Acquaintance content & obviation

An opinionated guide to predicates of personal taste

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Jarmush 1984

– Cleveland. It's a beautiful city.
– Yes?
– Yeah.
– It's got a big, beautiful lake. You'll love it there.
– Have you been there?
– No, no.

(Stranger Than Paradise)

The upshot

Acquaintance Inference (AI) (Wollheim 1980; Ninan 2014)

A firsthand experience requirement with subjective expressions: Predicates of Personal Taste (PPTs), psych predicates, subjective attitudes, ...

Larger issues and the epistemology of personal taste

Why do these expressions have this? (Bylinina 2017; Muñoz 2017)

Today: AI obviation and cross-constructional variation

- What is "this": form, dimension of meaning, ...?
- When and why does it go away?
- Verdict: different types of acquaintance content
  1. bare PPTs: a special evidential restriction
  2. other constructions: a classic presupposition

Basic data

The pattern

- AI arises with subjective expressions (Stephenson 2007; Pearson 2013; Klecha 2014; Ninan 2014; Kennedy and Willer 2016; Bylinina 2017)
- AI cannot be explicitly denied

(1) a. PPT:
The puerh was **delicious**, #but I never tasted it.

b. PSYCH PREDICATE:
The piano **sounded** out of tune, #but I've never heard it.

c. SUBJECTIVE ATTITUDE:
I **consider** the dress blue and black, #but I've never seen it.

Basic data, cont'd

AI survives under negation:

(2) a. PPT
The puerh wasn't **delicious**, #but I never tasted it.

b. Psych predicate
The piano **didn't sound** out of tune, #but I never heard it.

c. Subjective attitude
I don't **consider** the dress blue and black, #but I never seen it.

Basic data, cont'd

AI may disappear in the scope of epistemic *might*:

(3) a. PPT
✓The puerh **might have been delicious**, though I never tasted it.

b. Psych predicate
✓The piano **might have sounded** out of tune, though I've never heard it.

c. Subjective attitude
✓I **might have considered** the dress blue and black, though I've never seen it.

The Puzzle

Why obviation is possible and explicit denials aren't?

Directness and type of experience

- Sample size issues:

(4) a. Incomplete experience:
✓I only watched { the trailer / the first five minutes }. This movie is **boring**.

b. No experience:
#This new Allen movie is **boring**. I haven't watched it, but all his movies are the same.

NB type-token ambiguity, e.g. *this curry you made* vs. *Massaman curry*

- Type of perception

(5) My blindfolded dance last night was **gorgeous**. I couldn't see what I was doing, but I could feel my body in each position.

Directness and type of experience, cont'd

- Thresholds: professionals vs. laypeople
- World knowledge:

(6) That curry is **tasty**.

reading a recipe	#
looking at a picture	#
see other patrons ordering/eating it	??
reading reviews	?

$\Rightarrow$ a much broader question of how natural language conceptualizes evidence and (in)directness; see (Faller 2002; McCready 2015; Korotkova 2016) and references therein

Evidentiality

- A linguistic category that denotes information source for the proposition expressed by a sentence (Aikhenvald 2004)
- **English**: lexical means, e.g. *seem* or adverbials

(7) Threatened by climate change, Florida **reportedly** bans term 'climate change'. *Washington Post*

- **Many other languages**: dedicated grammatical means (verbal morphology, clitics, particles, ...) to talk about information source:

Direct	Indirect	
	Inference	Hearsay
• visual • auditory • other sensory	• reasoning • results	• secondhand • thirdhand • folklore

(Willett (1988) based on a 32-language sample)

Evidentiality, cont'd

(8) Cuzco Quechua (Quechuan; Peru)

a. para-sha-n=**mi** [FIRSTHAND]
rain-PROG-3=**DIR**
'It is raining, ***I see***.'

b. para-sha-n=**si** [HEARSAY]
rain-PROG-3=**REP**
'It is raining, ***I hear***.'

c. para-sha-n=**chá** [CONJECTURE]
rain-PROG-3=**CONJ**
'It must be raining, ***I gather***.'

(adapted from Faller 2002: 3)

Directness

(9) Range of meanings of *mi* in Cuzco Quechua

a. Knowledge from encyclopedia

Africa-pi-**n** elefante-kuna-qa ka-n
Africa-LOC-**DIR** elephant-PL-TOP be-3
'In Africa, there are elephants.' (Faller 2002: 133, ex.100b)

b. Faith

Dius kan-**mi**.
God be-**DIR**
'God exists.' (Faller 2002: 132, ex.99)

Evidentiality, cont'd

Evidential perfects (Izvorski 1997)

- (Present) perfect morphology that signals hearsay and inference
- Especially common in the Anatolia-Balkans-Caucasus region

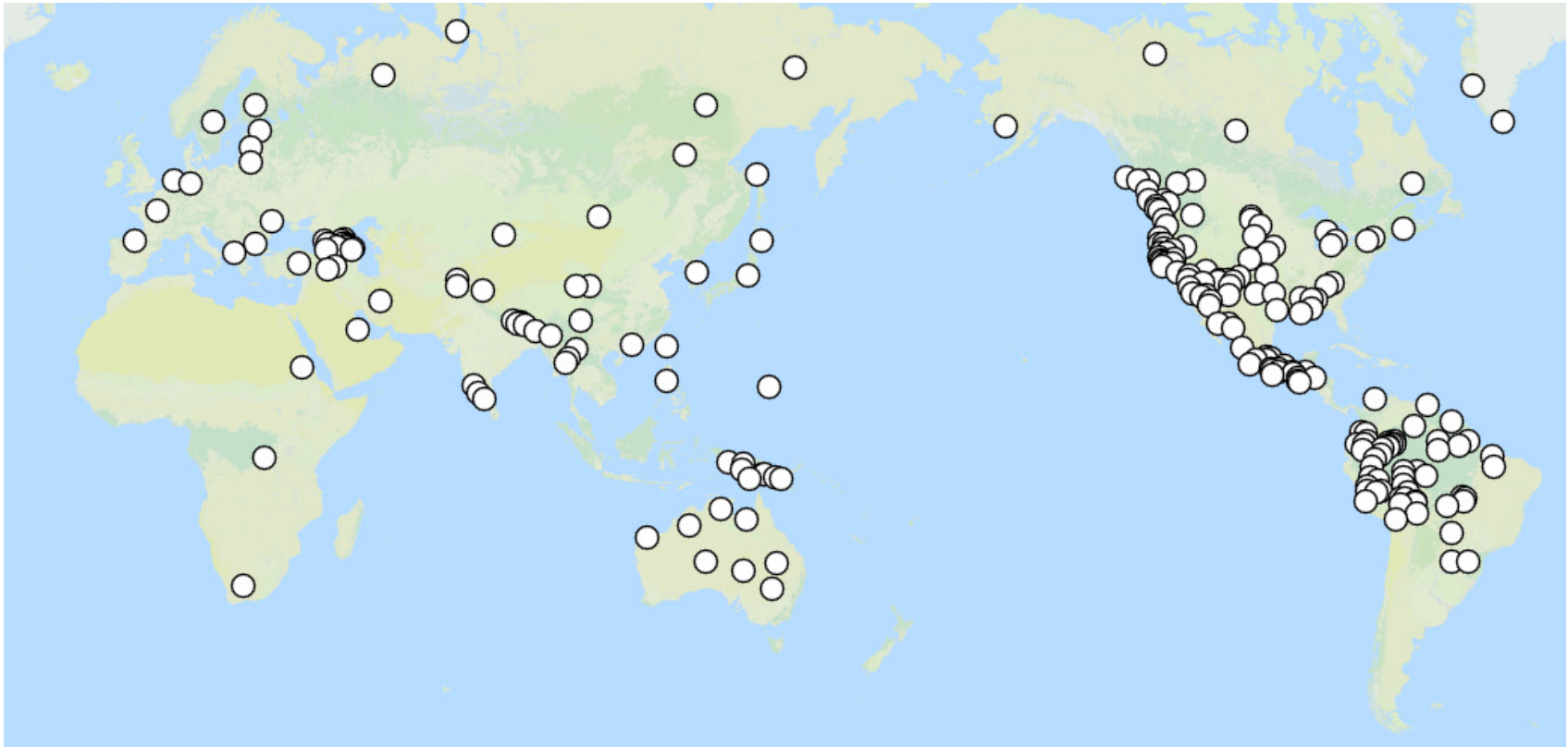
(10) Georgian (South Caucasian; Georgia, Azerbaijan)

C1: My brother says that the dragon hid the treasure. [HEARSAY]
C2:The dragon's cave is empty. [INFERENCE]

urʧxul-s gandʒ-i **daumalia**
dragon-DAT treasure-NOM hide.3SG.S.3SG.O.**IND.PST**
'The dragon hid the treasure, ***I hear/infer***.'

Evidentiality, cont'd

237 out of 414 languages in WALS:
dedicated grammatical means to talk about information source



World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS) Online (de Haan 2013b,a)

AI obviation

The AI isn't always present: it may disappear in the scope of some *obviators* (cf. Pearson 2013; Klecha 2014; Ninan 2014)

(11) The cake .....delicious, but I never tasted it.

a. EPISTEMIC MODAL AUXILIARIES:
✓**must/might** have been

b. EPISTEMIC ADVERBS:
✓**probably/possibly/maybe** was

c. PREDICATES OF EVIDENCE/CLARITY:
✓**obviously/certainly/apparently** was

d. FUTURATE OPERATORS:
✓**will/is going to** be

AI obviation, cont'd

- English obviators convey indirectness; cf. recent work on epistemic *must*
- Grammatical markers of indirect evidentiality follow the pattern

(12) Turkish (Turkic: Turkey)

a. BARE FORM:

#Durian güzel, ama hiç dene-me-di-m.
durian good, but ever try-NEG-PST-1SG
Intended: 'Durian is good, but I've never tried it'.

b. EVIDENTIAL *miş*:

✓Durian güzel-**miş**, ama hiç dene-me-di-m.
durian good-**IND**, but ever try-NEG-PST-1SG
'Durian is good, *I hear/infer*, but I've never tried it'.

Additional avenues of obviation

(13) a. EMPHATIC CERTAINTY
I {know, am certain} that the cake is tasty, but I haven't tried it.

b. HEDGES
I {assume, think} that the cake is tasty, but I haven't tried it.

Ninan (2014)

An epistemologically grounded norm of assertion

In order to know the truth of *o is tasty*, the speaker must have prior experience with *o*.

1. Assertions of unmarked propositions
   - assume such knowledge
   - trigger the AI
   - cf. parallel to Moore's paradox
2. Assertions of marked (modalized, hedged, ...) propositions
   - are not subject to this convention
   - allow obviation

Problems: Exocentric readings

- The pragmatic approach is rooted in the **speaker**'s knowledge
- but the taster $\neq$ the speaker (cf. relativist accounts): e.g. there exist non-autocentric readings (Lasersohn 2005; Stephenson 2007)
- incorrect prediction: no AI for those

(14) EXOCENTRIC AI:
Hobbes's new food is tasty, #but no cat has ever tried it yet.

(15) EXOCENTRIC AI OBVIATION:
Hobbes's new food .....tasty, ✓but no cat has ever tried it yet.

a. ✓**must/might** be

b. ✓**probably/possibly/maybe** is

c. ✓**obviously/certainly/apparently** is

d. ✓**will/is going to** be

The bottom line

Ninan's (2014) account explains the puzzle, but fails to accommodate the exocentric AI

Pearson (2013)

Core proposal (simplified)

1. First-person genericity (Bhatt and Pancheva 1998; Anand 2009; and especially Moltmann 2010, 2012)
2. An experience presupposition

- PPTs: Chierchia's (1995) individual-level predicates

(16) a. This is tasty.

b. [This$_i$ [GEN t_i is tasty]

- GEN: binds the taster and is restricted by quantificational domain restriction *Dom*

(17) a. $[\![\text{ tasty-to }]\!]^{c,w} =$
$\lambda x.\lambda o.$ **x has tried o in w.** 1 iff o is tasty to x in w

b. $[\forall \langle x, w' \rangle : x \in \mathit{Dom}]$ [the cake is tasty-to x in w']

c. $[\forall \langle x, w' \rangle : x \in \mathit{Dom}]$ [x has tried o in w']

Pearson (2013), cont'd

1. Exocentric AI explained:
   - The AI does not depend on who is the taster: the presupposition is generic
   - Default: the speaker $\in$ *Dom*
   - The speaker can be irrelevant in classic exocentric cases, so the speaker $\notin$ *Dom*
2. Obviation explained (based on *must*, extrapolated to other cases):
   - The speaker can be irrelevant if the speaker hasn't tried *o* so the speaker $\notin$ *Dom*
   - *must*: a signal of indirectness (von Fintel and Gillies 2010; Lassiter 2016)
   - Because the speaker is irrelevant, obviation is felicitous

Problems

1. Reasoning for *must* carries over to explicit denials (cf. Ninan 2014)
   - Incorrect prediction: the speaker's irrelevance should license denials
2. Speaker's irrelevance
   - Incorrect prediction: the speaker, when not in *Dom*, is necessarily irrelevant and is not committing to a judgment on *o* if/when they do try it

(18) Just look at it! The cake { is, must be } delicious, #but I am going to find it disgusting.

The bottom line

Pearson's (2013) account doesn't solve the puzzle and overgenerates

A direct proposal

Key components

- PPTs comment on direct evidential grounds of a proposition
- Obviators update the parameter of evaluation PPTs depend on

A direct proposal, cont'd

- Framework for directness: von Fintel and Gillies's (2010) kernels

(19)
a. *kernel* of propositions K encodes direct knowledge

b. the proposition $\bigcap K$ is the set worlds compatible with what is known directly and indirectly

c. kernels are provided via an interpretive coordinate (cf. Yalcin's (2007) information states; also Hacquard 2006)

d. evaluation indices: minimally 4-tuples: ⟨world, time, kernel, judge⟩

A direct proposal, cont'd

- The semantics for PPTs:

(20) a. $[\![\textit{tasty}]\!]^{c,\langle w,t,K,j\rangle} = \lambda o$:
K directly settles whether o is tasty for j in w at t. 1 iff o is tasty for j in w at t

b. X directly settles whether p iff
$\exists q \in X\ [\ q \subseteq p \ \vee\ q \cap p = \emptyset\ ]$

- Exocentric AI explained: kernel is independent of who the taster is
- AI arises both in affirmative and negative sentences

Obviation explained

Obviators signal the lack of direct knowledge by eliminating the direct vs. indirect restriction

(21) a. $[\![\text{ must } \alpha]\!]^{c,\langle w,t,\mathbf{K},j\rangle} = [\![\text{ must }]\!]^{c,\langle w,t,K,j\rangle}([\![\alpha]\!]^{c,\langle w,t,\bigcap \mathbf{K},j\rangle})$

b. Given the semantics for PPTs:
$[\![\text{ must [the curry is tasty] }]\!]^{c,\langle w,t,K,j\rangle}$ is defined
iff $\{\bigcap K\}$ directly settles whether the curry is tasty

c. vF&G's semantics for *must*:
$[\![\text{ must }]\!]^{c,\langle w,t,K,j\rangle}$
$= \lambda p :$ K does not directly settle whether p. $\bigcap K \subseteq p$

NB: the proposal is agnostic about the relation between categories of evidentiality and epistemic modality; see (Matthewson 2012; Korotkova 2016) for discussion

Overt tasters

- Overt tasters: *to*/*for* PPs
- A common unified view: the existence of experiencer PPs taken as evidence for a diadic treatment (a.o. Bhatt and Pancheva 1998; Stephenson 2007; Stojanovic 2007; Pearson 2013)
- Our proposal so far: only bare uses

Variation in AI obviation

- Prediction of the common view: overt tasters behave the same wrt obviation
- Prediction not borne out:

(22) OVERT TASTER PPs:
The puerh .....delicious to me, but I never tasted it.

a. **#must/✓might** have been — EPISTEMIC MODAL AUXILIARIES

b. **#probably/#possibly/#maybe** was — EPISTEMIC ADVERBS

c. **✓will/✓is going to** be — FUTURATE OPERATORS

d. **#obviously/#certainly/#apparently** — PREDICATES OF CLARITY

Variation in AI obviation, cont'd

Overt taster PPT pattern with other subjective expressions:

(23) PSYCH PREDICATE WITH AN EXPERIENCER:
The puerh .....delicious to me, but I never tasted it.

a. **#must/✓might** have looked EPISTEMIC MODAL AUXILIARIES

b. **#probably/#possibly/#maybe** looked EPISTEMIC ADVERBS

c. **✓will/✓is going to** look FUTURATE OPERATORS

d. **#obviously/#certainly/#apparently** looked ED. OF CLARITY

Variation in AI obviation, cont'd

Overt taster PPT pattern with other subjective expressions:

(24) SUBJECTIVE ATTITUDE:
I .....the cake delicious, but I never tasted it.

a. **#must/✓might** have found — EPISTEMIC MODAL AUXILIARIES

b. **#probably/#possibly/#maybe** found — EPISTEMIC ADVERBS

c. **✓will/✓is going to** find — FUTURATE OPERATORS

d. **#obviously/#certainly/#apparently** found — INDICATES OF CLARITY

Variation in AI obviation, cont'd

Obviators	Covert experiencers		Overt experiencers		
	PPT	Psych	PPT	Psych	Subjective att
must	✓	✓	#	#	#
might	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
epistemic adverbs	✓	✓	#	#	#
futurate markers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
predicates of clarity	✓	✓	#	#	#

Obviation facts support a disjoint treatment of bare vs. "overt" uses (cf. Lasersohn 2005; MacFarlane 2014)

- Extending the proposal: overt tasters depend on the DP's kernel

(25) $[\![\text{ tasty to } \alpha]\!]^{c,i} = \lambda o$: the kernel of $[\![\alpha]\!]^{c,i}$ in w at t directly settles whether o is tasty to j in w at t. 1 iff o is tasty to j in w at t

1. Unmarked cases: the same as bare uses (modulo the taster)
2. Modification with obviators:
   - indirect markers do not update the kernel coordinate of the taster DP
   - contradictory requirements

(26) $[\![\text{ must [the curry is tasty] }]\!]^{c,\langle w,t,K,j\rangle}$ is defined
[**imposed by *must***] iff K **does not** directly **settle** whether the curry is tasty to Mo $\wedge$
[**imposed by PPT**] iff K directly **settles** whether the curry is tasty to Mo

Conclusion

1. Discussion of previous approaches to the AI
2. Differentiating types of acquaintance content
3. Proposal rooted in the research on (in)directness
   - Extension 1: obviation is a diagnostic of indirectness rather than modality (contra Klecha 2014)
   - Extension 2: attitudes are taken to be obviators (cf. Yalcin 2007)
4. Future work
   - interaction with *bona fide* markers of direct evidentiality
   - relation to other expressions with similar restrictions, e.g. English copy-raising constructions (Asudeh and Toivonen 2012; Rett, Hyams, and Winans 2013) and expressions dealing with internal states across languages

Parallel: Other expressions with similar restrictions

Egophoric agreement (Coppock and Wechsler 2018; Floyd, Norcliffe, and Roque forth.) and **experiencer predicates** (Kuroda 1973; Speas and Tenny 2003; Tenny 2006)

- Bare uses impose a first-person constraint
- Indirect markers obviate it

(27) Japanese experiencer predicates

a. BARE USES:

watashi-wa / *anata-wa / *kare-wa sabishii desu.
I-TOP / you-TOP / he-TOP lonely COP.PRES
'I am / *you are / *he is lonely.' (Tenny 2006: 247; ex.2)

b. OBVIATION:

kare wa sabishii rashii
he TOP lonely IND.EV
'He seems to be lonely.'

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