Evaluative propositions and subjective judgments

Carla Umbach, ZAS Berlin

Second draft (7.6.2012)

1 Introduction

It has been claimed by various authors that predicates like tasty and fun give rise to so-called faultless disagreement such that participants in a dialog assert contradictory propositions without one of them being wrong. In the dialog in (1) Ann asserts that licorice from Denmark is tasty and Ben denies her assertion claiming that it tastes terrible. Although the assertions of Ann and Ben are clearly contradictory, their disagreement in (1) appears less severe than their disagreement in (2), because in (2) one of Ann and Ben must be wrong while in (1) it is intuitively possible that both are in some sense right. This intuition is commonly described as faultless disagreement.

(1)  a. Ann:  Lakritze ist lecker.
     'Licorice is tasty.'
  
     b. Ben:  Nein! Lakritze schmeckt eklig.
     'No, it isn't, it tastes terrible.'

(2)  a. Ann:  'Osnabrück liegt in Dänemark.'
     'Osnabrück is in Denmark.'
  
     b. Ben:  Nein! Es liegt in Deutschland.
     'No, it isn't, it's in Germany.'

The intuition of faultless disagreement in cases like (1) is usually accounted for in semantics by assuming that predicates of personal taste introduce a judge parameter determining the truth value of the propositions they occur in. The judge mostly corresponds to the speaker, e.g., Ann and Ben in (1), and is implemented either as an implicit argument provided by the context, or as an evaluation parameter in addition to world and time (Stephenson 2007; Lasersohn 2005, 2009).

None of these accounts, however, is suited to explain the puzzle of the competent speaker: 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 Ben would interpret Ann’s assertion in (1a) 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? (cf., e.g., Stojanovic 2007, Moltmann 2010). This puzzle casts doubt on any account involving an implicit argument or a judge parameter, and in fact casts doubt on the very idea of faultless disagreement – why not accept the denial expressed by Ben in (1b) as genuine disagreement?
In this paper, I will follow Stojanovic (2007) in considering the idea of faultless disagreement a misconception due to a bird’s eye perspective which is not available for either Ann or Ben. From the local perspective of the discourse participants Ann claims that licorice is tasty *tut court* and Ben denies this claim expressing genuine disagreement. Still, there is a clear difference between (1) and (2) since the latter describes a matter of fact while the former relates to a matter of taste and is inaccessible to empirical methods.¹ The difference between matters of fact and matters of taste is linguistically reflected in German by constraints on the attitude verb *finden* which combines with propositions about matters of taste, but not with propositions about facts.² This is why (3) is not acceptable and (4a) is. By embedding a proposition about matters of taste under first person *finden* the speaker can (i) make his claim immune against denial and (ii), convey dissent with a previous claim without directly denying it. If, for example, Ann embeds her position under *finden*, Ben cannot deny it, cf. (4), and if Ben counters Ann’s assertion in (5) by embedding his own position under *finden*, he will convey that he doesn’t agree without directly denying it – note, that the denial particle *nein* ‘no’ is not licensed in (5b).

(3) a. *Ich finde, Osnabrück liegt in Deutschland.
   'I consider Osnabrück to be in Germany.'

   'I think licorice is tasty.'

   b. Ben: # Nein! Lakritze ist eklig.
   'No! Licorice tastes terrible.'

   'Licorice is tasty.'

   '(No,) I think licorice tastes terrible.'

The literature on faultless disagreement focusses on more or less two predicates of personal taste, namely *tasty* and *fun*. Lasersohn explicitly rejects the idea of taking other predicates into account in order to avoid issues of aesthetics (cf. Lasersohn 2005, 645). In the present paper, basic insights will be taken from aesthetic theory, and the scope of predicates under consideration will be extended to include predicates like schön (‘beautiful’), wunderbar (‘wonderful’) and also groß (‘big’).

Dimensional adjectives like groß (‘big’) are known to diverge in semantic behavior from adjectives expressing taste, like schön (‘beautiful’), with respect to *Normbezug*³ (Bierwisch 1987), or *evaluativity* (Rett 2008), and with respect to combination with measure phrases (cf. Sassoon 2011).

---

¹ Verweis auf die interessante Chemikerin, die Cecile eingeladen hatte.  
² German *finden* is close in meaning to English *find*, but the latter is much more restricted in distribution. For this reason, German *finden* will be glossed as *think or consider* in this paper, although this might not always be the best translation.

³ While the sentence "A ist größer als B" (‘A is bigger than B’) is neutral as to whether A or B are big, the sentence A ist schöner als B (‘A is more beautiful than B’) entails (in most contexts) that both A and B are beautiful.
Surprisingly, when considering propositions embedded under *finden*, unmodified dimensional adjectives go together with adjectives expressing taste—*größ* as well as *schön* are licensed in (7a).

However, the picture changes again when considering comparative forms: *schöner* ('more beautiful') is licensed in *finden* complements whereas *größer* ('bigger') is not, cf. (7b).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(7a) } & \quad \text{Ich finde die neue Wohnung schön / *größer* als die alte.} \\
& \quad \text{('I think the new apartment is beautiful / larger than the old one.')}
\end{align*}
\]

In this paper, an analysis of evaluative propositions – propositions with *lecker/tasty, schön/beautiful, groß/big* and also *schöner/more beautiful* as their main predicates – will be proposed in which semantic aspects of evaluativeness are separated from pragmatic aspects. As for semantics, evaluative propositions will be shown to include a meta-linguistic component affecting the denotational borderlines of predicates. Semantics will be implemented based on Krifka’s enriched notion of a common ground consisting of a pair of worlds and interpretations (cf. Krifka 2012). Updating evaluative propositions will reduce interpretations in addition to worlds. As for pragmatics, evaluative propositions may – but need not – be relativized to express the speaker's subjective position, e.g. by embedding under first person *finden* or adding adverbials like *für meine Begriffe* ('to my mind').

Pragmatics will be spelt out in the discourse framework devised in Farkas & Bruce (2009) which includes, in addition to the common ground, sets of individual discourse commitments for each discourse participant. If relativized, evaluative propositions need not enter the common ground and may instead stay mere individual discourse commitments. But if not relativized, evaluative propositions are intended to enter the common ground, thereby conveying a normative claim – the speaker demands that his valuation be part of the common ground.

Relativist accounts like Lasersohn (2005) and Stephenson (2007) treat evaluative propositions generally as being (implicitly) first-person relativized – (1a) is always interpreted as (2a). This analysis conflates the semantic and the pragmatic dimension of taste judgments, thereby missing an important generalization: Judgments of taste make use of two different mechanisms of natural language – meta-linguistic interpretation and first-person relativization – where neither of these is confined to matters of taste. There are other types of propositions requiring meta-linguistic interpretation, and there are forms of first-person relativization beyond evaluative propositions. Separating the semantic from the pragmatic dimension faultless disagreement is restricted to explicitly relativized evaluative propositions – if not relativized, evaluative propositions claim general validity and license direct denial.

The paper is structured as follows: In section two, the current approaches to taste predicates will be summarized (Lasersohn 2005/ 2009, Stephenson 2007, Stojanovic 2007, Moltmann 2010, Egan 2010, Pearson 2013) and the notion of taste judgment proposed by Kant (1790) will be outlined. A two-by-two classification 'inspired by Kant' will be proposed distinguishing semantic and pragmatic aspects of evaluative propositions. Section three is about the semantics of evaluative propositions. It will be argued that evaluative propositions include a meta-linguistic component targeting the cut-off point of the predicate (cf. Barker 2002). This argument requires a brief look into the scale structure of non-dimensional adjectives. In section four, the difference in pragmatics between general judgments
(expressing non-relativized propositions) and subjective judgments (expressing relativized propositions) will be spelt out in the framework proposed by Farkas and Bruce (2009).

2 The idea of faultless disagreement

2.1 Current positions in the literature

The interpretation of taste predicates has been a topic of debate for the last decade in linguistics as well as philosophy. In this section, prominent positions such as Lasersohn (2005, 2009), Stephenson (2007), Stojanovic (2007), Moltmann (2010), and Egan (2010) will be reviewed addressing three questions: (i) Is faultless disagreement acknowledged to exist or dismissed as a misconception? (ii) (how) does the interpretation of taste predicates differ from the interpretation of regular predicates? (iii) who is the judge (if there is)?

Lasersohn (2005) starts from the intuition that what we find in dialogs like (1) is "faultless disagreement"⁴, that is, Ben denies the proposition asserted by Ann (Ann: Licorice is tasty. Ben: No, licorice isn't tasty.) and, at the same time, neither Ann nor Ben are wrong. Lasersohn rejects the option that predicates of personal taste involve an implicit argument such that tasty means tasty for some salient individual because the contents (in a Kaplanian framework) of Ann's and Ben's assertions would be different (Licorice is tasty to Ann / to Ben) not accounting for the fact that Ben's reply is a denial. There is another implicit argument interpretation such that contents are identical and denial is licensed, but now Ben denies that Ann considers licorice tasty, which is presumably not intended by Ben.

In view of these problems Lasersohn suggests to assume that the content of Ann's and Ben's utterances is in fact the same – otherwise, Ben's reply could not be a denial – and consider the truth of propositions involving taste predicates as being relative to a judge parameter, in addition to world and time (time will be ignored throughout this paper). His approach is implemented in a Kaplanian framework, treating the content of a sentence as a set of world-individuals pairs (instead of a set of worlds). Thus the truth or falsity of propositions involving taste predicates depends not only on the world of evaluation but in addition on a 'standard of taste' or judge. Technically, taste predicates are one-place predicates and differ from regular predicates only in their judge-dependent evaluation. There are three possibilities to fill the judge parameter corresponding to three perspectives: (1) The autocentric perspective is the perspective of the one assessing the sentence, i.e. speaker or hearer – this is the default case. (2) The exocentric perspective results from the speaker taking the perspective of some other individual ("the speaker places himself in someone else's shoes", cf. Lasersohn 2009, p.6). This perspective is found, e.g., in free indirect discourse and in questions. (3) The acentric perspective is like a bird's eye view. If a sentence is assessed from an acentric perspective, there is no judge and thus no determinate truth value. The sentence is nevertheless interpretable, since it has a well-defined content (recall that the content of a proposition is independent of the judge in Lasersohn's system). There is an interesting remark about the acentric perspective in Lasersohn's (2009) paper: "It is perhaps worth noting that it is only when we adopt an acentric stance that

⁴ The notion of faultless disagreement was coined by Köbel (2002).
“faultless disagreement” really seems faultless." (p.6) This implies that, from the perspective of the discourse participants, disagreement is not faultless, which is the position in the present paper.

**Stephenson (2007)** 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 require a specification of whose knowledge is expressed. She shows that Lasersohn’s system, if slightly modified, can account for this parallel. Concerning taste predicates, she deviates from Lasersohn’s system in allowing for an implicit argument interpretation in addition to a judge-as-evaluation-parameter interpretation. At the same time, she postulates that the autocentric perspective is obligatory. The two interpretations are implemented by turning predicates of personal taste into two-place relations between the object of the predication and the person whose taste is relevant. The second argument can be filled either by an implicit argument pro referring to a contextually salient individual (or an explicit experiencer argument), or can be filled by a distinct silent nominal PRO referring to the judge. Thus tasty can either be interpreted as "tasty to a salient individual" or as "tasty to the judge".

Stephenson motivates the implicit argument option by the notorious cat food example, cf. (9) (=34 in Stephenson 2007). The attitude verb think is assumed to shift the judge parameter (PRO) to the agent of the attitude. But the cat food example requires additional freedom because – on the preferred reading – the agent in (9) differs from the individual whose taste is under consideration. The problem is solved by binding the implicit argument pro to the contextually salient cat, thereby yielding the interpretation that Sam thinks the cat food is tasty pro\textsubscript{cat}.

(9)  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.

At first sight the additional implicit argument interpretation option appears to address a home-made problem, which does not occur in Lasersohn’s account – he simply argues for an exocentric perspective of the agent of the attitude in cases like (9). Still, including both an implicit argument and a judge parameter makes it possible to implement judge-dependence in a centered-world account, the judge being the center, cf. Stephenson (2010). This account correctly predicts that a taste sentence is preferably interpreted de se if embedded under an attitude verb like think and it relates judge-dependence to control constructions (e.g. *Sam wants to be famous.*).

On top of the semantic interpretation of taste predicates Stephenson gives a pragmatic account of taste judgments in dialog. She posits a common ground which represents the mutual beliefs of the discourse participants and is updated in the course of the communication (Stalnaker 1978, 2002). The common ground consists of a set of pairs of worlds and judges (instead of a set of worlds). Judgments of taste are handled by two principles, an "actual judge" and a "norm of assertion". The actual judge represents the group of participants in the conversation and is the judge for all world-judge pairs in the common ground. Thus there must be consensus concerning matters of taste throughout the common ground. The norm of assertion, on the other hand, allows the speaker to assert a sentence even if he does not believe that the sentence is true as judged by the group of conversational participants. He is only required to believe that the sentence is true as judged by himself. If the assertion is accepted by the group and added to the common ground, the judge parameter of the proposition will be shifted to the "actual judge". Judge parameters are implemented
like world parameters: for every conversation, there is an actual world and an actual judge. Judges that differ from the actual one occur only temporarily and disappear as soon as the common ground is established, thereby preserving consensus.

Unlike Lasersohn and Stephenson, Stojanovic, Stojanovic (2007) rejects the idea of faultless disagreement. She argues that discourse participants either genuinely disagree, or they are both right but their disagreement boils down to a misunderstanding. This is demonstrated in (10). When Ben denies her assertion Ann has two ways to reply. In (10c) she insists on her original claim, while in (10d) she retreats to a relativized version.\(^5\) Ann's reply in (10c) makes it obvious that she considers their disagreement to be genuine, such that one of them has to be wrong, while her reply in (d) indicates — according to Stojanovic — a misunderstanding: What she meant to say is just that licorice is tasty to her.

\[
\begin{align*}
(a) & \quad \text{Ann:} & \text{Licorice is tasty.} \\
(b) & \quad \text{Ben:} & \text{No, it isn't, it tastes terrible.} \\
(c) & \quad \text{Ann2:} & \text{It is tasty. And it's not just that I find it tasty; it's tasty tout court.} \\
(d) & \quad \text{Ann2':} & \text{OK. To my taste, licorice is tasty; that's all I'm saying.}
\end{align*}
\]

Stojanovic furthermore argues that, even if there were faultless disagreement, relativism would fail to account for it, since semantically competent speakers of English would be aware that taste predicates are judge-dependent, and thus not bother to deny (this is the puzzle of the competent speaker, cf. section 1). She also shows that a contextualist representation of judgments involving taste predicates can be translated into a relativist representation and vice versa preserving truth values, although it remains unclear what to conclude from that.

Moltmann (2010) accepts the intuition of faultless disagreement. However, unlike Lasersohn and Stephenson, she suggests accounting for this intuition not by relativizing the truth value of the proposition to a judge but 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) Her approach is based on her analysis of generic one and what she calls first-person-based-genericity. The basic idea is that a sentence involving generic one is understood such that the speaker identifies himself with each individual in the domain quantified over, which is close to taking, for each individual in the domain, Lasersohn's exocentric perspective – place oneself in that individual's shoes. Simplifying considerably, Moltmann's approach can be said to interpret the sentence 'Licorice is tasty' such that it means 'One considers/finds licorice tasty.' This sentence in itself has absolute truth conditions, is either true or false. But since different speakers may attribute different properties to the individuals he identifies with truth values may differ between speakers, which is, following Moltmann, the reason for the intuition of faultless disagreement.

Another account based on first person genericity is presented in Pearson (2013) linking it to the semantics of attitudes de se. In Pearson's account the role of first person indexicals (implicit experiencer arguments) and of the judge parameter, which are distinct ways of representing subjectivity in relativist semantics, are conflated. First person indexicals and the subject of the

\(^5\) The wording of Ann's replies is directly adopted from Stojanovic's examples (5) and (3).
identification relation are equally represented by bound variables. This leads to a different view on identification: While in Moltmann's account the speaker simulates the individual he identifies with, in Pearson's account the speaker empathizes with that individual.

The last paper to be considered is by Egan (2010). The focus is on the prerequisites of disputes about taste, semantics playing a minor role. Still, in the end of the paper Egan mentions two options to handle the semantics of sentences asserting a taste judgment. The first one is based on Lewis' (1979) account of propositional attitudes such that the complements of attitudinal verbs represent properties, together with Stalnaker's (1978) notion of assertion, acceptance and common ground.

The other option consistent in adopting a straightforward contextualist account of the semantics of aesthetic vocabulary, and say that the connection between accepting $S$ (¬$S$) and self-attributing $P$ (¬$P$) is pragmatic, rather than semantic.” (Egan 2010, p.?) This position implies, following Egan, that the dispute is not about the content of the asserted propositions but about the question of which propositions are asserted, that is, about the contextual standards of tasty, fun etc. Propositions involving taste judgments are thus interpreted meta-linguistically. 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.

The proposal in the present paper will be based on a meta-linguistic interpretation. The problem pointed out by Egan is resolved by using a discourse framework including, in addition to a Stalnakerian common ground, commitment sets of the individual discourse participants (s. section 4).

### 2.2 Kant's notion of judgments of taste⁶

In his Kritik der Urteilskraft (1790/1928) Kant characterizes judgments of taste – about beauty (das Schöne) – and judgments of agreeableness – about niceness (das Angenehme) in a way surprisingly relevant for linguistic interpretation.⁷ In Kant's system, first, judgments of taste and agreeableness are distinguished from judgments about factual matters. The latter are about properties of objects, whereas the former are about properties the subject ascribes to the object. Next, judgments of taste (in Kant's terminology) are distinguished from judgments of agreeableness. Judgments of agreeableness don't claim to be generally valid – others need not share our judgment:

"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)⁸ (check English version)

---

⁶Very many thanks to Peter Bosch for bringing Kant's theory on aesthetics judgments to my attention.
⁷In presenting Kant's ideas extensive use will be made of the clear and comprehensible article on aesthetic judgment by Nick Zangwill in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
⁸As regards the agreeable, every one 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.
In contrast, judgments of taste demand, following Kant, general validity and thus come with a normative claim – we insist on others agreeing with our 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 mehrmals mit dem seinigen einstimmmig 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 504)

Kant’s characterization of the two types of judgments is strikingly close to linguistic form. His judgments of the agreeableness come with an implicit experiencer argument ("... he does not take it amiss if, [...] [another] reminds him that he ought to say: It is agreeable to me.") and they don’t license denial, whereas his judgments of taste do not allow for an experiencer ("... be ridiculous if any one [...] were to think of justifying himself by saying: This object [...] is beautiful for me.") and they do license denial.

There is no room for something akin to faultless disagreement in Kant’s system. Denying a general judgment the speaker expresses genuine disagreement. But since these general judgments are about matters of taste (instead of matters of fact), they are essentially normative ("... when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others."). Normativity appears odd from a linguistic point of view, and is controversial when going into details. Nevertheless it appears to be a core characteristics of taste judgments explaining the possibility of genuine denial (see the convincing argument against relativism in Zangwill 2007).

Kant’s characterization of the two types of judgments suggests that lexical predicates can be divided into those expressing objective properties and others expressing ‘subjective feelings’. Although a

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: Every one has his own taste.

9 The beautiful stands on quite a different footing. It would, on the contrary, be ridiculous if any one who plumed 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: Every one has his own taste.
division along the lines of lexical predicates doesn't seem plausible, the distinction between the two types of judgments is immediately obvious. Actually, both the account in Stojanovic (2007) and that in Stephenson (2007) show a similar division of judgments. Recall that Stojanovic rejects the idea of faultless disagreement and interprets statements involving taste predicates in a non-relativized fashion expressing general claims, and since these are claims about matters of taste, they are necessarily normative. On the other hand, Stojanovic allows for a "relativistic re-interpretation" of taste judgments such that they include an implicit experienter argument, cf. (10d) above. Similarly, Stephenson posits two interpretations of statements involving taste predicates, an implicit experienter interpretation and a judge-dependent evaluation a la Lasersohn. Both are at first relativistic, but the second one loses relativity as soon as the proposition enters the common ground since for a judge-dependent statement (involving taste predicates) to enter the common ground the judge must be substituted by the actual judge of the conversation. Thus a competent speaker will intend his statement to be adopted by the overall group of discourse participants, which is a normative intention.

2.3 Descriptive vs. evaluative propositions – general vs. subjective judgments

In this paper it will be assumed that there is no faultless disagreement and no misunderstanding – if you claim that licorice is tasty and I say no, then I mean no. Faultless disagreement is considered as misguided idea because for a participants in a discourse there is no bird's eye perspective. Still, there is the intuition that judgments concerning matters of taste are in some sense weaker than judgments concerning matters of fact. The reason for this intuition is that judgments about matters of taste can be presented as being subjective, for example by embedding under first person finden. But, in contrast to what is claimed in relativist accounts, they can also be presented as general judgments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General judgments</th>
<th>Descriptive propositions</th>
<th>Evaluative propositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General judgments</td>
<td>'Osnabrück is in Denmark.'</td>
<td>'Licorice is tasty.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective judgments</td>
<td>'Osnabrück might be in D.'</td>
<td>'Licorice is tasty to me.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'Ich finde Lakritze lecker.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Descriptive vs. evaluative propositions -- general vs. subjective judgments

We will thus separate the semantics of evaluative propositions – how do they differ from propositions concerning matters of fact? – from their pragmatics – how can they be used in discourse?

This leads to the two-by-two classification schema shown in table 1. The first dimension is semantic relating to the nature of the propositions. Descriptive propositions concern matters of fact and express properties of objects. Evaluative propositions concern matters of taste and express properties the subject ascribes to an object. The semantic difference between the two types of propositions will be spelt out in section three. Note, that the semantic dimension separates two types of propositions, not two types of lexical predicates, the reason being that taste predicates readily occur in descriptive propositions. For example, the proposition 'Licorice is tasty to Sue.', is clearly descriptive – whether Sue likes licorice or not is a matter of fact.
The second dimension is pragmatic relating to the nature of the claim made by the speaker. When making a general judgment the speaker claims that his statement is true and demands that it is included in the common ground of the conversation, regardless of whether it involves a descriptive proposition or an evaluative one. If the other discourse participants agree, the proposition enters the common ground. This is the standard processing of assertions in discourse, and it’s the same for descriptive and for evaluative propositions. When making a subjective judgment the speaker does not demand that his statements enters the common ground. It may instead stay a mere individual discourse commitment. This will explain for the particular discourse behavior of subjective judgments. The pragmatic difference between the two types of judgments will be spelt out in section four. Note that unlike Stojanovic we don’t assume that evaluative propositions are ambiguous between a non-relativized and a relativized interpretation – subjective judgments require explicit first person relativization, by embedding under first person *finden* or adding adverbials like *für meine Begriffe / meiner Meinung nach* (‘to my mind’, ‘in my opinion’) (but see the *wundervoll* puzzle in the conclusions).

Finally, the two-by-two classification proposed above raises the question of whether there are subjective judgments expressing descriptive propositions. Possible candidates are descriptive propositions which are first person relativized. Relativization of descriptive propositions requires different lexical expressions than that of evaluative propositions, e.g. the attitude verb *meinen* (‘have the opinion’). Switching to English, modal sentences with epistemic *might* will also be included in this category (cf. Stephenson 2007 and section 5). We will, however, focus throughout this paper on subjective judgments expressing evaluative propositions.

3. The semantics of evaluative propositions

This section is about the semantic difference between descriptive and evaluative propositions. First of all the question will be considered of which propositions are evaluative. One might think that propositions are evaluative if and only if they include an adjective expressing taste, like *lecker / tasty* and *schön / beautiful*, as their main predicate. Phrasing it this way, however, shifts the burden to the question of which predicates are evaluative. Moreover, it would lead to subsuming propositions like ‘*Llorice is tasty to Ann.*’ under the notion of evaluative propositions, which is counter-intuitive. We will take a different approach making use of the observation that propositions embedded under the German attitude verb *finden* cannot be about factual matters. This offers a straightforward diagnostics to distinguish between descriptive and evaluative propositions. Propositions proven to be evaluative by this diagnostics will be shown to require a meta-linguistic interpretation component. The focus will be on German, and the sentences under consideration will be restricted to copular constructions with adjectival predicates, e.g. *Lakritze ist lecker* (‘Llorice is tasty’).

3.1 Which propositions are evaluative?

The attitude verb *finden* can be combined with *dass* (‘that’) complement clauses, verb-second clauses and also with small clauses without difference in meaning cf. (15). Embedding a proposition under first person *finden* is similar to providing a first person experiencer argument in requiring first person
experience and blocking denial, cf. section 4.1. It is generally agreed that propositions embedded under first person *finde* cannot be about matters of fact, cf. Saebo (2009). This is why the sentence in (16) (=3) is ungrammatical. This observation provides a helpful diagnostics to distinguish descriptive propositions from evaluative ones: If a proposition can be embedded under first person *finde*, it will be considered as an evaluative one, and as descriptive otherwise, cf. (17).

(15)  Ich finde, dass Lakritze lecker ist / Lakritze ist lecker / Lakritze lecker.  
     'I consider licorice to be tasty.'

(16)  *Ich finde, Osnabrück liegt in Deutschland.  
     'I consider Osnabrück to be in Germany.'

(17)  A proposition φ is evaluative iff the sentence "Ich finde φ" is grammatical.

In (18) a number of propositions prove to be descriptive by the *finden* test. This includes propositions with non-gradable adjectives as their main predicates, (18a), comparative forms of dimensional adjectives (18b) and dimensional adjectives modified by measure phrases, (18c). In addition, propositions with adjectives expressing taste are illicit under *finden* if they occur with an experiencer argument, (18d).

(18)  a. *Ich finde Sue schwanger.  
     'I consider Sue pregnant.'

     b. *Ich finde Sue größer als Mary.  
     'I consider Sue taller than Mary.'

     c. *Ich finde Sue 180 groß.  
     'I consider Sue 180 tall.'

     d. *Ich finde, der Termin ist mir / Sue wichtig.  
     'I consider the appointment important for me / Sue.'

The list of propositions which are licensed under *finden* includes propositions with positive forms of taste adjectives, (19a), positive forms of dimensional adjectives (19b), and comparative forms of taste adjectives (19c). In addition, 'definitional' propositions as in (19d) are licensed under *finden*, and also propositions involving deontic modals (19e) (adapted from Saebo's example (50)).

     'I consider licorice tasty / the picture beautiful / the appointment important.'

     b. Ich finde die Wohnung groß.  
     'I consider the appartment large.'

     c. Ich finde die Skulptur schöner als das Bild / den Vortrag wichtiger als das Buch.
'I consider the sculpture more beautiful than the picture / the talk more important than the book.'

d. Ich finde, das ist ein Stuhl / die Opposition hat kein Konzept.
   'I consider this as a chair. I think the opposition has no concept.'

e. Ich finde, indirekte Steuern sollten abgeschafft werden.
   'I think indirect taxes should be abolished.'

Setting the examples in (18d) and (19e) aside, the *finden*-test characterizes propositions as being

- descriptive, if based on
  - non-gradable adjectives, (18a);
  - comparatives of dimensional adjectives, (18b);
  - dimensional adjectives modified by measure phrases; and

- evaluative, if based on
  - gradable adjectives in the positive form, including dimensional adjectives, (19a,b);
  - comparatives of adjectives expressing taste, (19c);
  - definitional sentences, (19d);

These findings suggest that evaluativity is in some way related to a relative standard of comparison, which is little surprising for adjectives expressing taste. It is surprising, however, that dimensional adjectives in the positive form pattern with taste adjectives, while their comparative forms do not. Even more surprising, definitional sentences with run-of-the-mill nominal predicates also pattern with taste adjectives in being licensed under *finden*. We will focus on the adjectival cases and only briefly comment on definitional sentences. Deontic modals, as in (19e), are beyond the scope of this paper.

### 3.2 Descriptive vs. meta-linguistic modes of language use

Let us assume a degree-based analysis of gradable adjectives such that the adjective denotes a two-place relation between individuals and degrees, or a function taking individuals to degrees (e.g. Bierwisch 1987, Kennedy 1999). In degree-based analyses adjectival meanings must be combined with degree arguments in order to turn into predicates. Degree arguments may be provided by comparative or superlative morphology, or measure phrases like *three inches*. If the adjective occurs in the bare positive form the degree argument is supposed to be given by a covert morpheme pos introducing a context-dependent standard of comparison, or 'cut-off point'. The meaning of *tall* as a measure function of type <e,d> is shown in (20a), the meaning of pos is shown in (20b), where the standard of comparison is represented by a free degree variable $d_x$ whose value is determined by comparison class and context as shown in (25). Combining the meaning of *tall* with the meaning of pos yields a predicate 'tall above the contextually fixed standard for tallness', (20c), and thus the sentence *Mary is tall* is interpreted as 'The degree to which Mary is tall is at least as high as the contextually fixed standard, cf. (20d).

(20) a. $[[tall]] = \lambda x. \text{height}(x)$
b. \([[\text{pos}]] = \lambda f_{e,c,d} . \lambda x. f(x) \geq d_{e,f}\)

c. \([[\text{pos-tall}]] = \lambda x. \text{height}(x) \geq d_{s,\text{height}}\)

d. \([[\text{Mary is tall}]] = [[\text{pos-tall}]] ([[\text{Mary}}]] = \text{height}(\text{Mary}) \geq d_{s,\text{height}}\)

\[(21)\quad d_{e,f} = \text{standard}(f)(C)(c)\]

The cut-off point denoted by the variable \(d_{e,f}\) is spelt out by the function in (21), where \(f\) is an adjectival measure function, \(C\) is a comparison class, \(c\) is a context, and \textit{standard} is a function taking the adjectival measure function, the comparison class and the actual context to a cut-off point. It is an issue of debate whether the standard is determined by the average of the comparison class or by a 'stand-out' function or by some norm established in the particular context (Bierwisch 1987, Kennedy 1999, Barker 2002). As long as the adjective under consideration is a dimensional one, like \textit{tall}, an average or stand-out function can be calculated, for example by measuring the elements in the comparison class and comparing them. But as soon as adjectives like \textit{beautiful} are taken into account, there is nothing in the object itself to support an average or stand-out function – recall, that properties like beauty are not inherent in the object and instead ascribed to the object by the observer. So in the case of dimensional adjectives, the standard will be supported by average functions etc., but in the case of taste adjectives it solely depends on what the discourse participants agree upon – what counts as tall in a context is to some extent dependent on the average size of the elements in the comparison class, what counts as beautiful is pure convention.

One might thus conclude that evaluativity is brought about by a merely conventional, or judge-dependent, standard of comparison. Such an explanation would, however, be in conflict with the fact that evaluative propositions include ones based on the positive form of dimensional adjectives, cf. (19b). So the primary question is: Why can these propositions count as evaluative?

Let us compare the four dialogs in (22) – (25). They take place in two different situations. In the first situation, Ann informs Ben on the phone about a sculpture she saw in an exhibition, and Ben hasn’t seen it himself. To avoid complications it will be assumed that the definite NP \textit{the sculpture} is anaphoric, that is, Ann and Ben have been talking about the sculpture before. In the second situation, both Ann and Ben are in the exhibition standing vis-à-vis the sculpture. In each of these situations Ann and Ben have a dispute involving a dimensional adjective and another dispute involving a taste adjective.

\[(22)\quad \text{Dialog 1: phone / dimensional}\]

a. Ann: \textit{Die Skulptur ist groß.}
   'The sculpture is big.'

b. Ben: \textit{?? Nein, sie ist nicht groß.}
   'No, it is not.'

c. Ben: \textit{Nein, sie kann nicht groß sein, sonst hätte sie nicht durch die Tür gepasst.}
   'No, it is not. (I think it is small.)

\[(23)\quad \text{Dialog 2: vis-à-vis / dimensional}\]

a. Ann: \textit{Die Skulptur ist groß.}
   'The sculpture is big.'

b. Ben: \textit{Nein, ist sie nicht. (Ich finde sie klein.)}
   'No, it is not. (I think it is small.)
Consider the phone call in (22). To strengthen the case, assume that Ben needs to know the size of the sculpture because he has to transport it back to the studio. In using the dimensional adjective groß in (22a), Ann informs Ben about a property of the sculpture: Its size exceeds the normal size of sculptures presented in an art gallery. Since Ben cannot see the sculpture, he can deny her assertion only by citing indirect evidence, for example by arguing that the sculpture must be smaller than the width of the door.

In contrast, in the vis-à-vis situation in (23), Ann cannot reasonably try to inform Ben about the size of the sculpture when using the dimensional adjective groß. Instead, she asserts that the sculpture is included in what should be considered as big for a sculpture in this context. Accordingly, when denying her assertion, Ben does not question her measuring skills but her assessment of what counts as big for a sculpture in that context. This is what Barker (2002) refers to as meta-linguistic use of gradable adjectives.

Now consider the dialogs with the taste adjective. In the vis-à-vis situation in (25) there seems to be no difference between the dimensional and the taste adjective. Since their sensory experience will be the same (more or less), Ann’s assertion can only address the question of what the adequate standard of comparison for the beauty of sculptures in this context is. Direct denial is fine but, as in the dimensional case, Ben doesn’t question Ann’s perception of the sculpture but her assessment of what counts as beautiful for a sculpture in that particular context.

Finally, what is Ann doing in (24) when using the taste adjective on the phone? Is she conveying the information that the sculpture has some property p that makes it exceed a contextually fixed standard of beauty? If so, her assertion could be paraphrased as saying "The beauty of the sculpture is n beauty-units, which is above the generally accepted standard of comparison for the beauty of sculptures in this context". But there are no beauty units inherent to the sculpture. Unlike a certain degree of height, a certain degree of beauty is not a property of an object and instead a property ascribed by the subject – this is what we learned from Kant. On the other hand, the taste dialog is similar to the dimensional one since Ben cannot directly deny Ann’s claim, (24b), but he can cite
indirect evidence, (24c). Beyond, he can question her idea of the standard of comparison of beauty, as in (24d). This would be evidence that Ann’s assertion is meta-linguistic again, that is, she is asserting that the sculpture should be included in what counts as beautiful. Still, there seems to be something wrong with the very question of whether (24a) is meta-linguistic – intuitively, we can’t decide whether the assertion is about the sculpture or about the standard. Let us have closer look at meta-linguistic uses of dimensional adjectives before coming back to this issue in section 3.3.

In Barker (2002) it is shown that propositions based on gradable predicates have two types of uses, a descriptive and a meta-linguistic one. In its descriptive use the sentence *Feynman is tall* provides information about Feynman’s height by asserting that he exceeds a contextually given standard of tallness. In its meta-linguistic use the sentence provides information about what counts as tall in that context by asserting that Feynman does. In the former use the proposition is about Feynman while in the latter it is about the standard of comparison for tallness. As Barker points out, "Asserting and accepting a token of the sentence *Feynman is tall* can resolve some portion of the mutual uncertainty associated with the applicability of the predicate tall. More specifically, it eliminates from further consideration the possibility that the vague standard of absolute tallness might be greater than the maximal degree of Feynman’s height." (p.1)

In the phone situation, Ann’s assertion that the sculpture is big, (22a), is clearly descriptive. It might be paraphrased as "The size of the sculpture is n cm, which is above the generally accepted standard of comparison for the size of sculptures in this context." In the vis-à-vis situation Ann’s assertions that the sculpture is big, (23a), must be read meta-linguistically. Otherwise it wouldn’t be informative the sculpture being right before their eyes. Now consider embedding under *finden*. The sentence in (26a) cannot mean that the speaker considers the sculpture to have a particular size, which is above the presupposed cut-off point. It can only be read as establishing a standard below the sculpture’s size. Thus in the case of dimensional adjectives the meta-linguistic reading, but not the descriptive one, is licensed under *finden*.

(26) Ich finde die Skulptur groß.

Coming back to evaluativityit, it has to be noted that the meta-linguistic use in the vis-à-vis /dimensional dialog but not the descriptive one in the phone /dimensional dialog is normative, the speaker establishing his/her view of what the standard in that particular context should be. Moreover, the meta-linguistic use, but not the descriptive one, gives rise to the intuition of so-called faultless disagreement (from a bird’s eye view). This is compelling evidence that evaluativity is closely linked with meta-linguistic usage. Still, we feel uneasy with the conclusion that evaluative propositions are in general meta-linguistic – does Ann in the phone/taste dialog in (24) really discuss the standard of beauty?

3.3 Dimensional adjectives vs. adjectives expressing taste
In the case of propositions with dimensional adjectives the difference between the descriptive and the meta-linguistic use is tied to a difference in information structure: While the descriptively used proposition is about, say, Feynman’s actual height and presupposes the standard for tallness, the meta-linguistically used proposition is about the actual standard for tallness and presupposes Feynman’s height. This is reflected in different questions under discussion, in the descriptive use it is ‘What is Feynman’s height?’ and in the meta-linguistic use it is ‘What is the standard of height in this context?’

In the case of propositions with taste adjectives, the claim that they are generally meta-linguistic would entail that they are exclusively about the standard of comparison. But the idea that these propositions are, from an information structure point of view, necessarily about the standard of comparison is counter-intuitive. In the phone/taste situation in (24) the most plausible question under discussion is "What does the sculpture look like?" which is by no means a question asking for the standard of beauty. However, we have the intuition that in the case of taste adjectives there is no clear distinction. What we learn from Ann’s assertion in (24) is that the sculpture is in the denotation of beautiful entertained by Ann. But we cannot decide whether she chose an assessment of the sculpture’s beauty that is above her cut-off point, or whether she lowered her cut-off point such that it is below the beauty she attributes to the sculpture. In the case of dimensional adjectives there is no problem in deciding whether a proposition is descriptively uses or meta-linguistically used – we know which information is presupposed and which is asserted. So why can’t we decide in the case of taste adjectives?

In his paper in (2008) Lasersohn considers the possibility that (what he calls) faultless disagreement might arise from disagreement about cut-off points, that is, a meta-linguistic use of the proposition. Lasersohn rejects this option: "What seems crucial for disagreements over taste is not the location of the cut-off point, but the assignment of degrees. Different people may assign markedly different degrees of fun or tastiness to the same items, and may differ radically in the relative order of these items on the fun or tastiness scale; but no objective “matter of fact” would seem to select any one of these assignments or orderings as the correct one. John and Mary may disagree whether skydiving is fun, not because they both realize it is fun to degree d and differ as to whether d is sufficiently high to count as fun, but because John (who enjoys a good thrill) assigns it a high degree of fun, while Mary (who is terrified of falling) does the opposite." (Lasersohn 2008, p.4).

What Lasersohn suggest here is that one can either choose a low cut-off point or assign a high degree of fun to, say, skydiving. That is, Lasersohn doesn’t see a problem in deciding. But then, Lasersohn seems to take it for granted that fun and tastiness come with absolute values, since this is what you need to decide whether the degree of fun of skydiving is higher or the cut-off point is lower for John. Consider the case of dimensional adjectives again. On a descriptive use of Feynman is tall, a given standard of tallness is presupposed, e.g. 1.80m, and the height of Feynman is asserted to be above the standard. On a meta-linguistic use, a given height of Feynman is presupposed, e.g. 195m, and the standard is asserted to be below Feynman’s height. In both cases, one of the two items to be compared has to be given in advance which is only possible if it can be given as an absolute value like
1.80m. This entails that Lasersohn considers the scales associated with fun and tastiness to be ratio scales, since only ratio scales allow for absolute values.\(^{10}\)

There are few statements in the literature about the nature of scales in the case of taste adjectives. Bierwisch (1987) suggests interpreting these adjectives such that the zero on the scale is identical with the cut-off point (similar to the treatment of ‘absolute minimum’ adjectives in Kennedy & McNally 2005). This predicts norm-relatedness of the comparative – Anna ist schöner als Berta (‘Anna is more beautiful than Berta’) is predicted to entail that Anna and Berta are beautiful.\(^{11}\)

Sassoon (2011) starts from the observation that norm-relatedness coincides with the non-licensing of measure phrases and claims that norm-related adjectives have a relative zero (varying across possible worlds), where zero is again identical with the cut-off point. She then points out that measure phrases are only licensed with ratio scales (that is, those with an absolute zero point, invariant across possible worlds).

In the case of propositions with dimensional adjectives there is a clear-cut way to distinguish the descriptive and the meta-linguistic reading – either the cut-off point is presupposed and the actual height of Feynman is asserted, or vice versa. Presupposing one and asserting the other is possible because degrees of height are absolute – tall relates to a ratio scale (with an absolute zero). Taste adjectives don’t relate to ratio scales (this is why they don’t allow for measure phrases). It’s an open issue whether they have ordinal or interval scales – the latter would explain the licensing of factor phrases in equatives such as twice as pretty, cf. Solt (to appear)\(^{12}\). Another open issue concerns the nature of the order: It doesn’t seem plausible that the order would have a total order of beauty (of contextually relevant items). In this paper we will provisionally assume that, first, taste adjectives relate to an ordinal scale, where the order is partial,\(^{13}\) and that, secondly, there is a cut-off point such that for each element of the scale the cut-off is either lower or higher. We leave it open whether the cut-off is identical to a relative zero (that is we leave the question of norm-relatedness open – elements below the cut-off may still be ordered).

It is, moreover, important to note that, while with dimensional adjectives the order is induced by the objects themselves, with taste adjectives the order is only ascribed to the objects by the speaker. This entails that the order itself is under debate. Whether Sue is taller than Mary is a matter of fact. But whether Sue is prettier than Mary is a matter of taste. This explains why the latter proposition but not the former one can be embedded under finden, cf. (18b)/(19c). We will return to this issue in the next section.

Coming back to the question of why, in the case of taste adjectives, we can’t decide whether a proposition is used descriptively or meta-linguistically, an explanation is provided by the scale structure of these adjectives. The absence of a ratio structure entails the absence of absolute values, which, in turn, entails that the only thing you can pin down is an ordered pair. The sculpture is

---

\(^{10}\) A quick reminder: An ordinal scale provides an order between elements of of data points. An interval scale provides the order plus the size of the intervals in between data points. A ratio scale is an interval scale with an absolute (invariant across worlds) zero point.

\(^{11}\) Although the data are not conclusive and, in another section of his paper, Bierwisch emphasizes that judgments are notoriously shaky as to whether A ist schöner als B (‘A is more beautiful than B’) entails that A or B are beautiful.

\(^{12}\) In a recent manuscript Bierwisch points out that in German factor phrases are also licensed with comparatives but the interpretation is unclear (Schneewittchen ist tausendmal schöner als die Königin ‘Snow White is thousand times prettier than the Queen’).

\(^{13}\) There is no need to postulate consistency since the order is directly given on the (representatives of) individuals.
beautiful can be taken to mean that the beauty degree assigned to the sculpture is above the cut-off point, or to mean that the cut-off point is below the degree assigned to the sculpture. But that doesn't make a difference because in either case it's the same pair of the beauty order, <sculpture, cut-off>.

Accordingly, statements about beauty can only be given in a relative fashion – neither the cut-off point nor the degree of beauty of the sculpture can be given independent of the other. This implies that in the case of taste adjectives the assertion necessarily includes both the cut-off point and the actual value. So the ordinal level of measurement and the resulting lack of absolute degrees finally explains why in the case of taste adjectives the descriptive use cannot be distinguished from the meta-linguistic use.

3.4 Evaluative update

Barker's distinction between a descriptive and a meta-linguistic use of propositions is taken up in Krifka (2012) in order to provide an interpretation for definitional generics, which differ from descriptival generics in restricting the language instead of making generalizations about the world (compare Madrigals are polyphonic and Madrigals are popular).

Krifka introduces an interpretation index in addition to the world index and defines the common ground as a pair of sets of interpretations and worlds <l,W>. The meaning of an expression α is relative to interpretation and world, [α]_w. While the world index targets factual matters, the interpretation index targets the interpretation of the expressions. The difference between descriptive propositions and definitional (or, in Barker's terms, meta-linguistic) propositions is accounted for by providing separate update rules, cf. (27a,b). The first one implements update by descriptive propositions, reducing the set of possible worlds without affecting the set of interpretations. The second one implements update by definitional propositions, reducing the set of interpretations without affecting the set of worlds. Note that the rules are asymmetric: a world w is excluded if the proposition to be updated, [φ], is false in w under all possible interpretations, cf. (27a), whereas an interpretation i is excluded if there is a world w such that [φ] is false in w under i, cf. (27b).

Krifka explains the asymmetry as follows: "The existential meaning rule [=27a] reflects the idea that it is not determined yet which interpretation is the one that the participants will ultimately settle on, and so all the options have to be kept open. We interpret a sentence as if it were in the scope of a possibility operator: Under the interpretations that are to be considered, [φ] might be true. If a proposition [φ] is accepted definitionally at a common ground (l,W), as in (15) [=27b], then the set of possible worlds stays the same, but only such interpretations i remain admissible for which the proposition [φ] is true in all possible worlds of the common ground." (p.5 ... check page numbers in book).

$$\Phi \leftarrow \Phi, \mathcal{A}$$

In adapting Krifka's system to evaluative propositions, let us call the rule in (27a) descriptive update (DES) and the one in (27b) interpretational update (INT). Interpretations will be taken to determine the cut-off points of gradable predicates, cf. (28). Note that, like any other proposition, the order in

$$(27) \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \langle l,W \rangle \leftarrow \text{DES}(\langle \varphi \rangle) = \langle l, \{ w \in W : \exists i \in l, [\varphi]_w \} \rangle & (= 14 \text{ and } 15 \text{ in Krifka } 2012). \\
\text{b.} & \quad \langle l,W \rangle \leftarrow \text{DEF}(\langle \varphi \rangle) = \langle \{ i \in l \mid \forall w \in W \ [\varphi]_w \} \rangle, W
\end{align*}$$
(28) relates to world and also interpretation. The interpretation is irrelevant in the case of dimensional predicates due to the fact that dimensional degrees are absolute – if the cut-off point to count as big for indoor sculptures in interpretation i is 150cm then any value above 150 is greater because in the case of dimensional degrees the order is the order on real numbers, which independent of interpretation. But the order of beauty is a matter of taste (and is licensed under finden, cf. (19c)). So in the case of beauty the interpretation does not only determine the cut-off point but the entire order of beauty. In (28) the order is denoted by $\geq_{D(0)}$ where D(f) is the domain of the order associated with f – real numbers in the case of dimensional adjectives and (representatives of) individuals otherwise (cf. footnote 15).

$$[[\text{pos}]]^{\text{aw}} = \lambda f.\text{x.e.d.} \cdot \lambda x. f(x) \geq_{D(0)} \text{standard}(f)(C)(i).$$

By separating the two update rules, Krifka accounts for the fact that definitional sentences involve only interpretational update (while descriptive sentences require only descriptive update). However, in view of the intrinsic connection between cut-off point (provided by the interpretation) and actual value (provided by the world) found with taste adjectives, a combined update rule will be introduced such that descriptive and interpretational update are applied sequentially, cf. (29). The combined rule is called evaluative update.

(29)  
a. descriptive update  $<I,W> + \text{DES}(\varphi) = <I, \{w \in W \mid \exists i \in I. [\varphi]^{iw}\}>$

b. interpretational update $<I,W> + \text{INT}(\varphi) = <\{i \in I \mid \forall w \in W. [\varphi]^{iw}\}, W>$

c. evaluative update $<I,W> + \text{DES} \circ \text{INT}(\varphi) = (<I,W> + \text{DES}(\varphi)) + \text{INT}(\varphi)$

The sequence in the evaluative update rule in (29c) is such that descriptive update precedes interpretational update. The reason for that can easily be seen when considering interpretations that are ordered such that an interpretation i is more strict than an interpretation $i’$ if it excludes more worlds than $i’$. Assuming ordered interpretations a descriptive update excludes the worlds in which the proposition $[\varphi]$ is false under the minimal interpretation (or all minimal interpretations). Subsequent interpretational update will then exclude non-minimal interpretations. Consider a common ground $<\{w_1, w_2\}, \{i_1, i_2\}>$ where $i_1$ is less strict than $i_2$. Suppose $[\varphi]^{i1,w1}$, $[\varphi]^{i2,w1}$ and $[\varphi]^{i2,w2}$ are false while $[\varphi]^{i1,w2}$ is true. Applying INT subsequent to DES will yield a common ground $<\{i_1\}, \{w_1\}>$. In contrast, applying DES subsequent to INT will yield an empty common ground $<\{\}, \{\}>$, which appears inadequate. We thus take it that aligning descriptive information among discourse participants is prior to aligning interpretations, as implemented in (29c).

Purely descriptive and purely interpretational update is defined such that interpretations and worlds, respectively, are not affected by update, cf. (30). Suppose that interpretations are ordered again. Then a purely descriptive update is one where the set I contains only minimal interpretations, i.e. the interpretations under debate are such that in the remaining worlds $[\varphi]$ is true under all of them, cf. (31a). A purely interpretational update is one where $[\varphi]$ is true from the beginning (at least) under all/the minimal interpretations i, (31b).

(30)  
a. An evaluate update of common ground $<I,W>$ by proposition $[\varphi]$ is purely descriptive iff $<I,W> + \text{DES} \circ \text{INT}(\varphi) = <I,W> + \text{DES}(\varphi)$
b. An evaluate update of common ground \( \langle i, W \rangle \) by proposition \([\varphi]\)
   is purely interpretational iff \(<i, W> + \text{DES} \cap \text{INT} ([\varphi]) = <i, W> + \text{INT} ([\varphi])\)

(31) \[\begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \text{A purely descriptive update of } <i, W> \text{ is such that} \\
& \forall w \in \pi_2 (<i, W> + \text{DES}([\varphi])), \forall i \in I. [\varphi]_i^w \quad \text{where } \pi_2 <i, W> = W \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{A purely interpretational update of } <i, W> \text{ is such that} \\
& \forall w \in W. \exists i \in I. [\varphi]_i^w
\end{align*}\]

The idea that evaluative propositions have a meta-linguistic component can then be spelt out such that if an assertion expressing an evaluative proposition is accepted by the discourse participants, the common ground will be updated by means of the evaluative update rule interpretational rule in (29c).

Recall, that the notion of evaluative proposition in this paper includes propositions based on taste adjectives as well as propositions based on dimensional adjectives in meta-linguistic reading, and also definitional sentences such as 'Das ist ein Stuhl.' / 'This is a chair', cf. the definition in (17).

In the case of taste adjectives update always requires both the descriptive and the interpretational component due to their lack of absolute values – neither the cut-off point and nor the actual value can be presupposed. The two components will, of course, differ in salience depending on the utterance situation. Take the phone situation and suppose that Ann and Ben are a couple married for a long time. Then Ben might focus on the descriptive information to be drawn from Ann’s statement relying to some degree on her interpretations. In the vis-à-vis situation possible interpretations will be salient since descriptive aspects are (more or less) shared. But even if the descriptive and the interpretational component vary in their respective salience, in the case of taste adjectives update will is not purely descriptive or purely interpretational because there is no independent cut-off or actual value, respectively.\(^{14}\)

In the case of dimensional adjectives in evaluative propositions update can be purely interpretational – if Ann and Ben have a full view of the sculpture its actual size may be presupposed. But we can think of situations where neither size nor cut-off is fixed in advance. Ben might remember the size of the sculpture only vaguely and at the same time not be fully familiar with Ann’s views. In this situation Ben will draw descriptive as well as interpretational information from Ann’s statement (this situation is considered standard in Barker 2002).

Summarizing, while descriptive propositions require descriptive update, evaluative propositions require evaluative update. In the case of taste adjectives, evaluative update is neither purely descriptive nor purely interpretational. In the case of dimensional adjectives, if evaluative at all, update can, but need not be, purely interpretational. Take Ann’s utterances in the phone and vis-à-vis dialog in (22) – (25) and assume that Ben accepted each of them. Their effect on the common ground is shown in (32) – (34). (For ease of presentation the NP will be represented by a constant individual sc).\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\)Can it happen by chance that update is purely descriptive or interpretational? It’s unclear how to exclude this.

\(^{15}\)A side remark on the measure function interpretation of gradable adjectives: The measure function interpretation is common in the case of dimensional adjectives, with metrical scales. For taste adjectives the notion of degrees appears inappropriate – what could degrees be if the scale is only ordinal? On the other hand, even in the case of an ordinal scale there has to be a carrier on which the order is defined, and we want the carrier to be of type d (that is, distinct from the universe of individuals) in order to handle taste adjectives in parallel to dimensional ones. One standard technique in such cases consists in using a set of entities akin to a Herbrand universe (cf. Grätzer 1968), that is, the carrier of a term algebra. The term algebra construction ensures...
Finally, evaluative propositions with regular (non-gradable) predicates like Stuhl/Chair differ from the two types above being restricted to special utterance situations. As in the case of dimensional adjectives, if embedded under finden such sentences cannot be understood as describing a matter of fact. They can only be used to express that the denotation of Stuhl is such that the object the speaker points to is included. This is not acceptable in normal conversation because discourse participants know the meaning of the words. But imagine Max Black’s chair museum (c. Black 1937). The sentence ‘Das ist ein Stuhl!’ / ‘This is a chair’ makes perfectly sense when pointing to one of the borderline cases of chairs.\footnote{Note, however, that evaluative propositions with non-gradable predicates must be interpreted purely interpretational, that is, the thing pointed to must be in full view in order to license a meta-linguistic interpretation. If not (e.g., if the speaker points to some bulky package) the sentence is a plain descriptive proposition.} So the meta-linguistic interpretation component, which is argued to be at the core of evaluativity in this paper, is not restricted to taste predicates. But there is an essential difference: While with non-gradable predicates a meta-linguistic interpretation is licensed only in borderline cases, it is always licensed with taste predicates. Taste predicates, and presumably gradable predicates in general, come with inbuilt interpretational variability – this is why they aregradable. Speakers are, of course, aware of the fact that variability in gradables differs from variability in non-gradable predicates – you will be criticized for lack of taste but not for lack of language competence if you call a scrap heap beautiful. The flip side of the inbuilt interpretational variability seems to be this:

\footnote{Many thanks to Markus Kracht for pointing that out to me.}
Taste predicates, and presumably gradable predicates in general, include a meaning component which is immune against redefinition – although the criteria of a sculpture to be considered beautiful have changed considerably in the last century, the meaning of beautiful sculpture appears constant. This is why Hare (1952) attests taste predicates an 'evaluative component' in addition to their descriptive component.

4. The pragmatics of subjective judgments

The first dimension in the two-by-two classification proposed in section 2.3 relates to the semantic difference between descriptive and evaluative propositions, as discussed in section 3. The second dimension relates to the difference between general and subjective judgments, which is a pragmatic difference addressing the role of judgments in conversation. In this section we will first have a brief look at the meaning of finden. Next, the discourse framework of Farkas and Bruce (2009) will be presented, and finally the pragmatics of subjective judgments will be spelt out in this framework.

4.1 The meaning of finden

The German attitude verb finden is close in meaning but not equivalent to English find. Its meaning is discussed in Saebo (2009) and also in Nouwen (2007). Saebo summarizes verbs like Norwegian synes, Swedish tycka, French trouver and German finden under the notion of subjective attitude verbs. He focusses on the observation that these verbs require a 'subjective predicate' (subsuming taste and dimensional adjectives and deontic modals). Following Saebo, the sole function of subjective attitude verbs consists in shifting the judge such that it is identical to the agent of the attitude verb. The semantics of subjective attitude verbs is spelt out in a relativist framework with a judge parameter in evaluation and also in a contextualist framework, with an implicit experiencer argument. This yields two different explanations for the incompatibility of subjective attitude verbs with descriptive propositions (Saebo calls them judge-invariant propositions): In the relativist framework their combination would be redundant mapping judge-invariant propositions onto themselves, and in the contextualist framework their combination would lead to a type clash. From the point of view of rejecting that there is faultless disagreement, Saebo's account is inappropriate since it is judge-based. Moreover, it doesn't account for the data since it predicts that embedding an evaluative proposition under first person finden has no effect at all. How to explain then that embedding under first person finden makes the proposition immune against denial?

In the manuscript in Nouwen (2007) an 'impersonal' approach to taste predicates is advocated dispensing with judges as well as implicit experiencer arguments. Attitude reports with to find (as a subjective attitude verb) are analyzed analogously to belief reports, by means of a particular set of worlds constituting the agent's find-worlds. An agent's find-worlds are a subset of his belief worlds selected "based on subjective experience of the world." (p.6), which is taken to explain why the cat
food example presupposes information from personal experience – if Bill finds cat food tasty he must have tried it. The idea of find-worlods as a particular subset of belief worlds does not, however, explain for the fact that finden / to find cannot embed descriptive propositions (you can have personal access to facts of the world). More importantly, like Saebo's account, Nouwen's account fails to explain for the immunizing effect of first person finden.

We will start from the characteristics of finden used in the previous section: finden complements must be evaluative propositions, including an interpretational update component. That is, finden presupposes that its propositional argument is such that it cannot be updated purely descriptive. We will provisionally encode this characteristics by assigning a particular type \(<s,<i,t>>\) where \(i\) stands for interpretation (recall that propositions are evaluated with respect to a world and an interpretation).

We will, moreover, assume that the doxastic alternatives of an attitude holder mirror the separation of interpretations and worlds postulated for the common ground. We can then interpret finden such that it imposes the same condition as imposed by interpretational update, cf. (29): An agent \(x\) findet \(\varphi\) if \(\varphi\) is true in every world under each interpretation maintained by the agent, (35).\(^{17}\)

\[
(35) \quad \square_{\text{finden}} = \lambda x_\varphi. \lambda \varphi_{<s,<i,t,w>}. \forall i \in \pi_1(\text{DOX}_x), \forall w \in \pi_2(\text{DOX}_x). \quad \square \varphi_{<s,<i,t,w>} \quad \text{where} \quad \pi_1<1,w> = I, \pi_2<1,w> = W
\]

presupposing that \(\varphi\) cannot be updated purely descriptive\(^{18}\)

In the remainder of this paper the focus will be on the speech act capacity of finden, that is, on first person finden in the present tense. The prominent features of first person finden is that it makes the embedded statement immune to subsequent denial, and that it allows to express disagreement without expressing direct denial. This is considered as evidence that finden sentences do not express general judgments, i.e. regular assertions meant to enter the common ground of the conversation. They instead express subjective judgments indicating individual discourse commitments in the sense of Farkas & Bruce (2010). The semantics of finden in (35) is compatible with the idea that first person finden imposes an evaluative update on the discourse commitments of the speaker, cf. 4.3.

4.2 The framework of Farkas & Bruce

Farkas and Bruce in their paper in (2010) investigate the use of polarity particles in reacting to assertions and polar questions, and suggest a discourse structure extending Stalnaker’s common ground by individual – but public!! – discourse commitments. While the common ground includes the discourse commitments shared by the participants, individuals discourse commitments are not, or not yet, mutually shared. Assertions are understood as proposals addressing the question under discussion

\(^{17}\) The meaning of finden suggested in (35) does not account for the subject experience constraint. This constraint requires to take the criteria into consideration that lead someone to calling something beautiful etc., as opposed to those leading someone to calling something a chair, (see Hare 1952), which is beyond the scope of this paper.

\(^{18}\) that is, there is more than one interpretation under debate.
and are added to the common ground only after confirmation by the other discourse participants.

Farkas & Bruce define a discourse structure $K$ such that it contains

- a (possibly empty) set of propositions $DC_X$ for each participant $X$ — propositions that $X$ is publicly committed to, which are not shared by the participants of the conversation;
- a set of propositions $cg$ — common ground — shared by the participants of the conversation;
- the table representing the issues to be resolved, implemented as a stack of pairs of syntactic objects and their denotations;
- a projected set $ps$ comprising future common grounds projected by the elements of the table.

For ease of exposition, we will simplify the table omitting the syntactic objects, and we will ignore the projected set. Update rules operating on such discourse structures are specified for polar questions, assertion, confirmation and denial. For example, an assertion is given as an operator turning an input structure $K_i$ into an output structure $K_o$ such that the asserted proposition $p$ is pushed on the table and is added to the individual discourse commitments of the speaker, cf. (37a) (adapted from (9) in Farkas & Bruce).

Confirming an assertion $p$ is done by an operator turning an input structure $K_i$ into an output structure $K_o$ such that $p$ is added to the individual discourse commitments of the confirming participant, cf. (37b) (adapted from (16) in Farkas & Bruce). If $p$ is confirmed by each discourse participant, it will be an element of every individual discourse commitment set and trigger a 'common ground increasing operation' moving $p$ from the individuals commitment sets into the common ground, and removing it from the table, cf. (37c) (adapted from (17) in Farkas & Bruce).

Finally, (total) denial of an assertion $p$ is done by an operator pushing $\neg p$ on top of the table and adding $\neg p$ to the individual discourse commitments of the denying participant, cf. (37d) (adapted from (22) in Farkas & Bruce). Denial ends in a 'crisis' because neither $p$ nor $\neg p$ can become common ground and be removed from the table. A way out of the crisis is for participants to 'agree to disagree', removing the controversial propositions from the table while leaving them in the individual discourse commitments, cf. (37e) (adapted from (23) in Farkas & Bruce).

(37)  
  a. Assertion $(p, a, K_i) = K_o$ such that $DC_{a,o} = DC_{a,i} \cup \{p\}$, and $T_o = push(p, T_i)$
  b. Assertion_Confirmation $(b, K_i) = K_o$ such that $DC_{b,o} = DC_{b,i} \cup \{p\}$, where $p=\text{top}(T_i)$ and $p \in DC_{a,i}$
  c. Common_Ground_Increasing: if $DC_{x,o} = DC_{x,i} \cup \{p\}$ for all participants $X$, then
    (i) $cg_o = cg_i \cup \{p\}$
    (ii) $DC_{x,o} = DC_{x,i} \setminus \{p\}$ for all participants $X$, and
    (iii) $T_o = \text{pop}(p, T_i)$\(^{19}\)
  d. Total_Denial $(b, K_i) = K_o$ such that $DC_{b,o} = DC_{b,i} \cup \{\neg p\}$, where $p=\text{top}(T_i)$ and $p \in DC_{a,i}$
  e. Agree_To_Disagree $(K_i) = K_o$ such that $T_o = \text{pop}(p, T_i)$ where $p \in DC_{x,i}$ and $\neg p \in DC_{y,i}$

for at least one $X$ and $Y$

The distinctive feature of the Farkas & Bruce model consists in the representation of the individual discourse commitments of the participants. This idea accounts for the fact that an assertion involves a public commitment of the speaker even if it is not accepted by the other discourse participants, which

---

\(^{19}\)This is a simplification again. The original rules says: pop off the table all items that have as an element of their denotation an item $q$ that is entailed by $cg_o$, p.19.
was already pointed out in Gunlogson (2001). Individual discourse commitments have a two-fold task in the Farkas & Bruce system. First they serve as a temporary parking position for propositions waiting for confirmation, and secondly they serve as a representation of controversial information. The latter role is exploited by the ‘agree-to-disagree’ rule (37e). We will slightly extend the task of individual discourse commitments using them as representation of propositions conveyed in subjective judgments, e.g. embedded under first person *finden*.

### 4.3 General and subjective judgments in the Farkas & Bruce framework

In order to account for the semantic distinction between descriptive and evaluative propositions such that the former reduces possible worlds and the latter reduces possible interpretations, the common ground as well as the individual discourse commitments will be assumed to consist of a pair of worlds and interpretations, <I,W>. Update will be done according to the update rules in (29), cf. section 3.4.

The distinction between general and subjective judgments is a pragmatic one reflecting different intentions of the speaker. General judgments – with descriptive as well as evaluative propositions – are regular assertions waiting for confirmation or denial. If confirmed the propositions are included in the common ground. If denied the conversation is in a crisis and the issue under debate (on the table) remains unresolved, unless the participants ‘agree to disagree’.

Subjective judgments present their propositions as mere opinions, not intended to enter the common ground. This is what makes them immune against denial, cf. (38a). The other discourse participant can express agreement and disagreement by using first person relativized forms again, cf. (38b,d). However, in contrast to general judgments, the issue is resolved even in the case of disagreement (and even if the next speaker changes the topic). In the case of agreement the common ground increasing rule in (37c) will shift the proposition from the individual commitments sets to the common ground, as it does when general judgments are confirmed. In the case of disagreement the controversial propositions stay individual commitments. Since subjective judgments don’t present a proposition such that it is open for discussion, we will assume that they don’t affect the table. This accounts for the impossibility of denial, as in (38a). (Explicit confirmation, as in (38c) is at least marked.)\(^\text{20}\) It also accounts for the intuition that there is no unresolved issue regardless of how the other participants react.

\[(38)\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Ann} & \quad \text{Ich finde die Skulptur schön.} \\
& \quad \text{'}I \text{ think the sculpture is beautiful.'} \\
\text{Ben: a.} & \quad \text{# Nein, sie ist nicht schön.} \\
& \quad \text{’No, it is not.’} \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{Ich finde sie nicht schön.} \\
& \quad \text{’I don’t think it is beautiful.’} \\
\text{c.} & \quad \text{Ja, sie ist schön.} \\
& \quad \text{’Yes, it is.’}
\end{align*}\]

\(^{20}\) Agreement can be expressed without relativization, as shown below. But note that the confirmation particle is not licensed and verum focus or a verum particle like *tatsächlich* is required.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Ann} & \quad \text{Ich finde die Skulptur schön.} \\
\text{Ben:} & \quad \text{Sie ist tatsächlich schön.}
\end{align*}\]
d.  Ich finde sie auch schön.
   'I also think it is beautiful.'

In order to extend the Farkas & Bruce system such that it covers subjective judgments a rule must be added which is analogous to the assertion rule in (37a) without, however, placing the proposition on top of the table. This rule will be called opinion and is given in (39). Denial and confirmation are ruled out as reactions because there is no suitable proposition on the table. Agreement and disagreement are expressed by uttering another opinion.

(39) Opinion \( (p, a, K) = K_\alpha \) such that \( DC_{a, \alpha} = DC_{a,i} \cup \{p\} \), and \( T_\alpha = T_i \)

Let us finally consider the agree-to-disagree rule again. The sequence it was meant to cover in the original system is demonstrated in (40) using a descriptive proposition (Farkas & Bruce don't consider evaluative propositions). The crisis resulting from total denial is avoided by taking the issue from the table while leaving the controversial propositions as individual commitments, \( p \in DC_{a,i} \). In (41) a controversy is shown addressing an evaluative proposition (brought up by a general judgment).

In this case the crisis resulting from denial is most naturally avoided by rephrasing the controversial proposition as an opinion. Let us call this type of discourse move retreat to opinion. As before the controversial issue has to be removed from the table while leaving the individual commitments unchanged. So we might consider the sequence in (41) as an agree-to-disagree instance. (A more principled way to handle this sequence would consist in adding a precondition to the opinion rule saying that whenever \( p \) is on top of the table uttering the opinion \( p \) removes it from the table – if \( p=\text{top}(T_i) \) then \( T_\alpha=\text{pop}(T_i) \) else \( T_\alpha=T_i \).

(40) agree to disagree in Farkas & Bruce:
   Ann:  Osnabrück liegt in Dänemark. / Osnabrück is in Denmark.
   Ben:  Nein! Es liegt in Deutschland. / No, it isn’t, it’s in Germany.
   Ann:  Reden wir über was anderes – Let’s not pursue this further.
   Ben:  o.k.

(41) retreat to opinion
   Ann:  Die Skulptur ist schön.
         'The sculpture is beautiful.'
   Ben:  Nein! Sie ist nicht schön.
         'No, it is not beautiful.'
   Ann:  Ich finde sie jedenfalls schön.
         'Anyway, I think it is beautiful.'
   Ben:  Ich nicht.
         'I don’t.'

Summarizing the handling of general and subjective judgments in the extension of the Farkas & Bruce framework suggested above, general judgments (descriptive as well as evaluative) constitute issues to be confirmed or denied. If confirmed the proposition expressed in the judgment enters the common ground, which in the case of evaluative propositions has the effect of narrowing down interpretations.
instead of conveying factual information, and thus has a normative effect. If a general judgment is
 denied, the controversy can be resolved either by agreeing to disagree or by retreat to opinion. Note
 that the latter is impossible with descriptive propositions but the former is neutral as to the type of
 proposition.

Subjective judgments express propositions not intended to enter the common ground and are
represented as individual discourse commitments without being placed on the table. This is
implemented by the opinion rule in (39) which is the only deviation from the Farkas & Bruce system.
Not being on the table, subjective judgments cannot be confirmed or denied. Agreement and
disagreement can be expressed by using subjective judgments again.

If discourse participants agree with respect to an individual commitment, it will turn into a
shared one, that is, be moved to the common ground. This is the same in the case of general
judgments and of subjective judgments. That means that participants in a conversation can achieve
compliance in one of two ways: Either they make a general judgment thereby demanding acceptance,
or they make a subjective judgment and wait for agreement. Subjective judgments thus provide a by-
pass strategy to hopefully achieve compliance without risking denial.

5. Conclusion

Summing up, we started out from the hypothesis that faultless disagreement is a misconception –
denial of evaluative propositions is genuine disagreement. However, evaluative propositions can be
first person relativized making the proposition immune against denial. A semantic and a pragmatic
dimension of evaluativity were distinguished. Semantically, descriptive propositions differ from
evaluative propositions such that the latter but not the former pass the *finden* test: If a sentence can
be embedded under the German attitude verb *finden* it expresses an evaluative proposition, otherwise
the proposition is a descriptive one. This test results in a notion of evaluative propositions including, in
addition to propositions with taste adjectives, those with dimensional adjectives and even with plain
nouns if used meta-linguistically. This suggests that the distinctive feature of evaluative propositions as
compared to descriptive ones is located in an interpretational update component in addition to
descriptive update. The framework for spelling out descriptive vs. interpretational update has been
adopted from Krifka (2012).

The hypothesis that evaluative propositions require descriptive plus interpretational update is
supported by the nature of the related scales. In the case of the dimensional adjectives either the cut-
off point is presupposed and the actual size of the painting is asserted, or vice versa. Presupposing one
and asserting the other is possible because degrees of size are absolute – size relates to a ratio scale.
Degrees of beauty, however, are not absolute, since beauty relates to a merely ordinal scale. So
statements about beauty can only be given in a relative fashion. This entails that in the case of taste
predicates the assertion necessarily includes cut-off point and actual value, and accordingly, the
update has to include both a descriptive and an interpretational component.

Pragmatically, general judgments differ from subjective judgments such that the latter are first
person relativized by, e.g. first person *finden* or adverbials like *für meine Begriffe / meiner Meinung
nach* ('to my mind', 'in my opinion'). When using a general judgment, regardless of whether it’s about a
descriptive proposition or about an evaluative one, the speaker demands that his statement is
included in the common ground of the conversation. Subjective judgments are treated as mere
opinions. They need not enter the common ground and may, instead, stay individual discourse commitments in the sense of Farkas & Bruce (2009). This implies that they are immune against denial, but allow for disagreement in the form of controversial subjective judgments.

Distinguishing the semantic and the pragmatic dimension of judgments about taste does away with the notion of faultless disagreement. Denial in disputes about matters of taste is accepted as genuine denial thereby accounting for the puzzle of the competent speaker. On the other hand, judgments of taste can be relativized, and if relativized allow for controversial positions of discourse participants without one of them being wrong. Relativization provides a faultless way to express disagreement, which might explained the origin of the idea of faultless disagreement.

In judge-based accounts, as e.g. Lasersohn (2005), evaluative propositions are generally treated as is they were implicitly first-person relativized, thereby conflating the semantic and the pragmatic dimension of evaluativity. As shown in this paper, judgments of taste make use of two mechanisms of natural language, meta-linguistic interpretation and first-person relativization. Neither of the two is confined to matters of taste – there are other types of propositions requiring a meta-linguistic interpretation, e.g., definitional sentences (cf. Krifka 2012), and there is first-person relativization even of descriptive propositions, although not by finden and instead by, e.g., meinen ('have the opinion'). (another case at hand would be sentences with epistemic might which were argued to be judge-dependent in Stephenson 2007). Judge-based analyses, in taking evaluativity as a mechanism sui generis, miss an important generalization.

There is a large number of open issues. To name just a few, there is the provisional assumption that taste adjectives relate to ordinal scales – what does the order look like, and are they ordinal or do they including well-defined intervalls? (cf. Solt to appear). Secondly, disputes about matters of taste have been reduced in this paper to very simple cases. Gathering data on more realistic disputes is a top priority issue. Thirdly, we considered only copular sentences in this paper with evaluative adjectives in predicative positions. Switching to attributive positions raises the issue of restrictive vs. non-restrictive modification. It has been observed that the majority of non-restrictive attributive adjectives are evaluative, raising the question of why evaluative adjectives are more susceptible to non-restrictive interpretation than dimensional ones.

Here is one another open issue: Consider the adjective wunderbar 'wonderful'. In contrast to schön, wunderbar does not allow for direct denial, (42b) is clearly marked. Disagreement can only be expressed by embedding the respective proposition under finden, cf. (42c). Moreover, wunderbar exhibits a "quoting effect" when picked up by another discourse participant, cf. (43). If Ann uses the term Chinese vase and Ben repeats it, his reply appears slightly long-winded but is otherwise unmarked. But if she uses wonderful vase and Ben repeats this term, we have the clear impression that he is quoting her, that is, the ascription of the vase being wonderful is still due to Ann and not to Ben himself.

   'The new production is wonderful.'

   b. Ben: ???? Nein! Sie ist nicht wunderbar.
   'No, it's not wonderful.'
c. Ben: Ich finde sie nicht wunderbar.
   'I don’t consider it to be wonderful.'

(43) (Ann coming home packed with parcels and bags ...)

   'Look, Chuck gave me a Chinese/wonderful vase.'

   'I’ll be there in a minute. Leave the Chinese / wonderful vase in the corridor.'

It was claimed throughout this paper that first person relativization has to explicit. The above data suggest, however, that wunderbar – unlike schön, lecker, groß etc. – has an implicit argument tying the interpretation to the speaker in a way that when picked up in an attributive position by another discourse participant the interpretation is still bound to the former speaker. If this is correct, wunderbar behaves as predicted by Lasersohn’s or Stephenson’s implicit experiencer analysis: Ann says that the vase is wonderful to her mind, and Ben asks her to leave the to her mind wonderful vase in the corridor. This example is evidence that first person relativization can be implicit, but only if a predicate is already lexically immune against denial. Fortunately, such predicates are rare.

References


Kant, Immanuel (1790) Kritik der Urteilskraft.


Kennedy, Christopher & Louise McNally (2005) Scale structure, degree modification and the semantics of gradable predicates. Language 81, 345-381.


Lasersohn, Peter (2008) Quantification and Perspective in Relativist Semantics. ???


Nouwen (2007) ?????????????


Sassoon, Galit (2011) *Be positive! Norm-related implications and beyond*, Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 15, Universität des Saarlandes, Saarbrücken, Germany.

Solt (to appear) Scales in Natural Language. ?????????


