Day 1: Introduction & Empirical Landscape

An opinionated guide to the language of opinion

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Introduction

Star Trek *The Next Generation* (1988)

Data: Mr. Comic, I wish to know what funny is.

Mr. Comic: Funny? I don't know, it's a matter of opinion I guess.

(Season 2, Episode 4)

Subjective Predicates (SPs)

describe subjective judgment (≈in the eye of beholder) (another term: discretionary, Kölbel 2004; Coppock 2018)

- ► tasty
- ► delicious
- ► fun
- ► . . .

Other Predicates (OPs)

describe objective properties (≈facts of the world)

- ► nuclear
- ► local
- ► deciduous
- ► . . .

Class outlook

Goals

a focused examination of the SP-OP distinction
a biased guide into the literature (cf. von Fintel and Gillies 2008 on epistemic modals)

1. Distinguished linguistic profile of SPs
   - Grammatical properties
   - Conversational dynamics

2. Theories of SP exceptionalism
   - The nature of the beholder
   - Contextualism-relativism debate in a nutshell
   - Adjudicating theories of subjective meaning

Roadmap

Day 1 Empirical landscape: how SPs differ

Day 2 Theoretical landscape: SP exceptionalism

Day 3 SPs in attitudes: not so different, after all

Day 4 The Acquaintance Inference: *tasty* only if I tried it

Day 5 Subjective attitudes: *find*, *consider* and their like

What is subjective judgment? I

- Formal semantics, philosophy of language
  - Two fundamentally different classes: SPs vs. OPs
- Categorical thinking common in general but things are changing
  - Probabilistic approaches to modality (Yalcin 2010; Lassiter 2017; Moss 2018 a.o.)
  - At-Issue vs. Not-At-Issue divide as a continuum (Tonhauser et al. 2018)
  - …

What is subjective judgment? II

▶ Computational literature on sentiment analysis; also **appraisal theory** (Scherer 2005; Moors et al. 2013 a.o.)

  ▶ Subjectivity-objectivity is scalar, cf. SentiWordNet (lexical database for opinion mining, Baccianella et al. 2010; based on WordNet, a model of semantic organization, Fellbaum 2017)

	Positive	Negative	Objective
attractive, superb	0.875	0	0.125
beautiful, delicious, good	0.75	0	0.25
tasty	0.625	0.25	0.125
fun	0.375	0	0.625
fascinating, tall	0.5	0	0.5
vegetarian	0	0.375	0.625
acidic	0	0.125	0.875
deciduous, popular	0	0	1

What is subjective judgment? III

- Many semantic domains involve subjective judgment (Kölbel 2004; Martin and White 2005; Jackendoff 2007; Anand 2009)
    - PROWESS: *passable, acceptable*
    - APPRECIATION: *beautiful, handsome, ungrammatical*
    - AFFECT: *pleasant, scary, exhilarating*
    - BENEFIT: *dangerous, safe*
    - ESTEEM: *wise, foolish, historic*
    - NORMATIVE: *good, bad*
    - VALUE: *important, desirable, valuable*
    - PROBABILITY: *likely, improbable*
    - …
- Are there any meaningful differences?

What are SPs?

- Much of the literature: *fun* and *tasty*, hence the term **predicates of personal taste** (PPT) (Lasersohn 2005 a.o.)
- No clear-cut distinction between classic PPTs vs. other SPs (all classified as 'evaluative' in Bierwisch 1989)
- Lack of settled procedure of singling out PPTs (cf. Lasersohn 2005; Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009; Egan 2010; Moltmann 2010; Pearson 2013; Bylinina 2017; Anand and Korotkova 2021)
- Philosophical literature: special status of aesthetic judgment and, by extension, of aesthetic predicates (Young 2017; Briesen 2019; Zangwill 2019 a.o.)
- Agenda for now: look at SPs at large

Distinguished linguistic profile

- Conversational dynamics
  - Faultless disagreement (unlike OPs)
  - Normative effect (unlike corresponding self-attributions)
- Grammatical properties
  - Individual-level (unlike OPs, which can be stage-level, and unlike episodic uses of psych predicates)
  - Non-autocentric uses (unlike many perspectival expressions)
  - Overt tasters (some SPs; no OPs)
  - Acquaintance Inference (some SPs; no OPs)
  - Appear under *find*-verbs

Conversational dynamics

Faultless disagreement

Regular disagreement
If A believes ϕ and B believes $\neg\phi$, one of them is at fault

(1)　A.　The giant sequoia is an **evergreen** tree.

　　B.　No, the giant sequoia isn't **evergreen**, it is a **deciduous** tree.

Faultless disagreement (Kölbel 2004)
If A believes ϕ and B believes $\neg\phi$, it may be that none is at fault
(see recent discussions in MacFarlane 2014:118–137; Zakkou 2019)

(2)　A.　The giant sequoia is an **elegant** tree.

　　B.　No, the giant sequoia isn't **elegant**.

Does faultless disagreement exist? I

Faultless disagreement should not exist

- ϕ and $\neg\phi$ are **contradictory** (provided it is feasible to know which one is true)
- Believing—and asserting—things known to not be true is a mistake
- Either A or B makes a mistake
- **Main question:** what's up with apparent cases of FD?

Does faultless disagreement exist? II

Faultless disagreement does not exist

- ▶ A or B does make a mistake
- ▶ **Main problem:** how to capture intuitive and robust difference between objective vs. subjective discourse?

Does faultless disagreement exist? III

Faultless disagreement isn't faultless

- ▶ FD: Dispute about imprecision, as with contextual standards with vague and gradable predicates (Glanzberg 2007)

(3) A (from Scotland).   Ben Nevis is a **tall** mountain.

   B (from Switzerland).   No, it isn't.
   (Ben Nevis is the highest mountain in Scotland at 4.411 ft / 1.345 m)

- ▶ FD: Metalinguistic dispute, as with linguistic conventions/definitions (Barker 2002; Plunkett and Sundell 2013)

(4) A.   Switzerland is in the heart of Europe.

   B.   No, Switzerland isn't a part of Europe at all!
   (cf. Kennedy and Willer's (2016) ex.6)

- ▶ **Main problem:** no way to fix subjective matters (e.g. taste or pain) in the same way

Does faultless disagreement exist? IV

Faultless disagreement isn't a disagreement

- ▶ FD: Not a dispute, just a discussion of preferences/attitudes, which aren't truth-evaluable (most expressivist accounts)

(5) A. Milky oolong is delicious. ≈ I like milky oolong.
     B. Milky oolong isn't delicious. ≈ I don't like milky oolong.

- ▶ **Main problem**: compositional semantics

Does faultless disagreement exist? V

Bottom line

- Faultless disagreement exists
- Faultless disagreement is a cornerstone of SP exceptionalism

A taste of SP exceptionalism I

- ▶ Baseline assumption: SPs are special
- ▶ Key question: whose opinion is expressed by SPs?
- ▶ Intuitive answer: the speaker's
- ▶ Common treatment:
  - ▶ hard-wired subjectivity   [more on Day 2]
  - ▶ SPs as self-attributions

(6) a. $[\![$ evergreen $]\!]^{c,w} = \lambda x.\ x$ is evergreen in w [OP]

  b. $[\![$ elegant $]\!]^{c,w} = \lambda x.\ x$ is elegant **to me** in w [SP]

A taste of SP exceptionalism II

- ▶ Vanilla self-attributions: no faultless disagreement

(7) A.   I find the giant sequoia elegant.   [overt speaker's perspective]

     B.   # No, it isn't elegant.

     B'.   # No, you don't.

- ▶ Such dialogues: disagreements about one's private attitude, **generally infelicitous** (Bar-On 2004; Korotkova 2016a a.o.)

A taste of SP exceptionalism III

- Tension:
  - Capture faultlessness: SPs vs. OPs
  - Capture variation: SPs vs. overt self-attributions

- Natural language: a variety of 1-person content (Mitchell 1986; Anand 2006; Lasersohn 2017; Podobryaev 2017; Zu 2018 a.o.)
  - SPs typically considered as a special type
  - Many ways to formalize this intuition   [come to Day 2]

- Helpful analogy: fluidity of *we*

(8)   **We** [collaborator and me] will finish the paper this afternoon, then **we** [spouse and me] will go for a walk.

(based on Weatherson and Egan 2011:5)

A taste of SP exceptionalism IV

▶ Normative/generic effect: self-attributions vs. SPs (cf. Crespo, Karawani, and Veltman 2018)

(9) a. I like milky oolong.

b. Milky oolong is delicious.

▶ Assertion acceptance (see Stalnaker 1978; Farkas and Bruce 2010; Fogal et al. 2018 a.o. on assertion)

  ▶ Standard cases under mainstream views: the common ground updated with ϕ if proposal is accepted   [more in Geurts' class]
  ▶ SP-claims: all interlocutors committed to subjective judgment if proposal accepted (Stephenson 2007a; Egan 2010; Rudin and Beltrama 2019 a.o.)

A note on epistemic modality

▶ **Disagreement** (see especially Khoo 2015, 2017; noted already in Kölbel 2004)

(10) *Context: Everyone present acknowledges that Joe might be in Berkeley, and so no one thinks there are going to be grounds to assert that he is in Boston. The point of conversation is to settle whether he might be in Boston. So, in the following dialogue:*

    A.   Joe **might** be in Boston.

    B.   That's wrong.

    (i) = 'It is not the case that Joe might be in Boston'.   **about** $\Diamond p$
    (ii) $\neq$ 'It is not the case that Joe is in Boston'.   **about** p

                 (adapted from MacFarlane 2011:148)

▶ Epistemics (in some uses, notably root declaratives): target group knowledge (observation goes back to Hacking 1967)

▶ Several frameworks treat SPs and epistemics on a par
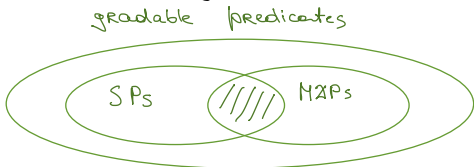(Stephenson 2007a; Schaffer 2011; MacFarlane 2014 a.o.)

SPs and multi-dimensionality I

- All SPs: **gradable** (see Kennedy and McNally 2005; Wellwood 2019; Hohaus and Bochnak 2020 a.o. on gradability and degrees)

    - Degree modifiers: *too/very beautiful*
    - Comparative constructions: . . . *more delicious than* . . .
    - . . .

- Gradable predicates

    - Uni-dimensional: *deep, tall, wide* . . .
    - Multi-dimensional: *mediocre, smart, sick, healthy* . . .

SPs and multi–dimensionality II

▶ Multi–dimensional predicates: seem to give rise to faultless disagreement

(11) A. Beth is sick.

  B. No, she isn't.

Not all multi–dimensional predicates are SPs (Kennedy 2013; Sassoon 2013; Solt 2018)

▶ More empirical diagnostics neeeded!

Grammatical properties

Core properties

- *Find*-verbs: litmus test for subjectivity
- Non-autocentric uses
- Acquaintance Inference (some SPs; no OPs)
- Overt tasters (some SPs; no OPs)

Find-verbs I

▶ English *find*: only complements that are matters of opinion
(Stephenson 2007b; Sæbø 2009; Kennedy and Willer 2016; Vardomskaya 2018)

(12)   a.   Magda thinks that hobbits are ✓**endearing** / ✓**mortal**.
         b.   Magda finds hobbits ✓**endearing** [SP] / # **mortal** [OP].

▶ Discovery-*find*: not subjective, generally different (Vardomskaya 2018)

Find-verbs II

- **Same pattern across languages** (German *finden*, Lande 2009; Reis 2013; Frühauf 2015; French *trouver* Bouchard 2012; Norwegian *synes*, Lande 2009; Sæbø 2009; Swedish *tycka*, Coppock 2018)

(13)   Norwegian (Germanic; Norway)

Magda   synes   at   kjempesequoiatre–et   er
Magda   be.of.opinion   COMP   giant.sequoia.tree–DEF.N   be.PRES
et   ✓**elegan–t** / # **eviggrøn–t**   tre.
INDEF.N   **elegant-N** / **evergreen-N** tree
≈ 'Magda is of the opinion that the giant sequoia is an ✓elegant / #evergreen tree .'

Find-verbs III

▶ Contrast with faultless disagreement: only 'inherently' subjective cases

(14)   a.   **Imprecision**
           #Magda finds Ben Nevis **tall**.

       b.   **Metalinguistic disagreement**
           #Magda finds Switzerland a **European** nation.

       c.   **Multi–dimensional non–SPs**
           #Magda finds this structure **typical** for the Neolithic period.

Find-verbs IV

- ▶ Full story: Day 5
  - ▶ Variety of subjective expressions
  - ▶ Relation to doxastic attitudes
  - ▶ *Find* vs. *consider*
  - ▶ Evidential restrictions (Korotkova and Anand 2021)

Find-verbs V

Bottom line

- When in doubt, embed under *find*
- Ignore the discovery sense

Non–autocentric uses I

- ▶ Typical uses of SPs in root declaratives: autocentric+ (the speaker and relevant community)

- ▶ The speaker may be excluded: non–autocentric uses (first noticed by Lasersohn 2005; Egan's (2010)'s term: sympathetic)

(15)   **Human speaker**: Rotting flesh is **delicious** (to a vulture).

(adapted from Egan et al. 2005)

(16)   **Lorelai**: [The bridge] was sturdy and strong, made of this Japanese maple wood, which, it turns out, is exactly the kind of wood that attracts **beetles**. [...] Now we're gonna make it out of less **delicious**$_{BEETLES}$ wood.

(American TV series *Gilmore Girls*, Season 7, Episode 9)

Non–autocentric uses II

- Autocentric perspective: always more salient (cf. psycholinguistic evidence in Harris 2012)
- Do all SPs have non–autocentric uses? Readings much easier to get with a different species, hence with taste predicates
- Epistemic modals: argued to allow non–autocentric readings as well (Egan et al. 2005; Stephenson 2007b a.o.)

Non-autocentric uses III

- ▶ Perspectival/point-of-view expressions
    - ▶ often analyzed as having an implicit argument
    - ▶ often obligatory autocentric: about the self
- ▶ Whose self?
    - ▶ Root declaratives: the speaker
    - ▶ Attitudes: the attitude holder (*de se*)
    - ▶ Canonical information-seeking questions: the addressee
      (biased, rhetorical, self-addressed questions: not necessarily)

Non–autocentric uses IV

▶ Always autocentric:

  ▶ evidentials (expressions of information source) (Korotkova 2016b, 2019)
  ▶ egophoric marking (expressions of intention/volition) (Coppock and Wechsler 2018; Zu 2018 a.o.)
  ▶ experiencer predicates (expressions of internal state) (Kuroda 1965; Hashimoto 2015 a.o.)

(17) Japanese (isolate; Japan)

  a. watashi-wa onaka-ga   **suita**   [1-PERSON]
      I.F-TOP   stomach-NOM **hungry.PST**
      'I am hungry.'

  b. John-wa onaka-ga   **suita**   ***(soo-da)**   [3-PERSON]
      John-TOP stomach-NOM **hungry.PST** REP-COP.PRES
      'John is hungry, I hear.'

Non–autocentric uses V

Bottom line

- Perspectival language: heterogeneous (pace Speas and Tenny 2003 a.o.)
- SPs ≠ vanilla self-attributions
- A theory of subjective meaning has to reflect this

Overt opinion holders I

- ▶ Subset of SPs: overt opinion holders (tasters for short)
    - ▶ English: *to*/*for* PPs (≠ comparison class *for*: *expensive for a tent*)
    - ▶ Across languages: underexplored (though see Bylinina 2017)

(18)   The first tea created for dogs [. . .] is a vet–approved combination of chamomile, gingerroot, fennel seed, skullcap, and calendula that is **tasty for** canines.

(19)   The rite also includes the placement of [. . .] food that is **tasty to** telluric beings but repugnant to human beings.
                        (Corpus of Contemporary North American English; COCA)

- ▶ Treated as evidence for postulating an individual argument in semantics (Schaffer 2011; Pearson 2013; Bylinina 2017 a.o.)

Overt opinion holders II

- ▶ Claim
  - ▶ Overt tasters argued to be thematic: the experiencer role (Glanzberg 2007; Bylinina 2017), much like psych predicates
  - ▶ Only genuine PPTs refer to an experience (Bylinina 2017, also Kaiser and Lee 2017, 2018)
  - ▶ Overt tasters = diagnostic of PPT-hood

(20) Overt tasters

    a.   PPTs: ✓fun / ✓tasty / ✓delicious to Magda

    b.   Non-PPT SPs: #lazy / #mediocre / #smart to Magda

- ▶ Problem
  - ▶ Diagnostics don't align
  - ▶ Aesthetic predicates: dislike overt tasters (Liao, McNally, and Meskin 2016; McNally and Stojanovic 2017), refer to an experience   [coming up next]

Overt opinion holders III

Bottom line

- Some SPs: overt tasters
- Not all, unclear which ones
- Bare vs. overt uses: different behavior   [Day 3 & 4]
- A theory of subjective meaning has to reflect this

The Acquaintance Inference I

▶ Most claims: require some evidence/justification (assertions norms, Williamson 2000; Lackey 2007; Gricean Quality, Benton 2016)

▶ Some SPs: require **firsthand experience** with the stimulus (Pearson 2013; Ninan 2014, 2020; Bylinina 2017; Anand and Korotkova 2018; Dinges and Zakkou 2020 a.o.)

(21) a. Pittsburgh is **beautiful**, # but I've never been there.

  b. Matcha is **delicious**, # but I've never tried it.

▶ Similar requirement: psych predicates

(22) a. I **like** dancing, # but I never danced.

  b. Saffron **smells wonderful**, # but I never encountered it.

The Acquaintance Inference II

- ▶ OPs: no AI

(23)   a.   This vase is **fragile**, ✓but I've never broken it.

     b.   This tree is **deciduous**, ✓but I've never seen it in the fall.

- ▶ Not all SPs have an AI

(24)   a.   Julia is a **good** lawyer, ✓but I've never seen her in action.

     b.   Tour de France is a **competitive** race, ✓but I've never observed it.

The Acquaintance Inference III

- ▶ Full story: Day 4
    - ▶ Semantic status of the AI
    - ▶ When it goes away
    - ▶ Relation to other expressions of evidence

Recap I

	OPs	SPs	self-attributions
Faultless Disagreement	special cases	✓	#
Normative effects	NA	✓	#
***Find*-verbs**	#	✓	redundant
Overt tasters	#	some	NA
Non-autocentric uses	NA	✓	#
Acquaintance	#	some	some

Recap II

Bottom line

- SPs demonstrate a distinguished linguistic profile
- Empirical foundation for SP exceptionalism

Preview of the theoretical landscape:
How are opinions determined?

- **Contextualism**: by the context of utterance (Bhatt and Pancheva 1998; McCready 2007; Anand 2009; Moltmann 2010; Schaffer 2011; Pearson 2013; Kennedy and Willer 2016; Zakkou 2019 a.o.)

- **Relativism**: by the context of assessment/index (Kölbel 2004; Lasersohn 2005, 2017; Stephenson 2007a,b; Sæbø 2009; Egan 2010; MacFarlane 2014; Bylinina 2017; Coppock 2018 a.o.)

- **Expressivism**: expressing an attitude/mental state rather a proposition whose truth can be evaluated (Ayer 1959; Gibbard 1990; Schroeder 2008; Franzén 2018 a.o.)

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