they agree about criteria and standards.

The unresolved issue with this account relates to normativity: When a speaker uses a subjective sentence – *This apartment is beautiful* – in a metalinguistic way, he is not just making a statement saying that this apartment is called *beautiful* (in the current context, etc.) in the same way in which he may make a statement saying that a certain object is called *chair* in English. The former statement crucially differs from the latter in including a valuation which the latter does not.²⁵ Calling an apartment *beautiful* has a normative component: this apartment should be called *beautiful*. This is not accounted for by a (solely) metalinguistic interpretation.

3.4 Kant on the difference between the Agreeable and the Beautiful

In the final two subsections, two prominent sources from philosophy will be presented to provide some broader historical context: Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and Hare's *Language of Morals*. In Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) judgments of taste (including personal taste as well as aesthetics) are characterized in a way surprisingly relevant for linguistics.²⁶ While judgments about factual matters express properties of objects, judgments of taste express properties the subject ascribes to the object. Judgments of taste can be about pleasure (*das Angenehme*) or about beauty (*das Schöne*). The latter claim general validity while the former do not:

"In Ansehung des *Angenehmen* bescheidet sich ein jeder: daß sein Urteil, welches er auf ein Privatgefühl gründet, und wodurch er von einem Gegenstande sagt, daß er ihm gefalle, sich auch bloß auf seine Person einschränke. Daher ist er es gern zufrieden, daß, wenn er sagt: der Kanariensekt ist angenehm, ihm ein anderer den Ausdruck verbessere und ihn erinnere, er solle sagen: er ist *mir* angenehm; [...] Darüber in der Absicht zu streiten und das Urteil anderer, welches von dem unsrigen verschieden ist, gleich als ob es diesem logisch entgegengesetzt wäre, für unrichtig zu schelten, wäre Torheit; und in Ansehung des *Angenehmen* gilt also der Grundsatz: *Ein jeder hat seinen besonderen Geschmack.*" (p. 54)²⁷

In contrast to judgments about pleasure, judgments about beauty demand, following Kant, general validity and thus come with a normative claim – we insist on others agreeing with our taste:

²⁴ This account is technically spelled out with the help of multidimensional attribute spaces and similarity.

Standards are regions in such spaces and are fulfilled by being sufficiently similar, see Gust & Umbach (2015).

²⁵ Further differences between *beautiful* and *chair* include (i) *beautiful* can be used metalinguistically in any context, while the metalinguistic use of *chair* requires special contexts such as language teaching or the Max Black chair museum, see (25), and (ii) *chair* can be taught by ostension, while *beautiful* cannot (see 3.5).

²⁶ This paragraph makes extensive use of the article on aesthetic judgment by Nick Zangwill (2014) in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy which is very clear and comprehensible for non-philosophers as well.

²⁷ As regards the Agreeable, everyone concedes that his judgment, which he bases on a subjective feeling, and in which he declares that an object pleases him, is restricted merely to himself personally. Thus he does not take it amiss if, when he says that Canary wine is agreeable, another corrects the expression and reminds him that he ought to say: *It is agreeable to me.* [...] To quarrel over such points with the idea of condemning another's judgment as incorrect when it differs from our own, as if the opposition between the two judgments were logical, would be folly. With the Agreeable, therefore, the axiom holds good: *Everyone has his own taste.*

"Mit dem Schönen ist es ganz anders bewandt. Es wäre [...] lächerlich, wenn jemand, der sich auf seinen Geschmack etwas einbildete, sich damit zu rechtfertigen gedächte: dieser Gegenstand (das Gebäude, was wir sehen, das Kleid, was jener trägt, das Konzert, was wir hören, das Gedicht, welches zur Beurteilung aufgestellt ist) ist *für mich* schön. [...] Reiz und Annehmlichkeit mag für ihn vieles haben, darum bekümmert sich niemand; wenn er aber etwas für schön ausgibt, so mutet er andern eben dasselbe Wohlgefallen zu: er urteilt nicht bloß für sich, sondern für jedermann, und spricht alsdann von der Schönheit, als wäre sie eine Eigenschaft der Dinge. Er sagt daher, die Sache ist schön, und rechnet nicht etwa darum auf Anderer Einstimmung in sein Urteil des Wohlgefallens, weil er sie mehrmalen mit dem seinigen einstimmig befunden hat, sondern fordert es von ihnen. Er tadelt sie, wenn sie anders urteilen, und spricht ihnen den Geschmack ab [...] und sofern kann man nicht sagen: *Ein jeder hat seinen besonderen Geschmack.*" (p. 55)²⁸

Kant's distinction between judgments concerning pleasure and those concerning beauty is surprisingly close to the difference discussed in section 2 between predicates of personal taste, which license experiencer arguments, and aesthetic and dimensional predicates, which do not. Following Kant, when making a judgment concerning beauty the speaker has a normative intention ("... when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others."), and in the case of disagreement he is entitled to insist, in the way Agata in (38b) insists on her claim. In contrast, when making a judgment concerning pleasure, the speaker is aware that his claim is relative to his own experience and he should be willing to backtrack if the addressee does not agree, in the way Agata behaves in (38a). From the point of view of Kant's distinction predicates of personal taste are experiencer-dependent allowing for faultless disagreement, while aesthetic and dimensional predicates give rise to genuine disagreement.

3.5 Hare on the meaning of good

The other source from philosophy is Hare's (1952) book "The Language of Morals", which presents an expressivist position towards value judgments. There are more recent highly sophisticated expressivist approaches, for instance Gibbard (1986). Hare is relevant in the context of the semantics of evaluative predicates because his approach is what is called "hybrid expressivism" (Camp 2017). Hare argues that value judgments include, (i), an expressive component encoding a commending function and, (ii) a descriptive component relating to criteria of application. Even though Hare is not fully explicit about their relation, his approach indicates a promising way of combining expressivist meaning with criteria of application.

²⁸ The Beautiful stands on quite a different footing. It would, on the contrary, be ridiculous if any one who prides himself on his taste were to think of justifying himself by saying: This object (the building we see, the dress that person has on, the concert we hear, the poem submitted to our criticism) is beautiful for me. [...] Many things may for him possess charm and agreeableness – no one cares about that; but when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for all men, and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Thus he says that the thing is beautiful; and it is not as if he counts on others agreeing with him in his judgment of liking owing to his having found them in such agreement on a number of occasions, but he demands this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently, and denies them taste, which he still requires of them as something they ought to have; and to this extent it is not open to men to say: *Everyone has his own taste.* (translation by J. C. Meredith, cf. wikisource)

Hare's primary example for value judgements is the predicate *good*. Following Hare, there is no property shared by good things – a good motor car and a good picture and a good meal have nothing in common apart from being good. So there is no regular denotational meaning of *good*. But there is what Hare calls the commending function of *good*: calling a motor car or a picture or a meal good means commending it.

The commending function constitutes the evaluative meaning component of *good*. In addition there is, following Hare, a descriptive meaning component. Although *good* has no regular denotation there are criteria relative to comparison class, speaker community, time etc. establishing a highly context-dependent standard for something to be called *good*. As far as they relate to factual properties criteria of *good* create a denotational meaning relative to a particular domain. This is the reason why value judgments may provide factual information.

Hare's primary example is *good motor car*. Suppose someone has been told that a particular car M (say, a Mercedes Benz) is a good motor car. Suppose, moreover, this person knows nothing about M, but he knows what the accepted standard of goodness in motor cars is: "He will complain that I have misled him, if he subsequently discovers that M will not go over 30 m.p.h., or uses as much oil as petrol, or is covered with rust, or has large holes in the roof. His reason for complaining will be the same as it would have been if I had said that the car was red and he subsequently discovered that it was black. I should have led him to expect the motor-car to be of a certain description when in fact it was of a quite different description." (Hare 1952, 113).

One consequence of the lack of a regular denotation is that the predicate *good*, in contrast to *red*, cannot be taught by ostension – there is no common property to infer from examples as diverse as good motor cars, good pictures, and good meals. Restricting the domain to motor cars someone may be taught by ostension to distinguish good motor cars from bad ones. Still, he will not have learned that calling something good means commending it. Another consequence of the lack of a regular denotation is the fact that the predicate *good*, in contrast to *red*, cannot be redefined in the sense of changing the denotation:

"It may happen that motor-cars will in the near future change considerably in design [...]. It may be that then we shall cease giving the name 'a good motor-car' to a car that now would rightly and with the concurrence of all be allowed that name. [...] we may begin to say 'No cars of the nineteen-fifties were really good; there weren't any good ones till 1960'." Such a shift in meaning is not a redefinition but a change of standard and makes essential use of the fact that the evaluative meaning of *good*, that is, the commending function, stays constant. [...] we are doing what would be called, if 'good' were a purely descriptive word, redefining it. But we cannot call it that, for the evaluative meaning remains constant; we are rather altering the standard." (p. 119).

Consider the sentence *A Honda Civic is a good motor car*. Suppose the addressee is familiar with Honda Civics, but he knows nothing about criteria for good motor cars. Then this sentence provides information about the criteria counting as good-making ones, that is, it provides information about the standard of *good* in the context of motor cars (plus speaker community, time, etc.) – being a good motor car is being like a Honda Civic. This is what Barker (2002 / 2013) calls the metalinguistic usage of a proposition. Now suppose that the addressee is not familiar with Honda Civics. But he agrees with the speaker on what the criteria for good motor cars are. Then the same sentence provides information on Honda Civics, namely that they satisfy the agreed-on criteria for good motor cars. This is what Barker calls the descriptive usage of a proposition.

So following Hare's analysis there is a descriptive usage of evaluative statements in addition to the metalinguistic usage even in the case of evaluative predicates like *good*. This entails that evaluative statements may convey factual information, which is a strong argument against purely metalinguistic analyses as suggested by Barker, Sundell and Glanzberg.

In Hare's theory, the normative component of value judgments – the commending function – appears as a speech-act-like component, thus leading to the notorious Frege-Geach problem, which does not yet have a satisfactory solution (see Schroeder 2008, Willer 2017)

4 Conclusion

In the first part of this paper the focus was on data: A range of predicates expressing matters of taste or valuation were considered addressing the question of which predicates should be subsumed under the notion of evaluative predicates and why – what are the criteria for a predicate to count as evaluative? It turned out that evaluative predicates are more diverse than is generally assumed. We found five major classes – personal taste predicates (*tasty, fun*), one-dimensional predicates (*tall*), two types of (mere) multi-dimensional predicates (*healthy* and *smart*) and aesthetics predicates (*beautiful*). Main differences consist in (i) whether the comparison form is subjective, (ii) whether experiencer arguments are grammatical, and (iii) whether embedding under subjective attitude verbs is licensed.

In concluding the data part we had a brief look at the subjective attitude verb *find* in English and its counterparts in German, French, and Norwegian, which show significant distributional differences. These findings cast doubt on the suitability of subjective attitude verbs as a general testing ground for subjectivity.

In the second part of this paper, the focus was on semantic theories. A range of theoretical positions were considered including relativist accounts as well as generic and metalinguistic varieties of contextualist positions. Finally, insights from two prominent sources from philosophy – Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and Hare's *Language of Morals* – were presented, making it quite clear that the issue of subjectivity and value judgments is neither novel nor settled.

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