Evaluational Adjectives

Alex Silk

a.silk@bham.ac.uk

Draft of July 2017

Abstract

Recent literatures in philosophy of language and formal semantics on predicates of personal taste (PPTs) have focused on a surprisingly limited range of expressions. This narrow focus has led to problematic conclusions about the syntax and semantics. This paper demarcates a theoretically interesting class of (what I call) *evaluational adjectives*. This class includes PPTs as well as adjectives expressing other kinds of normative and epistemic evaluation, such as aesthetic adjectives, moral adjectives, and epistemic adjectives, among others. Evaluational adjectives are distinguished, empirically, in giving rise to certain phenomena often associated with context-sensitivity, not only in the positive form, but also in comparatives. Such phenomena include discourse-oriented use, felicitous embedding under ‘find’, and, surprisingly, vagueness phenomena. A unified degree-based semantics is developed to capture these phenomena: what distinguishes evaluational adjectives, semantically, is that they denote context-dependent measure functions (“evaluational perspectives”) — context-dependent mappings to degrees of tastiness, beauty, probability, etc., depending on the adjective. The perspective-sensitivity characterizing the class of evaluational adjectives cannot be assimilated to multidimensionality or sensitivity to an experiencer class argument. Contrary to common assumptions, a unified context-sensitive semantics for evaluational adjectives can be neutral on philosophical issues about subjectivity, antirealism, etc. However, I show how speakers’ assumptions about these issues can lead to certain differences among evaluational adjectives in patterns of use. I propose that diagnostics for PPTs and putatively “subjective” expressions be analyzed, not in terms of some basic notion of subjectivity, but in terms of a general, precisely specified kind of “context-oriented” use of context-sensitive language. I focus on one such diagnostic: the felicity of embedding under ‘find’.

*This paper develops material from Silk 2016a: ch. 7. Thanks to Gunnar Björnsson, Daniel Rothschild, and audiences at the 3rd Varieties of Normativity Workshop at Uppsala University, the University of Birmingham, and University College London for discussion.
Contents

1 Introduction 1

2 Diagnosing evaluational adjectives 4
   2.1 Perspective-sensitivity with PPTs 4
   2.2 Adjectives of normative and epistemic evaluation 11
   2.3 Four sources of context-sensitivity 14

3 Evaluational adjectives in a degree semantics 21
   3.1 Background: Degree semantics and standards 21
   3.2 Perspective-sensitivity 23
   3.3 Aside: Experiencer arguments and multidimensionality 26
   3.4 Discourse dynamics 28

4 Evaluational adjectives and evaluational domains 30

5 ‘Find’ and ‘subjectivity’ 37

6 Conclusion 45

References 47
1 Introduction

An important function of language is to share and coordinate our attitudes in communication. In inquiry we manage our beliefs about how things are, how they might be, and how possibilities may hang together. We also take a stance and orient ourselves toward possible acts, attitudes, and states of affairs. We evaluate possibilities as desirable, appropriate, horrible, trivial, permissible, wonderful. We make demands and grant permissions, emphasize commonality and breed antipathy. In communication we shape our identities as thinkers and feelers in a social world; we coordinate on what to believe, how to act, how to feel, and whom to be.

Literatures in descriptive areas of linguistics have highlighted the richness of evaluativity in natural language and discourse (e.g., Hunston & Thompson 1999, Martin & White 2005, Hunston 2011 and references therein). One class of expressions that has received much attention in recent theoretical discussions is so-called “predicates of personal taste” (PPTs). For instance, in using (1) speakers can express their experiences and coordinate their sensibilities—sometimes in agreement, sometimes in disagreement, as in (2).

(1) This cake is tasty.
(2) A: This cake is tasty.
   B: Yeah it is. Let’s get some more.
   B’: No way. It’s too sweet.

Yet the literature on PPTs in philosophy of language and formal semantics has focused on a surprisingly limited range of expressions—‘tasty’, ‘fun’, and, well, that pretty much covers it. This narrow focus has led to hasty generalizations and problematic conclusions about the syntax and semantics.

The aim of this paper is to develop an improved linguistic account of the broader variety of predicates of normative and epistemic evaluation. The paper demarcates a theoretically interesting class of (what I call) evaluational adjectives. This class includes adjectives expressing various types of evaluative, normative, and epistemic attitudes—not only PPTs but also aesthetic adjectives, moral adjectives, and epistemic adjectives, among others. First, I show that evaluational adjectives are distinguished, empirically, in giving rise to certain distinctive discourse phenomena, embedding phenomena, and vagueness phenomena in the comparative form (§2). Second, I develop a degree-based semantics that captures these phenomena: what distinguishes evaluational adjectives, semantically, is that they denote context-dependent measure functions (“evaluational perspectives”)—context-dependent mappings to de-
degrees of taste, beauty, probability, etc., depending on the adjective (§3). Third, I show how, contrary to common assumptions, such a unified context-sensitive semantics can be neutral on philosophical issues about “subjectivity” in different evaluative domains (§4). Fourth, I propose that putative diagnostics for subjectivity be analyzed instead in terms of a general, precisely specified kind of use of context-sensitive language (§5).

A more detailed overview of the paper is as follows: §2 empirically diagnoses the class of evaluational adjectives, focusing first on PPTs (§2.1). Like other relative gradable adjectives (RGAs), PPTs are sensitive to a contextually relevant degree standard or threshold when used in the positive (unmodified) form. PPTs are distinguished from ordinary RGAs such as ‘tall’ in continuing to exhibit various phenomena often associated with context-sensitivity when used in the comparative. Such phenomena include (what I call) discourse-oriented use, felicitous embedding under ‘find’, and, surprisingly, vagueness phenomena. While the former two data points have been observed in the literature on PPTs, the third has not. Extensions to other normative and epistemic predicates haven’t been systematically investigated. Indeed I show that the phenomena with comparatives arise not only with PPTs but also with (e.g.) aesthetic, moral, and epistemic adjectives (§2.2). PPTs are an instance of a theoretically interesting class of (what I call) evaluational adjectives. I provide new data showing that the context-sensitivity characterizing evaluational adjectives cannot be assimilated to multidimensionality or sensitivity to a thematic experiencer argument (§2.3).

§3 develops a formal semantics that captures the linguistic commonalities among PPTs and other evaluational adjectives. Informally put, evaluational adjectives are sensitive to a perspective of evaluation — body of tastes, values, norms, etc. — which evaluates how tasty, beautiful, likely, etc. things are. This notion of perspective is implemented in a degree-based framework for gradation: Evaluational adjectives are semantically unified in denoting context-dependent measure functions — what I call an evaluational perspective — which map items to their degree of taste, beauty, probability, etc., depending on the adjective. With evaluational adjectives, the adjective itself, and not simply the positive form, is context-sensitive. Issues concerning relations among perspective-sensitivity, multidimensionality, and experiencer arguments in the formal semantics are then briefly considered. These four potential sources of context-sensitivity — standard-sensitivity, perspective-sensitivity, dimension-sensitivity, and experiencer-sensitivity — haven’t been clearly delineated in previous literature.

Focus on PPTs’ alleged “subjectivity” has led many theorists to avoid examining how their theories may apply to other types of normative and evaluative language.
§4 argues that this restriction of attention is misplaced. Giving evaluational adjectives a unified context-sensitive semantics (§3) doesn’t imply that the domains of evaluation are all merely a “matter of taste.” Putative differences in subjectivity can be located in the metasemantics. Speakers’ assumptions about these differences can lead to differences among evaluational adjectives in patterns of use. I consider four, concerning first-person experience requirements, attitude-dependence, Yalcin-style “evaluative contradictions,” and discourse disagreements.

Considering the range of evaluational adjectives raises challenges for certain common diagnostics for PPTs and other putatively “subjective” expressions. §5 more closely examines one such diagnostic: the felicity of embedding under ‘find’. Drawing on the (largely new) data from the previous sections, I observe that felicitous embeddings under ‘find’ arise with a broader variety of adjectives than is often assumed, adjectives not all of which we might intuitively classify as subjective or as concerning matters of taste. I suggest that we explain felicitous embedding under ‘find’, not in terms of a pretheoretic notion of subjectivity, but in terms of a general, independently attested kind of “context-oriented” use of context-sensitive language. This kind of use, and with it the proposed licensing condition for ‘find’, can be precisely characterized in terms of the formal semantics and pragmatics from §3.

Relative gradable adjectives and predicates of personal taste have been central in literatures on faultless disagreement, contextualism vs. relativism, and degree-based vs. non-degree-based semantics for gradation. I want to flag that the aim of this paper isn’t to address these debates, at least directly. To fix ideas I use a degree-based framework in developing the formal semantics, and implement the notion of perspective-sensitivity along contextualist lines. These technical choice points are inessential; the proposal can be adapted straightforwardly to alternative non-degree-based and non-contextualist frameworks. And although I will argue against fundamentally explaining the linguistic phenomena in terms of some independent notion of subjectivity, the positive proposals are compatible with different substantive views about the possibility of faultless disagreement and the subjectivity/objectivity of various evaluational domains.

The principal aims of the paper are as follows: first, to provide linguistic data motivating a theoretically interesting class of “evaluational adjectives”; second, to delineate the contextual dependence characterizing evaluational adjectives (“perspective-sensitivity”), and to distinguish it from other sources of context-sensitivity often discussed in literatures on adjectives; third, to develop a (degree-based) formal semantics for evaluational adjectives that captures their unity as a semantic class, and more clearly delineates certain possibilities regarding syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic differences among them; fourth, to raise challenges for certain common tests for
PPTs and frequent explanatory appeals to notions of “subjectivity” in linguistic theorizing; and fifth, to shed light on possible interactions among linguistic phenomena with evaluational adjectives and substantive philosophical issues across domains of normative and epistemic evaluation. Investigating evaluational adjectives highlights the varieties of evaluative resources which language affords. The hope is that the preliminary discussion of evaluational adjectives in this paper may serve as a corrective to the literature’s preoccupation with ‘fun’ and ‘tasty’. Examining the broader spectrum of examples can encourage more fruitful approaches to existing debates and new avenues for future research.

2 Diagnosing evaluational adjectives

Predicates used in expressing personal tastes come in various syntactic categories. Following the literature, I focus on predicates of personal taste (PPTs) that are relative gradable adjectives (RGAs), like ‘tasty’ and ‘fun’. I begin by examining three phenomena often associated with context-sensitivity in RGAs: discourse-oriented use, felicitous embedding under ‘find’, and sorites-sensitivity. I will show that PPTs are distinguished from ordinary RGAs such as ‘tall’ in continuing to exhibit these phenomena in the comparative form. While the first two data points below have been observed in the literature on PPTs, the third has not. Details of formal implementation (§3) and extensions to other predicates of normative and epistemic evaluation (§2.2) haven’t been systematically investigated.

2.1 Perspective-sensitivity with PPTs

It is a commonplace that gradable adjectives are interpreted with respect to a contextually supplied comparison class. In one context (3) might say that Harry is bald for a Johnsen, while in another context (3) might say that Harry is bald for a man.

(3) Harry is bald.

1Gradable adjectives are adjectives that can (inter alia) form comparatives (‘taller’, ‘tastier’) and take degree modifiers (‘very tall’, ‘quite tasty’). (On relative vs. absolute gradable adjectives, see, e.g., Kennedy & McNally 2005, Kennedy 2007; it is contentious whether positive form absolute adjectives (e.g., ‘flat’) are similarly context-sensitive.) I will sometimes call positive form gradable adjectives ‘predicates’; this doesn’t prejudge whether the form in positive predications is basic or derived (more on which in §3). For expository purposes I will be sloppy about distinguishing lexical items and word forms, using single quotes indiscriminately for both; context should disambiguate.

As has been well-observed, this doesn’t exhaust the adjectives’ apparent context-sensitivity.\footnote{See, e.g., \textsc{Fara} 2000, \textsc{Richard} 2004, \textsc{Shapiro} 2006, \textsc{Kennedy} 2007. For experimental evidence, see also \textsc{Alexatir} & \textsc{Pelletier} 2011 and references therein.} Relative gradable adjectives (RGAs) are sensitive to (something like) a \textit{standard} or \textit{threshold} when used in the positive form (‘tall’, ‘bald’, ‘rich’; see n. 1). Even given a specific comparison class — say, “bald for a man” — if Harry has only some small patches of hair, then (3) can seem acceptable under low standards but unacceptable if the standards are raised. What standard to accept can become the subject of agreement and disagreement (e.g., \textsc{Barker} 2002, \textsc{Richard} 2004, 2008, \textsc{Silk} 2016: ch. 6). Settling that by ‘rich’ we mean “rich for an American,” and agreeing on the relevant socio-economic facts, needn’t resolve the dispute in (4).

\begin{quote}
\textbf{(4)}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[-] \textit{Me}: Rita is rich.
\item[-] \textit{You}: No way, Rita isn't rich.
\end{enumerate}
\end{quote}

Our disagreement concerns what it is to count as rich.

\textsc{PPTs also exhibit such standard-sensitivity in the positive form (cf. \textsc{Glanzberg} 2007). Suppose we are sampling ice cream cakes for a friend's birthday. Even if we settle that by 'tasty' we mean “tasty for an ice cream cake,” we have similar gustatory experiences, and we agree on the relevant circumstances, this needn't resolve our dispute in (5).}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{(5)}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[-] \textit{Me}: This cake is tasty.
\item[-] \textit{You}: No it isn't. Let's keep looking. We can find a better cake for Chip.
\end{enumerate}
\end{quote}

We disagree about what "standard for tastiness" to accept — i.e., how tasty a cake needs to be for it to count as tasty.

In (5) the speakers agree about how tasty the cake is, and use ‘tasty’ in managing their assumptions about what standard for tastiness to accept. Perhaps more common is to use ‘tasty’ in managing assumptions about how tasty things are in the first place (cf. \textsc{Lasersohn} 2008: 308). In (6) we may agree that things count as tasty only if they have such-and-such degree of tastiness.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{(6)}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[-] \textit{Me}: This cake is tasty.
\item[-] \textit{You}: No it isn't. It's gross. It's way too sweet.
\end{enumerate}
\end{quote}

Our disagreement is about how tasty the cake is.

One way of bringing out this contrast between (4)-(5) and (6) is to look at comparatives. First, call uses like in (4)-(6) \textit{discourse-oriented uses} — pretheoretically,
in the sense that the speakers are managing their assumptions about what standards, tastes, etc. to accept in the discourse. (How to capture such uses is contentious. For now let’s use the label merely descriptively in this way. A more formal characterization will follow in due course.) Discourse-oriented uses fail to arise with ‘tall’ when in the comparative form, as reflected in (7).

(7) [Context: A and B agree about everyone’s heights — say, that Alice is 70″ and Bert is 67″ — and about all other relevant worldly facts.]
   A: Alice is taller than Bert.
   B: #No, Bert is taller than Alice.

It is hard to imagine what could be at-issue between A and B in (7).

By contrast, the comparative in (8) with ‘tasty’ can be used in the same sort of discourse-oriented way as the positive predication in (1), as reflected in (9) (cf. Lasersohn 2008, Kennedy 2013).

(8) Alice’s cake is tastier than Bert’s cake.
(9) Me: Alice’s cake is tastier than Bert’s cake.
    You: No way. Alice’s is too sweet. Bert’s cake is right on the money.

The basis for the comparative disagreement in (9) is intuitively the same as the basis for the disagreement in (6): how tasty things are. What is at-issue is what tastes to endorse in the conversation.

Second, many have observed that the matrix verb ‘find’, in constructions of the form ‘find x PRED’, only licenses complements exhibiting certain kinds of context-sensitivity.

⁴Embedding the context-insensitive complement in (10) or the context-sensitive complement in (11) leads to infelicity:

(10) #Fritz finds 7 prime.

⁴See Stephenson 2007b, Sæbø 2009, Bouchard 2012, Fleisher 2013, Kennedy 2013, McNally & Stojanovic 2014. The relevant sense of ‘find’ is the one which licenses small clauses and is stative. There are other senses of ‘find’ which lack the apparent restriction to certain sorts of context-sensitive complements, as in (i)–(ii).

(i) After closely examining the contents of my dish, I found my trippa alla romana to be vegetarian, and so not actually trippa alla romana at all. (Kennedy 2013: 261n.6)

(ii) A research team based at Princeton University found that physical activity reorganizes the brain so that its response to stress is reduced and anxiety is less likely to interfere with normal brain function.

(www.lifescience.net/news/60/exercise-reorganizes-the-brain-to-be-more-resilient)
(11)  #Fritz finds the number prime.

Although certain positive uses of ‘tall’ are felicitous under ‘find’, as in (12), comparative uses, like in (13), are infelicitous.

(12)  [Context: Some adolescents are talking about who has had a growth spurt. They mention Robb, who shot up four inches over the summer. Ed, trying to play like it’s nothing, says that Robb “isn’t tall” (for a boy in their grade) — he’s “only” 5’7”. Height is quite the point of pride, after all, and Robb isn’t cool enough to be in their group. Most of the other kids go along with Ed, but Sam won’t have it. Sam says:]

You might not find Robb tall. But I find him tall.

(13)  #I find Robb taller than Ed.

By contrast, positive and comparative uses of PPTs are equally felicitous under ‘find’ (cf. [KENNEDY 2013]):

(14)  Fritz finds the cake tasty.

(15)  Fritz finds Alice’s cake tastier than Bert’s cake.

Though it is contentious what characterizes the felicitous uses of ‘find’ (more on which in §5), what is important for present purposes is simply the contrast between examples like (13) with ‘tall’ and (15) with ‘tasty’. The felicity of PPTs under ‘find’ cannot merely be due to a feature of the positive form.

A third motivation for distinguishing the context-sensitivity of PPTs from the general standard-sensitivity associated with positive form RGAs concerns vagueness phenomena. Context-sensitivity isn’t itself sufficient for vagueness; speakers could intend to settle on perfectly specific standards, maximally discriminating tastes, etc. However, speakers’ failing to do so can lead to phenomena characteristically associated with vagueness. Positive form gradable adjectives provide the paradigm of sorites-sensitivity:

(16)  Sorites Paradox

(P1)  Someone with one cent isn’t rich.

(P2)  If you give one cent to someone who isn’t rich, she still won’t be rich.

(C)  ∴ No one, no matter how much money they have, is rich.

Slightly more formally, where $x_n$ is an individual with $n$ cents:

\[(P1)\] $x_1$ isn't rich.
\[(P2)\] For all $n$, if $x_n$ isn't rich, then $x_{n+1}$ isn't rich.
\[(C)\] $\therefore$ For all $n$, $x_n$ isn't rich.

The premises seem true, and the argument seems valid. But the conclusion is false. Bill Gates is rich. Hence the paradox.

Though it is often assumed in linguistics circles that comparatives aren't vague, PPTs contrast with RGAs such as 'tall' in giving rise to vagueness phenomena in the comparative. You like sugar in your coffee. Yet it's not as if you care exactly how sweet it is. As far as your preferences go, one day's sweetness is as good as any other — okay, at least up to a point (say, $K$; there is, perhaps, such a thing as too sweet). Now consider (18) with 'preferable' — letting $x_s$ be an ordinary cup of coffee, and $x_1, \ldots, x_n, \ldots x_K$ be a series of otherwise identical cups differing only in quantity of sugar, with $x_n$ being a (pre-$K$) cup with $n$ micrograms of sugar:

\[(18)\] **Comparative Sorites (A)**
\[(P1)\] $x_s$ is more preferable than $x_1$.
\[(P2')\] For all $n < K$, $x_n$ is as preferable as $x_{n+1}$.
\[(P3)\] For all $a, b, c$, if $a$ is more preferable than $b$, and $b$ is as preferable as $c$, then $a$ is more preferable than $c$. (**P1-transitivity**)
\[(C)\] $\therefore$ For all $n < K$, $x_s$ is more preferable than $x_n$.

Alternatively, in a perhaps more familiar form:

\[(19)\] **Comparative Sorites (B)**
\[(P1)\] $x_1$ is not more preferable than $x_s$.
\[(P2)\] For all $n$, if $x_n$ is not more preferable than $x_s$, then $x_{n+1}$ is not more preferable than $x_s$.
\[(C)\] $\therefore$ For all $n$, $x_n$ is not more preferable than $x_s$.

We know (P1) is true given your preferences. (P2) (alternatively (P2')/(P3)) also seems true. Indeed even a supertaster could accept it; one simply doesn’t care exactly how sweet it is. As far as your preferences go, one day’s sweetness is as good as any other — okay, at least up to a point (say, $K$; there is, perhaps, such a thing as too sweet). Now consider (18) with 'preferable' — letting $x_s$ be an ordinary cup of coffee, and $x_1, \ldots, x_n, \ldots x_K$ be a series of otherwise identical cups differing only in quantity of sugar, with $x_n$ being a (pre-$K$) cup with $n$ micrograms of sugar:

\[(18)\] **Comparative Sorites (A)**
\[(P1)\] $x_s$ is more preferable than $x_1$.
\[(P2')\] For all $n < K$, $x_n$ is as preferable as $x_{n+1}$.
\[(P3)\] For all $a, b, c$, if $a$ is more preferable than $b$, and $b$ is as preferable as $c$, then $a$ is more preferable than $c$. (**P1-transitivity**)
\[(C)\] $\therefore$ For all $n < K$, $x_s$ is more preferable than $x_n$.

Alternatively, in a perhaps more familiar form:

\[(19)\] **Comparative Sorites (B)**
\[(P1)\] $x_1$ is not more preferable than $x_s$.
\[(P2)\] For all $n$, if $x_n$ is not more preferable than $x_s$, then $x_{n+1}$ is not more preferable than $x_s$.
\[(C)\] $\therefore$ For all $n$, $x_n$ is not more preferable than $x_s$.

We know (P1) is true given your preferences. (P2) (alternatively (P2')/(P3)) also seems true. Indeed even a supertaster could accept it; one simply doesn’t care exactly
how sweet the coffee is. Discriminable though they might be, whether in quantity of sugar or even quality of sweetness, one cup is as good as the next given one’s preferences. Again the argument seems valid (n. 3). And yet the conclusion (C) is false. Not just any ordinary cuppa can be the best. There may be something wrong with sugar in one’s coffee, but not that thinking otherwise leads to paradox.

So, PPTs give rise to a kind of vagueness which persists in the comparative. Vagueness phenomena with PPTs can be associated not only with a standard for tastiness (how tasty something needs to be to be tasty), but with the body of tastes itself (how tasty things are). Comparative sorites arguments like (18)–(19) haven’t been observed in the literature (see Silk 2016a: ch. 7, 2017c for discussion).

To recap, we have examined three phenomena often associated with context-sensitivity in adjectives: discourse-oriented use, felicitous embedding under ‘find’, and sorites-sensitivity. Unlike ordinary RGAs such as ‘tall’, PPTs exhibit these phenomena not only in positive predications but also in comparatives. The upshot is that the context-sensitivity of PPTs cannot simply be due to a feature of the positive form. Informally put, PPTs are sensitive not only to a relevant threshold or standard when in the positive form — a standard for how tasty something needs to be for it to count as tasty; they are sensitive to a body of tastes which evaluates how tasty things are. This sensitivity to a body of tastes — call it a taste perspective — is associated with the adjective itself and hence arises with both positive and comparative forms.

The goal thus far has been to delineate two potential sources of context-sensitivity in uses of adjectives ‘ADJ’: standard-sensitivity (sensitivity to a standard determining how ADJ something needs to be to count as ADJ), and perspective-sensitivity (sensitivity to a perspective of evaluation determining how ADJ things are). For the moment what is of primary importance are the empirical contrasts between RGAs like ‘tall’ and PPTs like ‘tasty’. The discussion has been neutral on how the phenomena — the discourse disagreements, embedding behavior under ‘find’, and sorites arguments — are to be captured, and how standard-sensitivity and perspective-sensitivity are to be implemented in the formal semantics. For instance, first, it is common, especially in the literature on PPTs, to characterize discourse disagreements like the ones in this section as in some sense “faultless.” Nothing in this paper requires tak-

\^{9}\text{Note that the force of } (P_2')/(P_2) \text{ isn’t fundamentally due to limitations in one’s powers of discrimination. As Wright shows in responding to Peacocke, mere indiscriminability between adjacent items is insufficient to generate the paradox (1987: 239–243). (I now see that certain of the comparative sorites examples which I used in earlier work were problematic in failing to appreciate the above point from Wright (2016a: 198–199, 206). Thanks to Gunnar Björnsson for helpful discussion.) (P_3) \text{ is validated by standard semantics for gradation, both degree-based and delineation-based; see Silk 2016a, 2017c for extensive discussion.}
ing a stand on this issue one way or the other (more on which in §4). What is important here is simply that whereas comparative disagreements like (7) with ‘tall’ are odd, analogous comparative disagreements like (9) with ‘tasty’ are perfectly natural. PPTs can be used in managing speakers’ views about what standards to accept in the conversation (e.g., how tasty something needs to be to count as tasty), as occurs with positive form RGAs generally, as well as about what tastes to accept in the conversation (e.g., how tasty things are).

Second, it is commonplace to treat examples involving discourse disagreement and embedding under ‘find’ as diagnostic of a kind of “subjectivity” in natural language (e.g., Lasersohn 2005, Stephenson 2007b, Bouchard 2012, Fleisher 2013, Kennedy 2013, Bylinina 2014, Crespo 2015, Umbach 2015, a.m.o.). No such characterization is built into the data itself. Indeed we will see reasons for avoiding treating the phenomena fundamentally in terms of a pretheoretic notion of subjectivity; an alternative characterization of the phenomena will be proposed.

Third, I have spoken of the discourse role of gradable adjectives in managing speakers’ assumptions about what standards, tastes, etc. to accept (introduced above via the descriptive label of “discourse-oriented use”); yet I have left open what specific mechanisms are responsible for this phenomenon and at what level it is to be explained.10 As noted in §1, the discussion in this paper is ultimately neutral on matters broached in recent contextualism/relativism debates — e.g., whether the standards/tastes with respect to which the adjectives are interpreted are determined by a syntactically real argument, whether they figure in the derivation of semantic content, and whether they are supplied by the context of utterance or a posited context of assessment. For all I have said, the apparent “context-sensitivity” could be pre-semantic (in determining what language, in the sense of Lewis 1975, is being spoken), semantic (in determining what value for a contextual parameter figures in deriving semantic content), or post-semantic (in determining what value for a contextual parameter figures in truth-evaluation). To fix ideas I eventually assume a type of contextualist semantics, but nothing hangs on this. I return to the relation between a (taste) perspective and thematic experiencer arguments in §2.3.

10 For general discussion of the notion of faultless disagreement, see Wright 2001, MacFarlane 2014.

11 For relevant discussion, see Soames 1999, Barker 2002, Richard 2004, 2008, Shapiro 2006, Stephenson 2007b, MacFarlane 2014, Silk 2016a; see also nn. 18, 24. Compare Barker 2002 on “metalinguistic” uses of vague predicates. I avoid this label since the relevant uses needn’t be fundamentally about (uses of) language or whether a predicate applies — e.g., whether ‘tall’ applies to Robb. More fundamentally, they can concern what standards, tastes, norms, etc. to accept, or what it is to be tall, rich, tasty, beautiful, etc. (cf. Richard 2004, 2008, Silk 2016a, 2017a).
Fourth, our informal talk of “standards” in positive predications, and of objects having “degrees” of various properties, needn't require a formal semantics which incorporates degrees into the type system. Though the next section develops the semantics in a degree-based framework, the descriptive points in this section are neutral on the ontological status of degrees, and compatible with treating gradable adjectives as ordinary predicates (e.g. type \(\langle e, t \rangle\)). (More on this in §§2.3, 3.1.)

2.2 Adjectives of normative and epistemic evaluation

It is common to treat the category of “predicates of personal taste” on an intuitive level. One might wonder what relevantly distinguishes PPTs from expressions of aesthetics (‘beautiful’), desirability (‘wonderful’), morality (‘wrong’), credence (‘likely’), etc., and whether the intuitive category of PPTs constitutes an interesting lexical class. In this subsection I provide new data showing that the above phenomena with PPTs also arise with (e.g.) aesthetic, moral, and epistemic adjectives. The linguistic features of PPTs that distinguish them from RGAs like ‘tall’ are shared among adjectives of normative and epistemic evaluation generally.

Consider an aesthetic adjective such as ‘beautiful’. Like other RGAs, ‘beautiful’ is interpreted with respect to a contextually supplied standard/threshold when in the positive form. In using \[(20)\] speakers can manage their assumptions about this standard, i.e. about how beautiful something needs to be for it to count as beautiful.

\[(20)\] This painting is beautiful.

In \[(21)\], however, our disagreement needn't concern how beautiful the painting would need to be for it to count as beautiful; it concerns how beautiful the painting is.

\[(21)\] *Me:* This painting is beautiful.  
*You:* No it isn't. My dog could have painted that.

Comparative judgments like \[(22)\] are no less contestable:

\[(22)\] This painting is more beautiful than that one.

\[(23)\] *Me:* This painting is more beautiful than that one.  
*You:* No way. The balance in this one is all off.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\] Compare the categories of evaluation in, e.g., \cite{HunstonThompson1999, MartinWhite2005}. A distinction is sometimes made between narrowly deontic/normative expressions (‘permissible’) and evaluative expressions (‘good’). I will use ‘normative’ and ‘evaluative’ broadly for expressions of both types.
Likewise for adjectives of epistemic evaluation such as ‘likely’: Our disagreement in [24] needn’t target how likely Raphaella’s winning would need to be to count as likely; it can concern how likely her winning is.

(24)  
Me:  It’s likely that Raphaella will win.  
You:  No way. Thom is the real frontrunner.

The disagreement extends to comparative likelihood judgments.

(25)  
Me:  It’s more likely that Raphaella will win than that Thom will.  
You:  No way. Thom is the real frontrunner.

In using (e.g.) ‘beautiful’/‘likely’, speakers can manage their assumptions about how beautiful/likely things are, and what aesthetic values/epistemic norms to accept in the conversation.

Second, various normative and epistemic adjectives pattern with PPTs in felicitously embedding under ‘find’ in both the positive and comparative form.\(^\text{[3]}\)

(26)  
[Context: We are on a field trip to the art museum. We have to locate five paintings and evaluate them.]
   a.  I find this painting beautiful.
   b.  I find this painting more beautiful than the last one.

(27)  
[Context: A and B are both welfare monists: they take well-being to be determined by a single property. A takes the only basic factor affecting well-being to be pleasure, but B takes it to be desire-satisfaction. They consider Pat, who is very happy and thinks his family loves him, though they in fact hate him, and Sal, who is less happy but not so deluded. B appeals to Pat as a problem case for A’s hedonism. A disagrees and says:]  
   a.  I find Pat well-off.
   b.  I find Pat more well-off than Sal.

(28)  
[Context: We are discussing what is likely to result from recent political protests.]
   a.  I find peace likely.
   b.  I find peace more likely than war.

Finally, consider vagueness phenomena. Suppose you are forced to decide between saving your dearest friend and saving some number of strangers. Plausibly

\(^{13}\)We will return to the importance of such examples for existing accounts of ‘find’ in §5.
we have some special obligations to those close to us, so that it is morally better for you to save your friend than to save two strangers. But there doesn't seem to be any precise number of strangers that would tip the balance. Now consider:

(29)  (P1) Your saving 2 strangers is not morally better than your saving your dear friend.

(P2) For all n, if your saving n strangers is not morally better than your saving your dear friend, then your saving n+1 strangers is not morally better than your saving your dear friend.

(C) ∴ For all n > 2, your saving n strangers is not morally better than your saving your dear friend.

No one's friends are that important.

Our sensitivities to evaluatively relevant features of objects are often limited. Even when we are sensitive to differences in these features, we might not think every degree of change matters. The upshot: vagueness phenomena with comparatives.¹⁴

So, various normative and epistemic adjectives pattern with PPTs, in contradistinction to RGAs such as 'tall', in exhibiting the relevant linguistic phenomena in both the positive and comparative forms. In light of these empirical commonalities, it will be helpful to have a label for the class of adjectives that pattern with one another in this way: call them *evaluational adjectives*. (I introduce the label 'evaluational', rather than (say) 'evaluative', since the latter is often used for narrower subclasses of adjectives (e.g., excluding PPTs or epistemic adjectives).) Evaluational adjectives are empirically unified, and distinguished from RGAs such as 'tall', in continuing to exhibit certain linguistic phenomena often associated with context-sensitivity in comparatives. The examples with comparatives motivate treating evaluational adjectives as context-sensitive in the same kind of way, over and above the standard-sensitivity associated with positive form RGAs generally. Informally put, much as positive/comparative uses of ‘tasty’ depend on a body of tastes evaluating how tasty things are (“taste perspective”), likewise positive/comparative uses of ‘beautiful’ depend on a body of aesthetic values evaluating how beautiful things are (“aesthetic perspective”), positive/comparative uses of ‘likely’ depend on a body of evidence and epistemic norms evaluating how likely things are (“epistemic perspec-

¹⁴Comparative sorites arguments get their force from apparent intransitive indifferences. Given the rich structure in probability scales, it is harder to generate intuitively compelling comparative sorites arguments with epistemic adjectives. Elsewhere I argue that such arguments are possible ([Silk 2016a, §7.4]). However, examining such cases may be distracting for present purposes; as noted in §§2.1, 2.3, although certain forms of semantic context-sensitivity characteristically give rise to vagueness phenomena, context-sensitivity is itself neither necessary nor sufficient for vagueness.
tive”), and so on. Evaluational adjectives are in general sensitive to a “perspective of evaluation” (body of tastes, values, norms, etc.); this “perspective-sensitivity” is associated with the adjective itself, not simply the positive form, and hence arises in comparatives as well as positive predications.

The discussion thus far has been neutral on how the discourse, embedding, and vagueness phenomena are to be explained, how the empirical commonalities among evaluational adjectives are to be captured in the formal semantics, and what linguistic differences there may be internal to the class of evaluational adjectives. The remainder of the paper takes up certain of these issues in beginning the project of developing a theoretical account of evaluational adjectives.

2.3 Four sources of context-sensitivity

I have said that what characterizes evaluational adjectives is that they are sensitive to a “perspective of evaluation” (body of tastes, values, norms, etc.), which evaluates how tasty, beautiful, likely, etc. things are. The next section examines how to implement this notion of perspective in the formal semantics. But first it is important to distinguish perspective-sensitivity from several other properties often discussed in literatures on adjectives. While there are precedents for appealing to an informal notion of perspective in the semantics of PPTs, existing accounts often fail to clearly distinguish (what I call) perspective-sensitivity from certain other sources of vagueness and context-sensitivity (n. [17]). Even at the present informal level of discussion, the perspective-sensitivity which demarcates the class of evaluational adjectives can be seen to be distinct from (e.g.) general properties of vagueness, standard-sensitivity, sensitivity to a thematic experiencer argument, and multidimensionality.

First, some authors have suggested treating PPTs’ sensitivity to relevant tastes as an instance of vagueness ([Barker 2009, 2013, Sassoon 2013b], cf. Taranto 2005, Glanzberg 2007, Umbach 2013). Indeed above we appealed to sorites-sensitivity in the comparative as evidence for distinguishing evaluational adjectives from RGAs such as ‘tall’. However, although perspective-sensitivity can give rise to vagueness phenomena, perspective-sensitivity isn’t sufficient (or necessary) for vagueness. As noted in §2.1, it is possible to settle on perfectly precise, maximally opinionated tastes, norms, etc. (cf. n. [5]). Imagine a race of maximally discriminating and opinionated supertasters. Every comparative ‘$x_i$ is more preferable than $x_j$’, even for adjacent cups $x_n$ and $x_{n+1}$, would be accepted or rejected, and the inductive premises (P2)/(P2') in the comparative sorites arguments (18)/(19) would have no force. Nevertheless the comparatives could be used in a discourse-oriented way and felicitously embed under ‘find’:

14
A and B are maximally discriminating and opinionated alien supertasters. They both take sweetness to be the only factor determining preferability for coffee, but they disagree about how sweet is too sweet. Alice’s cup has one more microgram of sugar than Bert’s.

A: Alice’s cup is more preferable than Bert’s.
B: No way. It’s sweeter, but Bert’s is still better.

A finds Alice’s cup more preferable than Bert’s.

Second, some authors have suggested assimilating the context-sensitivity of PPTs to multidimensionality (Barker 2013, Bylinina 2014, McNally & Stojanovic 2014). Many adjectives can be used to measure items along multiple dimensions (‘clever’, ‘large’, ‘healthy’, ‘skillful’) (see Sassoon 2013a and references therein). For instance, how large something is might depend on its height (‘large in height’) or volume (‘large in volume’), or some combination thereof. It is important to distinguish informal observations about how judgment can sometimes depend on multiple criteria (factors, dimensions, etc.) from the specific linguistic phenomena of multidimensionality. Call a use of an adjective phrase ‘α’ dimension-sensitive if how α something is is taken to depend on multiple properties which might be quantified over or overtly specified via some ‘with respect to’-type phrase, as reflected in the contrast between (32) and (33). (So, not all uses of multidimensional adjectives, qua lexical items, need be dimension-sensitive in this sense; overtly specifying a dimension may render the use dimension-insensitive, like in (32a).)

(32) This box is large.
    a. This box is large in height.
    b. This box is large in some/all respects.

(33) Robb is tall.
    a. #Robb is tall with respect to height.
    b. #Robb is tall in some/all respects.

Which specific factors are relevant and how they compare can depend on context and become subject to negotiation, as in (34)–(35) with ‘healthy’.

(34) [Context: How healthy someone is is taken to depend on their cholesterol and blood pressure, among other things. Robb has high blood pressure but normal cholesterol. Sam has normal blood pressure but high cholesterol.]
A: Robb is healthier than Sam.
B: No, Sam is healthier. You give cholesterol too much weight. Blood pressure is more important.

(35) A finds Robb healthier than Sam.

Some uses of evaluational adjectives are similarly dimension-sensitive. For instance, how tasty a cake is might be taken to depend on various factors — sweetness, richness, texture, etc. — as reflected in (36)–(37).

(36) This cake is tasty in some/all respects.

(37) A: Alice’s cake is tastier than Bert’s. It’s nice and sweet.
    B: No, Bert’s cake is tastier. You’re a sugar fiend. Sweetness counts for something, but texture is more important. Bert’s cake hits it right on the money.

However, dimension-sensitivity isn’t necessary for the perspective-sensitivity characteristic of evaluational adjectives. Intuitively speaking, perspective-sensitivity is a sensitivity to something that determines how tasty, beautiful, likely, etc. things are. Speakers might disagree about how tasty, beautiful, etc. things are on the basis of disagreeing about the relative importance of various dimensions of taste, beauty, etc., as in (37), but they need not. Hence the phenomena from §§2.1–2.2 with comparatives can arise with evaluational adjectives in uses where only a single dimension is relevant.

For instance, first, the phenomena with comparatives can arise in uses which linguistically specify a particular dimension, as in (38)–(39), in contrast to (40)–(41).

(38) A: Alice’s cake is tastier in sweetness than Bert’s cake.
    B: No way. Alice’s is too sweet.

(39) A finds Alice’s cake tastier in sweetness than Bert’s cake.

(40) [Context: A and B agree on all the physical facts about the two boxes (length, width, height, volume, mass, etc.).]
    A: This box is larger in height than that one.
    B: #No, that box is larger in height.

(41) #A finds this box larger in height than that one.

Likewise the phenomena persist in contexts where it is agreed that some single dimension determines the evaluational property. This is particularly evident for unidimensional epistemic adjectives, like ‘likely’ where the single dimension is simply
probability, as in (25) and (28).

(42)  a. #Raphaella’s winning is likely in some respects (/more likely in some respects than Thom’s winning).
    b. #Raphaella’s winning is likely with respect to probability (/more likely with respect to probability than Thom’s winning).

Yet we have seen that the point holds with non-epistemic evaluational adjectives as well: In (27) A and B each take well-being to be determined by a single dimension, but they disagree about what this dimension is — say, measurable quantity of pleasure, or number of preferences satisfied. A self-respecting hedonist like A wouldn’t say things like (43) — except perhaps as conveying a concession to a pluralist about well-being — nor would a desire-satisfaction theorist like B agree to them.

(43) [Context: Same as (27)]
    A: ??Pat is well-off in some respect.
    A: ??Pat is well-off with respect to happiness.
    A: ??Pat is more well-off with respect to happiness than Sal.

Similarly, the disagreements in (6) and (9) with ‘tasty’ may arise even if we agree that there is a single relevant dimension of tastiness; we could simply disagree about what this dimension is, or agree on the dimension (e.g., phenomenal sweetness) but disagree about the cakes’ respective measures of it. Likewise for the comparative sorites arguments in (18)–(19), which may assume that preferability is measured simply in terms of sweetness, and the comparative sorites argument in (29); many a monistic indirect consequentialist have countenanced special obligations.

Third, a prominent debate in the literature on PPTs has concerned whether PPTs have an argument place for an experiencer (judge) specifying to/for whom something is tasty, fun, etc. The alleged experiencer argument is treated as what is specified in ‘to’/‘for’ phrases like in (44).

(44)  a. The cake is tasty (/tastes good) to me.
    b. The roller coaster is fun for Timmy.

It is contentious how to test for the presence of an experiencer argument (n. 16). On

16There are of course more sophisticated ways of developing hedonism and desire-satisfaction theories, but the crude versions illustrate the point more vividly.

an intuitive level, although evaluational adjectives are used in expressing speakers’ attitudes, it isn’t immediately clear what experiences need be associated with (e.g.) moral or epistemic adjectives. Contrast (45), in which the subject, Timmy, is evidently the experiencer of the fear, with (46)–(47).

(45)  
  a. Timmy_{experiencer} fears Fido_{theme}.
  b. Timmy_{experiencer} is afraid.

(46)  
  God: Coveting thy neighbor’s wife is morally wrong/permissible/tolerable.

(47)  
  Inconceivable bliss is 50% likely.

Yet we needn’t rely on such intuitive contrasts to see that perspective-sensitivity — sensitivity to relevant tastes, norms, values, etc. — cannot be assimilated to dependence on a relevant experiencer, in the sense of traditional discussions of thematic roles. The distinction can be observed even with PPTs: The “perspective” evaluating things’ levels of tastiness cannot be identified with the tastes of an “experiencer” of the sort specified in ‘to’/’for’ phrases like in (44).

First, the phenomena involving discourse-oriented use and embedding under ‘find’ arise with PPTs even when a relevant experiencer is linguistically specified or salient in the extra-linguistic context. Suppose A and B are discussing the quality of the new brand of cat food, Brand X, as compared to the existing brand, Brand Y. Most of the cats devour X, but the “highbrow” Persian and Siamese cats push it aside, going for Y instead. A, being a person of refined sensibilities herself, thinks it’s the latter cats’ tastes that really matter, whereas B is more egalitarian. The following dialogues ensue:

(48)  
  B: The new cat food is really tasty [to cats]. Look, most of them are eating it right up.
  A: No way, and who cares. I’m voting for Brand Y.
  B: Stop being so snobbish. Brand X tastes great.

(49)  
  B: Brand X is tastier [to cats] than Brand Y. Look, most of them are eating it right up.
  A: No way, and who cares. I’m voting for Brand Y.
  B: Stop being so snobbish. Brand X tastes great.

A and B’s disagreement isn’t a descriptive disagreement about the cats’ gustatory experiences; they agree about the various cats’ likes and dislikes. And they aren’t disagreeing about what is tasty; obviously, neither A and B like the cat food themselves. Rather A and B’s disagreement is an evaluative disagreement about what
what counts as tasty, and determines tastiness, for cats: the responses of the feline majority or the “cat elite.” In reporting A and B’s disagreement, we might say:

(50) [What are A’s and B’s views about the new brand of cat food?]

B finds it tasty [to cats], even tastier than the old brand, but A doesn’t.

The disagreements in (48)–(49) are, in this sense, relevantly analogous to the disagreements with ‘tasty’ in (6)/(9). In (48)–(49) A and B disagree about what “perspective on tastiness-for-cats” to accept, much as in (6)/(9) we disagree about what tastes to endorse ourselves. (I leave it to the reader to adapt the sorites series with ‘tasty’ in §2.1 for the above case.)

Second, experiencers and perspectives can be differently bound. Suppose there is a company, Company C, that makes ice cream (for humans) as well as pet food for different kinds of animals. You love their ice cream, and you think their dog food tastes good to dogs, their cat food tastes good to cats, and so on. You say:

(51) Everything C makes is tasty.

The experiencer in (51) varies as a function of the argument of the predicate, as reflected in the rough interpretation in (52).

(52) for every x C makes, x is tasty-to-Kx, where Kx is the kind of creature that x is made for

By contrast, the taste perspective — what determines the dog food’s measure of tastiness-to-dogs, the cat food’s measure of tastiness-to-cats, etc. isn’t bound, but contextually supplied; it can be targeted in discourse disagreements, as in (53).

(53) B: Everything C makes is tasty.
A: No way. Their cat food falls short.
B: Stop being such a snob. Most cats love it.

Comparative examples such as (54), given the rough interpretation in (55), illustrate the point as well:

(54) C’s dog food is tastier than C’s cat food.

(55) a. C’s dog food is more tasty to dogs than C’s cat food is tasty to cats.
b. C’s-dog-foodx is more tasty-to-Kx than C’s-cat-foody is tasty-to-Ky

(56) [Context: The bourgeois cats in the majority devour C’s cat food, but the highbrow cats ignore it. The highbrow dogs (gracefully) devour C’s dog
food, but the bourgeois dogs in the majority ignore it.]

A: C’s dog food is tastier than C’s cat food.
B: No, stop being such a snob. Their cat food falls short, but their dog food tastes great.

So, even if PPTs take an experiencer argument — an argument of the sort explicitly specified in ‘to’/‘for’ phrases — this argument must be distinguished from the taste perspective, in the sense of what determines things’ relevant levels of tastiness.

This section has delineated four sources of context-sensitivity: standard-sensitivity, i.e. sensitivity to a threshold or standard, associated with positive form RGAs; perspective-sensitivity, i.e. sensitivity to a body of tastes, norms, probabilities, etc., associated with evaluational adjectives; dimension-sensitivity, i.e. sensitivity to a set of dimensions, associated with certain uses of multidimensional adjectives; and experiencer-sensitivity, i.e. sensitivity to an experiencer, associated with predicates taking an experiencer class argument, the sort of argument specified by ‘to’/‘for’ phrases with PPTs. These loci of context-sensitivity haven’t been consistently distinguished in the literature. While the informal point that PPTs are associated with a “perspective” on taste isn’t uncommon, existing formal implementations fail to distinguish what I am calling perspective-sensitivity from other sources of evaluation, experiences, attitude expression, etc., and fail to generalize to other adjectives which pattern in relevantly similar ways. The following sections develop an account that improves in these respects.

1⁷ For observations about the context-sensitivity of PPTs going beyond the standard-sensitivity associated with the positive form, see Lasersohn 2008: 308, Bouchard 2012: 211–212, Fleisher 2013, Kennedy 2013, Sassoon 2013: 122–123, Bylinina 2014 ch. 2, MacFarlane 2014: 2–3, 71–7, McNally & Stojanovic 2014, Crespo 2015. However, these authors either don’t offer a specific formal semantics, or pursue different implementations from the one developed below. For accounts which, in my view, fail to clearly distinguish standard-sensitivity and perspective-sensitivity, see Taranto 2005, Glanzberg 2007, Barker 2009, 2013, Wolf 2014. Experiencer-sensitivity is systematically conflated with (what I am calling) perspective-sensitivity, in the sense of what determines the measures of taste, etc. (n. 16). McNally & Stojanovic 2014 provides a helpful corrective, in distinguishing experiencer-sensitivity, which they associate with PPTs, from the evaluativity associated with other types of evaluative adjectives, such as aesthetic adjectives. However, McNally & Stojanovic still treat the adjectives as essentially multidimensional and diagnose their context-sensitivity (at least partly) in these terms (see also Barker 2013, Kennedy 2013: 275–276, Bylinina 2014).
3 Evaluational adjectives in a degree semantics

This section develops a formal semantics for evaluational adjectives. The principal focus will be on capturing the perspective-sensitivity common to evaluational adjectives, and distinguishing perspective-sensitivity from the standard-sensitivity associated with the positive form. Issues of multidimensionality and experiencer arguments are also briefly considered. To fix ideas I assume a contextualist version of a Kennedy-style degree semantics. However, as noted previously, the central issues in this paper are orthogonal to debates about contextualism vs. relativism and degree-based vs. non-degree-based semantics for gradation (§§1.2.1). The following implementation can serve as a model which may be adapted in light of one’s broader views on context-sensitivity and adjective semantics. §4 considers potential broader linguistic and philosophical implications of unifying evaluational adjectives’ semantics in the proposed way.

3.1 Background: Degree semantics and standards

A common approach is to treat gradable adjectives as associating things with degrees, conceived as points on a scale. I will assume specifically that gradable adjectives denote functions from items to degrees on a scale — so-called measure functions (type \textlangle} e, d \textrangle, or for broadly modal adjectives type \textlangle} st, d \textrangle; Bartsch & Venne mann 1973, Kennedy 1999, 2007). For instance, ‘tall’ denotes a function from individuals to (positive) degrees of height, i.e. the individual’s maximal height; ‘hot’ denotes a function from individuals to (positive) degrees of temperature, i.e. the individual’s maximal temperature; and so on. Treating gradable adjectives as denoting measure functions yields a straightforward interpretation of comparatives. Roughly, (57) says that the degree to which Alice is tall is greater than the degree to which Bert is tall, as reflected in (58), where tall is a function that maps each individual to its height, a degree in the height scale.

\begin{align*}
(57) & \quad \text{Alice is taller than Bert.} \\
(58) & \quad (57) \text{ is true in } c \text{ iff } \text{tall}(Alice) > \text{tall}(Bert)
\end{align*}

The positive form is treated as relating a degree to a contextually determined threshold, or degree standard. Following Kennedy 2007, I treat this degree standard as determined by a variable \textit{s}; the value of \textit{s} in a context \textit{c}, \textit{s}_c, is a function that maps adjective denotations — measure functions — to a degree standard associated with the adjective in \textit{c}. For instance, \textit{s}_c(tall) is the degree standard for tallness in \textit{c}, i.e.
the least height that something can have for it to count as tall. is true in if the degree to which Alice is tall is at least as great as .

(59) Alice is tall.

(60) is true in iff \( \text{tall}(\text{Alice}) \geq s_c(\text{tall}) \)

It is important not to read too much into the ‘measure’ in ‘measure function,’ or into the appeal to “degrees” in the formal semantics. I use ‘measure function’ broadly, not only for adjectives associated with measurement procedures or numerical units of measurement (e.g. height in inches, with ‘tall’), but for any mapping which would determine an order on objects. I am not assuming that the domain of degrees is isomorphic to the real numbers; yet for simplicity I assume that the domain of degrees is totally ordered (see Solt & Gotzner 2012 for experimental data). Talking about the “measure functions” for evaluational adjectives doesn’t presuppose that properties of tastiness, fun, beauty, etc. are quantifiable.

Further, my decision to implement the account in a degree-based semantics with a semantic type for degrees is inessential. There are well-known logical correspondences between degree-based and non-degree-based (“delineation-based,” “supervaluationist,” “partial predicate”) frameworks. For instance, rather than utilizing a primitive notion of degrees, one can start with qualitative orderings \( \succeq \) (“at least as ADJ as”) over the set of individuals in the adjectives’ domains; degrees and scales may then be derived from these qualitative orderings (Cresswell 1977).

---

18Details of the compositional process which delivers these truth conditions won’t be crucial here. For instance, first, I bracket how the positive form is related to the comparative. Many degree-based theories derive the positive form by combining the adjective with a null morpheme, ‘pos’, to yield a predicate of individuals (e.g., von Stechow 1984, Kennedy 1999, 2007). Second, there are issues concerning how degree standards are determined as a function of the linguistic and extra-linguistic context, and how comparison classes may figure in the semantics (see n. 3). I continue to abstract away from other sources of context-sensitivity, such as from comparison classes. I will use ‘standard’ sometimes in referring to \( s_c \), sometimes to the degree standard for a given adjective determined by \( s_c \); context will disambiguate. For simplicity I bracket issues of intensionality from world-indexing measure functions and standards. To fix ideas I couch the account in terms of variables. (I use boldface type for variables, and italics for their values in context.) My talk about context supplying values for such variables can be understood as short for talk about contextually determined assignment functions (e.g., Heim & Kratzer 1998); any subscripts on variable values are included simply for expository purposes to indicate the intended assignment and interpretation of the variable (see also n. 21). For alternative relativist and dynamic frameworks, see Barker 2002, Kolb 2002, Laser-Sohn 2002, Stephenson 2007c, Richard 2008, Lassiter 2011, Silk 2013, MacFarlane 2014, Umbach 2013, cf. Glanzberg 2007, Silk 2016 on contextualism (see also nn. 11, 24). For general discussion of adjectives and different types of (non-)degree-based analyses, see Kennedy 1999, Morzycki 2015 and references therein.
van Benthem 1982, Klein 1991, Bale 2011, van Rooij 2011). (The set of degrees $D$ is the set of equivalence classes under $\succeq_A$, and the order $\succeq_A$ on $D$ is defined accordingly, such that $[x]_A \succeq_A [y]_A \iff_{def} x \succeq_A y$ (where $[a]_A$ is an equivalence class $\{b: b \succeq_A a \land a \succeq_A b\}$).) Where degree-based and non-degree-based approaches differ is on issues regarding the morphology, the internal compositional semantics, the basic vs. derived status of degrees, and the role of degrees in object language and metalanguage. These issues are orthogonal to the issues in this paper. What is important about “degrees” for our purposes is simply that they represent assessments of how tasty, beautiful, likely, etc. (tall, rich, etc.) things are, and thus that they can be associated with qualitative orderings on the items in the adjectives’ domains. The semantics could be implemented in a (logically equivalent) delineation-based framework, or in a derived-degree framework that derives degrees from a more basic ordering on individuals. Nothing of metaphysical significance is presupposed in our talk of things having “degrees” of tastiness, beauty, etc.

3.2 Perspective-sensitivity

Turn now to evaluational adjectives. Let’s start with PPTs. Like other relative gradable adjectives, PPTs are interpreted with respect to the overall standards variable $s$ when in the positive form. The value of $s$ maps the denotation of ‘tasty’ to a degree standard for tastiness, i.e. the least tastiness something can have for it to count as tasty. This standard is what is at-issue in (5) we agree about how tasty things are, but we disagree about how tasty a cake needs to be to count as tasty; we disagree about the relevant value for $s$. In (6), by contrast, we disagree about how tasty the cake is. Our disagreement targets, not the value of $[s]$ given $[tasty]$ (the degree standard for tastiness), but the value of $[tasty]$ given $[the$ cake] (the cake’s degree of tastiness). The basis of our disagreement is what tastes to assume in the conversation. We disagree about what measure function to associate with ‘tasty’.

The lexical semantics of ‘tall’ determines a particular measure function, $tall$, as its semantic value; what heights things have isn’t up for contextual negotiation. I propose that what distinguishes PPTs (and other evaluational adjectives) is that they denote context-dependent measure functions. The adjective itself, not simply the positive form, is context-sensitive. Semantic competence with ‘tasty’ requires a capacity to map objects to their degree of tastiness given a certain body of tastes. No particular mapping from objects to their degree of tastiness — no particular view on how tasty things are — is built into the conventional meaning of ‘tasty’.

I continue to focus on evaluational adjectives that are relative gradable adjectives (n. 1, §2.1).
Call a measure function from objects to their degree of tastiness a *taste perspective*. One way of implementing the above idea is to treat ‘tasty’ as a variable for a taste perspective, as reflected in the first-pass lexical entry in (61) (for contextually determined assignment $g_c$, and typed syntactic index $i_k$ (Heim & Kratzer 1998)).

$\left[\text{tasty}_{i_{e; d}}\right]^g_c = g_c(i_{e; d})$ if $g_c(i_{e; d})$ represents a body of tastes, undefined otherwise.

Given the sorts of uses we have been considering, let’s restrict our attention to contexts where the relevant taste perspective represents tastes endorsed for purposes of the conversation, i.e. to contexts $c$ determining assignments such that $g_c(i)$ represents tastes endorsed in $c$. For convenience let $T$ be a taste perspective variable that represents tastes endorsed for purposes of the conversation, and let $T_c$ be the measure function assigned to $T$ by the contextually determined assignment in such a context; that is, for such contexts $c$, $\left[T\right]^g_c = g_c(i) = T_c$, where $T_c$ maps objects to their (maximal) degree of tastiness according to the tastes endorsed in $c$ (see nn. 18, 21). Accordingly, uttering (1) assumes values for $T$, $T_c$, and $s, s_c$ — a body of tastes and standards endorsed for purposes of the conversation — and asserts that the cake’s degree of tastiness according to $T_c$ is at least as great as the standard for tastiness given by $s_c$, as reflected in (62), where $k$ is the object denoted by ‘this cake’ in $c$. Uttering (8) assumes a value for $T$, $T_c$, and asserts that this taste perspective maps Alice’s cake to a greater degree of tastiness than it maps Bert’s cake, as reflected in (63), where $a$ and $b$ are Alice’s and Bert’s cakes, respectively.

(1) This cake is tasty.

(62) (1) is true in $c$ iff $T_c(k) \geq s_c(T_c)$

---

20 Hereafter I typically use ‘perspective’ in the formal sense introduced here — namely, for a contextually supplied measure function that associates items with degrees of $E$-ness (tastiness, beauty, probability, etc., for evaluational adjective ‘$E$’), representing a body of tastes, norms, etc. In delineation-semantic (“partial predicate,” “supervaluationist”) terms, one could think of a perspective as something that determines the qualitative ordering $\leq_E$ on items with respect to $E$-ness. The present notion of “perspective” thus differs from the notions appealed to in Schaffer (2011) and in literatures on linguistic expressives (Potts 2007) and perspectival expressions (Mitchell 1986). See also nn. 17–18.

21 I assume that the numerical indices record the type of their value. (So, where $\Theta$ is the set of semantic types, the domain of the assignment $g_c$ determined in $c$ is $\mathbb{N} \times \Theta$, and the range is $\bigcup_{\tau \in \Theta} D_{\tau}$.) For simplicity I assume that the measure function for ‘tasty’ takes an individual (type $e$); likewise below I assume that the measure function for ‘beautiful’ takes an individual, and that the measure function for ‘likely’ takes a proposition (type $(s, t)$). To improve readability I often omit the type information on indices when understood. See also n. 18.
Alice’s cake is tastier than Bert’s cake.

The positive predication in (1) and the comparative in (8) each presuppose a body of endorsed tastes (value for Tc), represented by Tc, and assert something about things’ levels of tastiness according to Tc. The context-dependence of both the positive and comparative forms arises from the semantics of the lexical item itself.

This semantics for ‘tasty’ extends straightforwardly to other evaluational adjectives. Take ‘beautiful’ and ‘likely’. Lexical entries can be given as follows (see n. 21).

\[
\text{[beautiful]}_{t(e,d)} \left[ g_{c} = g_{c}(i_{t(e,d)}) \right. \text{ if } g_{c}(i_{t(e,d)}) \text{ represents a body of aesthetic values, undefined otherwise}
\]

\[
\text{[likely]}_{t(st,d)} \left[ g_{c} = g_{c}(i_{t(st,d)}) \right. \text{ if } g_{c}(i_{t(st,d)}) \text{ represents a probability measure, undefined otherwise}
\]

As above, let’s restrict our attention to contexts c where the aesthetic/epistemic perspectives assigned by the assignment gc represent aesthetic values/probabilities accepted for purposes of conversation. Accordingly, let B be an aesthetic perspective variable, the value of which in c, Bc, is a measure function that maps objects to their degree of beauty, representing the aesthetic values endorsed in c. Truth conditions for (20) and (22) follow in (66) and (67), respectively.

| (20) | This painting is beautiful. |
| (66) | (20) is true in c iff Bc(p) ≥ sc(Bc) |
| (22) | This painting is more beautiful than that one. |
| (67) | (22) is true in c iff Bc(p) > Bc(q) |

The positive predication in (20) says that the given aesthetic perspective Bc maps the designated painting p to a degree of beauty at least as great as the degree standard for beauty operative in the context. The comparative in (22) says that Bc maps p to a degree of beauty greater than it maps the non-proximal painting q. Uses of both the positive and comparative forms presuppose a contextually determined aesthetic perspective (value for B), or body of aesthetic values.

Similarly, let E be an epistemic perspective variable, the value of which in c, Ec, is a probability measure that maps propositions to a degree of probability, representing the information and epistemic norms accepted for purposes of conversation. Truth conditions for (68) and (70) follow accordingly, where r is the proposition...
that Raphaella will win and \( t \) is the proposition that Thom will win:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{(68) It's likely that Raphaella will win.} \\
&\text{(69) is true in } c \text{ iff } E_c(r) \geq s_c(E_c) \\
&\text{(70) It's more likely that Raphaella will win than it is that Thom will win.} \\
&\text{(71) is true in } c \text{ iff } E_c(r) > E_c(t)
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{(68)}\] says that the contextually supplied probability measure \( E_c \) maps Raphaella's winning to a degree of probability at least as great as the operative probability threshold. \[\text{(70)}\] says that \( E_c \) maps Raphaella's winning to a greater degree of probability than it maps Thom's winning. Again, the truth conditions of both the positive predication and comparative depend on a contextually determined epistemic perspective (value for \( E \)), or probability measure.

So, on this semantics, what unifies evaluational adjectives semantically, and distinguishes them from (e.g.) 'tall', is that they denote context-dependent measure functions, or evaluational perspectives — context-dependent mappings to degrees of tastiness, beauty, probability, etc., depending on the adjective. Unlike with 'tall', the context-sensitivity of evaluational adjectives arises from the semantics of the lexical items themselves and hence is present in both positive and comparative forms.

### 3.3 Aside: Experiencer arguments and multidimensionality

In §2.3 we distinguished the perspective-sensitivity characteristic of evaluational adjectives from experiencer-sensitivity (associated with predicates taking a possibly implicit experiencer argument) and dimension-sensitivity (associated with certain uses of multidimensional adjectives). Since the primary focus in this paper is on evaluational adjectives as a class, I will largely put aside issues regarding experiencer arguments and multidimensionality. Yet it may be helpful to briefly consider how experiencer- and dimension-sensitivity might be implemented in the present semantics.

First, on experiencer-sensitivity: While it is contentious whether PPTs take an experiencer argument, it is evident that at least some evaluational adjectives do not. That said, let's assume that PPTs have an argument place for a thematic experiencer of the sort specified in overt 'to'/'for' prepositional phrases. Very roughly, one natural way of implementing experiencer-sensitivity is to skolemize the taste perspective variables, indexing them to an element that may vary with a quantificational subject.

\[\text{22There may of course be other linguistic differences among them; more on this below.}\]
It would be instructive to compare the options considered in Kennedy’s 2007 discussion of skolem functions and the sensitivity to a comparison class. For simplicity assume that the perspective variables are indexed to a (possibly singleton) set of individuals \( f_R(x) = \{ \lambda e . R(x, e) \} \), the set of individuals \( e \) bearing a contextually relevant relation \( R \) to the relevant object \( x \) (alternatively, indexed to a (possibly plural) individual, kind, or property). In our examples from §2.3, \( R \) would be a relation picking out the set of individuals for whom the food product was made. So as to bracket the standard-sensitivity from the positive form, the truth conditions of a comparative such as (54), reproduced in (72), would be roughly as in (73).

(72) a. C’s dog food is tastier than C’s cat food.
    b. C’s-dog-food\(_a\) is more tasty-to-\( f_R(a) \) than C’s-cat-food\(_b\) is tasty-to-\( f_R(b) \)

(73) (72) is true in c iff \( T_{f_R(a)}^{f(a)}(a) > T_{f_R(b)}^{f(b)}(b) \)

The skolemized measure function \( T_{f_R}^{f(x)} \) maps objects \( x \) to degrees of tastiness to things \( e \) that bear the relevant relation \( R \) to \( x \): in (73), \( T_{f_R}^{f(a)}(a) \) is the dog food’s degree of tastiness-to-dogs, according to \( T_c \); \( T_{f_R}^{f(b)}(b) \) is the cat food’s degree of tastiness-to-cats, according to \( T_c \); and so on. The contextually supplied taste perspective, represented by \( T_{f_R}^{f(x)} \), which determines things’ relevant levels of tastiness, is correctly distinguished from the experiencer(s) \( e \) doing the tasting.

In §2.3 we saw that perspective-sensitivity also cannot be assimilated to dimension-sensitivity: measures of taste, probability, etc. can depend on context even when it is specified (linguistically or extra-linguistically) that the measures depend a single dimension. Yet dimension-sensitivity provides one basis for how measures of properties can depend on context: they can depend on which dimensions are relevant and how they compare. Measures of largeness, cleverness, similarity, etc. (as well as taste, beauty, etc.) may depend on a contextually relevant set of dimensions and their relative weights. As a result, the apparent context-sensitivity of multidimensional adjectives also arises in comparatives, as we saw in (34)–(35) with ‘healthy’ and (37) with ‘tasty’, as well as in (74)–(75) below with ‘similar-looking’.

(74) A: Sheena’s baby is more similar-looking to Tim’s baby than Pat’s is. [favoring nose/mouth shape]
    B: No, Pat’s baby is more similar-looking to Tim’s baby. [favoring hair/eyes]

(75) A finds Sheena’s baby more similar-looking to Tim’s baby than Pat’s is.

There are difficult questions about how exactly to capture this in the syntax and semantics. For instance, what exactly needs to be parameterized? Just the set of di-
dimensions (cf. Sassoon 2013b)? Or the set of dimensions and their relative weights (cf. Bylinina 2014)? Should even the operation for determining measure functions (i.e., mappings from individuals to degrees) from dimension sets be parameterized (pace Sassoon and Bylinina)? On the one extreme, one might parameterize each of these elements, and treat context as supplying a triple of a set of dimensions $D$, a (possibly partial) preorder $\preceq$ on $D$ representing the relative priorities of these dimensions, and a function $f$ mapping this preordered set $(D, \preceq)$ to a measure function associated with the adjective. On the other extreme, one might not represent any of the elements explicitly in the semantics, leaving the additional structure for an extra-semantic psychological account of how speakers settle on multidimensional adjectives’ measure functions in context; measure functions for multidimensional and evaluational adjectives would in general be determined directly via the assignment, as in the simplified lexical entries for the adjectives from §3.2. I suspect that there may ultimately be reasons for pursuing the former extreme in developing a semantics for multidimensional adjectives, but I won’t press the point here.

As noted above, hereafter I will bracket semantic complications due to experiencer arguments and multidimensionality, and assume the semantics from §3.2 on which the adjectives’ measure function denotations are determined directly by a (non-skolemized) perspective variable. I leave investigation of potential complications in how context-dependent measure functions are determined as a function of linguistic and extra-linguistic context, such as via skolemized perspective variables and (weighted) dimension sets, for future work.

### 3.4 Discourse dynamics

The proposed semantics treats uses of evaluational adjectives as potentially interpreted with respect to (at least) two contextual variables: evaluational adjectives are in general sensitive to a contextually relevant perspective, in addition to being sensitive to a contextually relevant standard when in the positive form (n. 19). This captures how evaluational adjectives may be used in managing assumptions about what

---

*Sassoon 2013b* uses Boolean operations in determining adjectives’ measure functions from dimension sets, and *Bylinina 2014* uses a Euclidean distance function which also incorporates weights.

I am not convinced that hardwiring specific operations such as these into the semantics is necessary. The relevant operation seems just as subject to contextual negotiation as the relevant dimensions or priorities. For instance, in discussing whether trying to save group A is “morally better” than trying to save group B, speakers might agree about the relative importance of different values and individuals, and yet disagree about the comparative because of disagreeing about whether to apply (say) Maximax, Maximin, or some rule of expected-value-maximization.
standards to accept, and in managing assumptions about what perspectives (tastes, values, norms, credences, etc.) to accept (cf. Barker 2002, Silk 2016a, though see n. 11). For space purposes I will work through one example—a use of ‘This cake is tasty’ which targets the values for both s and T. This example can provide a model for the other kinds of (non-)discourse-oriented use.

Suppose we haven’t settled either on how tasty the cake is, or on a precise standard for tastiness. For expository purposes let’s represent our indecision about how tasty the cake is by saying that the cake’s degree of tastiness might be 5, 8, or 9; and let’s represent our indecision about how tasty something needs to be to count as tasty by saying that the live standards for tastiness are degrees between 7 and 9 (though, as noted in §3.1, I am not assuming that scales need be isomorphic to the real numbers, or that measures of tastiness, etc. need be quantifiable). A simplified representation of the state of the conversation is in (76), where CS is the prior context set (the set of worlds compatible with what has been accepted for purposes of conversation (Stalnaker 1978)), gc represents the concrete discourse context in wn, Tn indicates a taste perspective that assigns the cake a degree of tastiness n (i.e., [T]gc(k) = n), and sn indicates an overall standard that determines a degree standard for tastiness n (i.e., [s]g(T) = n). (Assume that the cake’s physical properties are the same in each world, and that it is presupposed in the conversation that the conversation is taking place.)

(76) \[ CS = \{ w_1, \ldots, w_9 \} \]

\[
\begin{align*}
  w_1: \quad & [T]g_1 = T_5 \\
  w_2: \quad & [T]g_2 = T_8 \\
  w_3: \quad & [T]g_3 = T_9 \\
  w_4: \quad & [T]g_4 = T_5 \\
  w_5: \quad & [T]g_5 = T_8 \\
  w_6: \quad & [T]g_6 = T_9 \\
  w_7: \quad & [T]g_7 = T_5 \\
  w_8: \quad & [T]g_8 = T_8 \\
  w_9: \quad & [T]g_9 = T_9 \\
\end{align*}
\]

2⁴ We will return to the proposed formalization of discourse-oriented uses, and its importance for an account of embedding under ‘find’, in §5. As noted above, although for expository purposes I have adopted a contextualist implementation, the treatment of the discourse dynamics could be adapted for a relativist or dynamic semantic framework. Although several authors have invoked broadly relativist and dynamic semantics in order to capture (what I am calling) discourse-oriented uses (esp. Barker 2002, also Stephenson 2007a, Richard 2008, Lassiter 2011, MacFarlane 2014, Umbach 2015), we can see here that a contextualist semantics can capture the phenomenon as well. See Silk 2014, 2016a for extensive discussion of the discourse dynamics of discourse-oriented uses with context-sensitive expressions generally (definite descriptions, quantifiers, modals, etc.).
Upon hearing an utterance of (1) ‘This cake is tasty’ one will try to infer values for T and s which render the utterance true and appropriate. For each possibly relevant world, one checks whether the cake’s degree of tastiness, given the contextually determined taste perspective in that world, is at least as great as the standard for tastiness determined by the context in that world — intuitively put, one checks whether one’s evaluation of how tasty the cake is is such that the cake counts as tasty. Assuming the speaker is being cooperative, one can infer that she must be assuming that the discourse context isn’t represented by \( g_c^1, g_c^4, g_c^7, \) or \( g_c^8, \) and thus that \( w_1, w_4, w_7, \) and \( w_9 \) aren’t in fact live possibilities. If no one objects, the context set will be set to \( \{ w_2, w_3, w_5, w_6, w_9 \} \), i.e. the set of relevant worlds \( w_n \) such that the cake’s tastiness in \( w_n, [T]^{g_c}(k) \), is at least as great as the standard for tastiness determined by \( [s]^{g_c} \) given \( [T]^{g_c}(k) \). Updating with (1) in this context doesn’t settle on how tasty the cake is or on the standard for tastiness, but it does rule out certain combinations thereof.

4 Evaluational adjectives and evaluational domains

The previous section developed a semantics for PPTs and other evaluational adjectives. PPTs, aesthetic adjectives, moral adjectives, epistemic adjectives, etc. are semantically unified, and distinguished from RGAs like ‘tall’, in denoting context-dependent measure functions — contextually supplied “perspectives” that evaluate how tasty, beautiful, likely, etc. things are. Many theorists in the literature on PPTs have avoided generalizing their accounts to other evaluative domains because of potential (meta)normative implications concerning antirealism, subjectivity, and the like. For instance, Lasersohn (2005) motivates his relativist account of PPTs on the ground that they don’t concern “matters of fact”; hence he continues, “The status of predicates such as good or beautiful immediately raises fundamental issues for ethics and aesthetics… Accordingly, we will… leave open the status of more philosophically ‘charged’ predicates like good and beautiful” (2005: 644–645).

This restriction of focus is misplaced. The relevant linguistic commonalities among PPTs and other types of evaluational adjectives motivate a common semantic

---

\( w_9: \ [T]^{g_c} = T_9 \ [s]^{g_c} = s_9 \)
treatment. In this section I show how the formal semantics for evaluational adjectives from §3 can be neutral on (meta)normative issues about subjectivity (realism, etc.). However, we will see that speakers’ substantive assumptions about these issues can lead to differences among evaluational adjectives in patterns of use.

Formal semantics investigates the semantic values of expressions, and how the semantic values of complex expressions are calculated as a function of the semantic values of their parts. Crucially, the compositional semantics takes as given an abstract representation of context that assigns values to free variables and other context-sensitive expressions (in the formalism from §3, an abstract assignment function g). Compositional semantics with evaluational adjectives thus takes as given specific evaluational perspectives — values for evaluational perspective variables — which figure in calculating the conventional contents of complex expressions. The compositional semantics leaves open the broadly metasemantic question of which abstract context (or perhaps range of abstract contexts) represents a given concrete conversational situation. The conventional meaning of evaluational adjectives thus leaves open what makes it the case that such-and-such evaluational perspectives represent the operative tastes, norms, etc. — and thus that such-and-such values for perspective variables are determined — in a concrete discourse context.

Delineating questions about the metasemantics of evaluational adjectives locates a place for substantive theorizing about the nature of different domains of evaluation. For instance: What makes it the case that something has such-and-such degree of tastiness, beauty, moral value, likelihood, etc.? What is the relation between the operative perspectives in a given context and individuals’ evaluative attitudes? For such-and-such type of perspective variable (taste, aesthetic, moral, epistemic, etc.), is a single value determined by all contexts, or can the relevant perspective (tastes, values, norms, probabilities, etc.) vary across contexts? What are the relations among different types of evaluational domains, and hence among the values for different types of perspective variables determined in concrete contexts?

To take one example, consider the questions about universality. To capture common “relativist” claims about matters of taste, one could say that different concrete contexts can determine different taste perspectives. Conflicting taste judgments about a certain object could thus both be true. However, whereas it isn’t implausible that different contexts determine different tastes, the same might not hold for every type of evaluational perspective. Take morality. Defenders of the objectivity of morality — or at least the objective purport of moral language — might identify the relevant moral perspective with the correct moral norms in the conversational situation, determined independently of particular speaker attitudes. If a universal body of moral norms was correct, the same moral perspective would be supplied in
all contexts. This would be a substantive (meta)normative matter rather than something built into the conventional meaning of moral language.

So, contrary to what is often assumed, giving evaluational adjectives a unified context-sensitive semantics doesn’t imply that evaluative matters are, in general, merely a “matter of taste.” Questions about (e.g.) subjectivity with evaluational adjectives can be teased apart from the semantics, and located in the metasemantics of what determines the values of perspective variables in concrete discourse contexts. Substantive (meta)normative differences among domains of evaluation (taste, aesthetics, morality, epistemology, etc.) needn’t be reflected in the formal semantics itself—our representation of expressions’ conventional meaning and use. Investigation of such differences can be left for broader philosophical theorizing.

Unifying evaluational adjectives’ formal semantics (at the present level of generality) doesn’t imply that there are no linguistic differences among them. Speakers’ (meta)normative assumptions about what determines the relevant perspectives in particular contexts, and about relations among the perspectives determined across contexts, can lead to differences in patterns of use among evaluational adjectives. In the remainder of this section I consider four such differences, concerning first-person experience requirements, attitude-dependence, Yalcin-style “evaluative contradictions,” and discourse disagreements. For concreteness I will focus on examples with PPTs, aesthetic adjectives, and moral adjectives.

(I want to flag that judgments concerning some of the following examples may be vague for some speakers and may vary given subtle changes in context. Though pre-

---

26 For more extensive discussion of these points, and relations among the formal semantics, metasemantics, and substantive philosophical theorizing, see Silk (2013, 2016a, 2017a).

27 I limit my attention to variations among certain non-epistemic evaluative adjectives simply for expository purposes. First, the adjectives are intuitively similar in expressing practical, motivational attitudes. Indeed it is common in various subfields to categorize them together (“evaluative,” “practical normative,” etc.), and to make distinctions such as between practical vs. epistemic normativity. Focusing our attention in this way helps illustrate the phenomenon — how speakers’ (meta)normative views can affect patterns of use — even among adjectives that form an intuitively natural subclass. Second, it is contentious how certain of the phenomena with epistemic vocabulary are to be understood, and in some cases even what the data are (e.g., regarding epistemic contradictions, the possibility of fundamental epistemic disagreement, and complications from so-called “solipsistic” vs. “group” readings). Engaging with such issues would be distracting given our purposes. The aim in this section is to illustrate how giving evaluational adjectives a unified formal semantics, as in §3, is compatible with there being other differences among them, and to provide preliminary discussion of how certain of the linguistic and non-linguistic issues may interact. I leave further investigation of these issues, and interactions with work in substantive epistemology and epistemic modals literatures, for future research.
liminary data supports the general patterns of judgments reported here. Speakers may differ on judgments about particular examples. Such differences only support the main point of this section on how substantive (meta)normative assumptions can affect patterns of use among evaluational adjectives.

First, there is variation among evaluational adjectives concerning the degree to which they are associated with certain subjective experiences. It is hard to hear an ascription ‘x is tasty’ as felicitous unless the speaker has had a relevant kind of first-personal experience with x, as reflected in (77).

(77) ??This cake is tasty, but I haven’t tried it.

Such examples improve with aesthetic adjectives like ‘beautiful’. Suppose Highbrow hears Philistine dissing the new Botticelli exhibit at the art museum. Philistine isn’t one for art criticism, but he knows what he doesn’t like. Highbrow hasn’t seen the

2⁸ An acceptability judgment task was conducted via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were 45 self-reported native English speakers, filtered to IP addresses from the US; they were paid $1 for their participation. Participants were asked how natural they would find the target sentence if used in a conversation, on a scale from 1 (“completely unnatural”) to 7 (“completely natural”); they were encouraged to imagine the use of the sentence as part of a larger conversation to help it make sense. A summary of the data is as follows: For 1st-person-experience examples like (77)–(79) (where the speaker uses the adjective either without having had a relevant 1st-personal experience or while denying that they have had such an experience): with ‘tasty’ the average rating was 2.4 (SEM = .15), with ‘beautiful’ the average rating was 3.2 (SEM = .19), and with ‘wrong’ the average rating was 6.7 (SEM = .08). For examples like (80)–(82) conveying the possibility of attitude-independence: with ‘tasty’ the average rating was 3.6 (SEM = .29), with ‘beautiful’ the average rating was 5.2 (SEM = .20), and with ‘wrong’ the average rating was 5.2 (SEM = .24). For embedded “evaluative contradictions” like (86b)–(88): with ‘tasty’ the average rating was 3.8 (SEM = .26), with ‘beautiful’ the average rating was 4.2 (SEM = .29), and with ‘wrong’ the average rating was 5.8 (SEM = .22).

It is perhaps worth noting that the judgments reported in the main text also cohere with the patterns of judgments (implicit and explicit) in various related literatures—not only the recent linguistic work on PPTs, but also substantive philosophical literatures in aesthetics, ethics, and metaethics. For instance, it is widely assumed in the recent linguistics literature on PPTs that PPTs have something like a “direct experience” requirement (n. 29); and while philosophers and linguists have generally accepted some sort of attitude-dependence about matters of taste, intuitions about the possibility of attitude-independence aren’t without precedent, as in certain generic accounts of PPTs (n. 32). On the flip side, in metaethics, although some authors have defended attitude-dependent accounts of normativity, it is nearly universally accepted that normative truths can come apart from individuals’ actual beliefs and evaluative attitudes. As the mean between two extremes, in philosophical aesthetics, questions about first-person experience requirements and attitude-independence are hotly debated (n. 29). See also n. 25.

Botticelli paintings, but he has heard the experts praising them, and he is apt to defer. A dialogue ensues:

(78)  **Philistine:** I’m never getting dragged to the art museum again. All that famous Botticelli stuff was trash.  
     **Highbrow:** You’re wrong. The Botticellis are beautiful. I haven’t seen them myself, but I’ve heard enough about them to know that you don’t know what you’re talking about.  
     **Philistine:** Yeah right. My kid could have done that.  
     **Highbrow:** Not a chance. The mastery with symmetries, color, balance, classical themes that I read about — that’s enough for me to know they’re beautiful.

I find it harder to construct an analogous context to improve the judgment with ‘tasty’ in (77). For moral adjectives it is hard to know what the relevant kind of experience would need to be. Regardless, as observed in §2.3, (79) is felicitous.

(79)  **God:** Coveting thy neighbor’s wife is wrong.

A second variation concerns the extent to which speakers can consistently allow for the possibility that the predicate applies while denying that they have the associated taste, value, attitude, etc. Examples with ‘tasty’ are odd, whereas examples with the moral adjective ‘permissible’ are perfectly coherent:

(80)  ??We don’t like the cake, but maybe it’s actually tasty.

(81)  a. Like you, I’m repulsed at the idea of killing an infant, but maybe infanticide is actually permissible.  
     b. Like you, I’m horrified at the idea of torture, but maybe it’s sometimes permissible.

Aesthetic adjectives appear to be somewhere in the middle, but felicitous examples seem possible. Imagine Philistine on the cusp of a cultural transformation saying:

(82)  I still can’t see what’s so great about those paintings, but maybe they’re actually beautiful.

A third difference concerns the extent to which evaluational adjectives can felicitously embed in certain kinds of suppositions. Seth Yalcin (2007) makes a striking observation about sentences such as (84a)–(85a) with epistemic modal expressions: unlike familiar Moore-paradoxical sentences such as (83a), their apparent incoher-
ence typically persists in suppositional environments:

(83) a. #The butler is the killer, but I don’t think that he is.
    b. ok Suppose that the butler is the killer but I/you/we don’t think he is.

(84) a. #The butler is the killer, but he might not be.
    b. #Suppose that [the butler is the killer but he might not be].

(85) a. #The butler is the killer, but he probably isn’t.
    b. #Suppose that [the butler is the killer but he probably isn’t].

Yalcin dubs sentences like ‘ϕ and might/probably ¬ϕ’ “epistemic contradictions,” insofar as they frequently give rise to a “phenomenology of contradiction” (Dorr & Hawthorne 2013) in this way.8 Analogous phenomena can be observed with certain non-epistemic expressions, such as PPTs: it is hard to hear (86b) with ‘tasty’ as consistent.

(86) a. ??The take is tasty but we all hate it.
    b. ??Suppose the cake is tasty but we all hate it.

However, there is variation among evaluational adjectives in this respect9 (87) with ‘wrong’ is perfectly natural.

(87) a. Suppose infanticide is wrong but we’re all for it.
    b. Suppose torture is wrong but we all support it.

Consistent examples with ‘beautiful’ also seem possible, as reflected in the continuation in (88).

(88) Suppose the Botticellis are beautiful but we don’t like them. Then we should take an art appreciation class.

Finally, a fourth difference among evaluational adjectives concerns the extent to which speakers tend to weaken their assertions in the face of disagreement. In discourse disagreements with ‘tasty’, it isn’t uncommon for speakers to fall back on explicitly relativized claims as a point of agreement. The disagreement with ‘tasty’ in (6) might plausibly continue as in (89).

(89) Me: This cake is tasty.

8How to capture this, and whether such sentences are to be regarded as semantically contradictory or incoherent, is contentious (see also Silk 2016a: ch. 4, 2016b).

9See Silk 2016a §§4.2.3, 5.3.2, 7.5, 2016b for additional examples and discussion.
You: No it isn’t. It’s gross. It’s way too sweet.
Me: No way. What do you know about sweet?
You: Well, it doesn’t taste good to me.
Me: Fine. I think it tastes great.

Though we disagree about how tasty the cake is, settling the question isn’t exactly a matter of grave concern. Better to put the question aside and fall back on related claims on which we agree. I can agree that the cake doesn’t taste good to you, and you can agree that the cake tastes good to me.

By contrast, speakers may be more inclined to persist in disagreements about certain moral matters. Consider 90.

90 Me: It’s always morally worse to abort a fetus than to let it live.
You: No, you’re wrong. Sometimes it’s better to have an abortion.
Me: Absolutely not. Abortion is murder.
You: Sorry, I disagree. I’m not backing down on this one.
Me: Neither am I.
You: This is going nowhere…

Here we refuse to fall back on claims about our own respective moral views. We may regard questions about the moral status of abortion as deeply important and hence prefer to leave the issue unresolved. Registering our views may be more significant to us than finding common ground. (I suspect that the frequency of persisting disagreement with aesthetic adjectives is also somewhere between that with PPTs and moral adjectives.)

To reiterate, I am not claiming that these patterns of judgments hold without exception across contexts. They are tendencies. These tendencies do reflect non-trivial differences in use among evaluational adjectives. Yet we shouldn’t assume, absent much further investigation, that these differences are reflected in the syntax or semantics. For instance, it isn’t implausible that certain of the discourse differences above reflect differences in interlocutors’ assumptions about whether the relevant perspective may be determined by factors external to the individual’s or group’s attitudes. Judgments about 77–88 improve to the extent that one allows that what values (tastes, norms) to endorse may come apart from one’s subjective experiences or attitudes. In the case of discourse disagreement, we may be less willing in per-

---

32 This point helps capture a core intuition driving generic analyses of PPTs — namely, that it is sometimes “rational to give evidence on which to base one’s opinion about whether [something] is tasty and… rational to ask a third party for theirs” (Pearson 2013: 19; cf. Moltmann 2010, Wolf 2014). We can capture the relevance of others’ views in matters of taste without treating PPT as-
sisting moral disputes to take the question off the conversational table and conclude on a point of agreement. Settling whether something is morally wrong is typically more important to us than settling whether something is tasty. This needn’t imply that views about attitude-independence or the universality of (say) morality are built into the conventions of the language. Sometimes it is the *moribus*, not the *gustibus*, which *non est disputandum*. Disagreements about taste might persist, and disagreements about morality might not. This is no different from the case of ordinary factual disagreements. Sometimes it just depends on what we care about. Not all discourse differences need be reflected in our accounts of the conventional meaning and use of evaluational adjectives.

In this way, there may be interesting generalizations about conversations which give rise to various discourse differences among evaluational adjectives — e.g., concerning speakers’ substantive normative views and (non-)discourse-related goals. Classifying predicates as ‘predicates of personal taste’, ‘aesthetic predicates’, ‘moral predicates’, etc. may be harmless for some purposes, but it has the potential to mislead. Such intuitive classifications may or may not be conventionalized. This of course isn’t to deny that there may be data supporting grammatical or lexical differences among evaluational adjectives (cf. *Pearson* 2013, *Bylinina* 2014, *McNally* & *Stojanovic* 2014 on possible differences in argument structure). How the conventional linguistic issues, substantive philosophical issues, and empirical facts about context interact and constrain theorizing may be more complex than initially seemed.

5 ‘Find’ and “subjectivity”

Our delineation of semantic, metasemantic, and metanormative issues in §4 raises challenges for certain common diagnostics for PPTs and other putatively “subjective” expressions. In this section I would like to examine one such diagnostic: the felicity of embedding under ‘find’ (§2; see n. 4). I find much of the data reported in the literature to be problematic. (Even the previous sentence is a counterexample to several accounts.) I will suggest that we understand embedding under ‘find’, not in terms of some pretheoretic notion of subjectivity, but in terms of a general kind of discourse-oriented use.
observed in the previous sections. This kind of use can be given a precise analysis in terms of the formal semantics and pragmatics from §3.

In §2 we noted that constructions of the form ‘find x PRED’ only license complements exhibiting certain kinds of context-sensitivity. All parties in the literature agree that ‘find’ licenses (positive and comparative) PPTs, as in (91), and that ‘find’ is typically infelicitous with ordinary context-insensitive predicates, like ‘vegan’ or ‘prime’, as in (92)–(93).

(91)  a. Fritz finds the cake tasty.
     b. Fritz finds this cake tastier than that one.

(92)  #Fritz finds the cake vegan.
(93)  #Fritz finds 7 prime.

In light of this contrast, felicitous embedding under ‘find’ has been used as diagnostic of a distinctive kind of “subjectivity” (“judge-dependence,” etc.) in natural language. However, there is little agreement either about precisely what this putative subjectivity amounts to, or about what the broader embedding data with ‘find’ even are. Some have claimed that ‘find’ disallows ordinary positive form RGAs, like ‘tall’, and only licenses PPTs (Fleisher 2013, Kennedy 2013); others that ‘find’ allows ordinary positive form RGAs and PPTs (Sæbø 2009, Bouchard 2012) but disallows non-PPT evaluational adjectives (McNally & Stojanovic 2014); still others that ‘find’ allows ordinary positive form RGAs, PPTs, and multidimensional non-PPT evaluational adjectives (Bylinina 2014) (terminology varies among authors).33 The alleged embedding data have been used to support diverse syntactic and semantic conclusions — e.g., concerning argument structure (for both positive and comparative forms), thematic experiencer arguments, contextualism vs. relativism, and multidimensionality.

These reactions have been premature. We have seen felicitous embedding under ‘find’ arise with various types of evaluational and non-evaluational adjectives (§§2, 3.3): with ordinary unidimensional positive RGAs (even given a fixed comparison class), as in (94); with positive/comparative non-evaluative multidimensional adjectives, as in (95); with positive/comparative PPTs (even given a particular dimension (Sassoon 2013b)), as in (96); and with positive/comparative non-PPT evaluational adjectives (even given a particular dimension), as in (97)–(100).

33Sæbø 2009 and Bouchard 2012 don’t distinguish among evaluational adjectives and lump them together as PPTs.
(94) [Context: Some adolescents are talking about who has and hasn't had a growth spurt yet. ey mention Robb, who shot up four inches over the summer. Ed, trying to play this o like it's nothing, says that Robb “isn't tall” (for a boy in their grade) — he's “only” 5'7’. Height is quite the point of pride, after all, and Robb isn't cool enough to be in their group. Most of the other kids go along with Ed, but Sam won't have it. He says:]
You might not find Robb tall. But I find him tall.

(95) A: I find Sheena's baby similar-looking to Tim's baby.
A': I find Sheena's baby more similar-looking to Tim's baby than Pat's is.

(96) [Context: We are sampling cakes at the bake-off. We agree in making sweetness the only relevant factor.]
A: I find this cake tasty [with respect to sweetness].
A': I find this cake tastier [with respect to sweetness] than that one.

(97) [Context: We are on a field trip to the art museum. We have to find five paintings and evaluate them in their beauty with respect to a number of dimensions — symmetry, balance, fineness of detail, etc.]
A: I find this painting beautiful [in its use of symmetries].
A': I find this painting more beautiful than that one [in its use of symmetries].

(98) [Context: We are discussing the university’s new sexual harassment policy. We turn to the morality of its attitudes toward women.]
A: I find the new policy morally reprehensible [in its attitudes toward women].
A': I find the new policy morally reprehensible [in its attitudes toward women] — even more reprehensible than the previous policy.

(99) [Context: A and B are both welfare monists: they take well-being to be determined by a single property. A takes the only basic factor affecting well-being to be pleasure, whereas B takes it to be desire-satisfaction. They consider the case of Pat, who is very happy, thinking his family loves him, though they in fact hate him, and the case of Sal, who is less happy but not so deluded. B appeals to Pat as an apparent problem case for A’s hedonism. A disagrees and says:]
A: I find Pat well-off.
A': I find Pat more well-off than Sal.

(100) [Context: We are discussing what is likely to result from the recent political protests.]
A: I find peace likely.
A': I find peace more likely than war.

The broader spectrum of examples is problematic for existing accounts of ‘find’. Not all of the adjectives felicitously embedding under ‘find’ need be intuitively classified as subjective or as concerning matters of taste. Felicitous embedding under ‘find’ cannot be used as diagnostic of PPTs, and it fails to distinguish a class of intuitively subjective predicates. Perhaps at the end of the theoretical day we will recover a notion of “subjectivity” which our use of ‘find’ is tracking. But we shouldn’t expect a pretheoretic notion of subjectivity to play a fundamental explanatory role in the lexical semantics of ‘find’.

My initial aim is simply to establish this negative conclusion, in the hope of serving as a corrective to the previous literature. In the remainder of the section I will offer preliminary speculations about how the semantics/pragmatics in §§2–3 may support a more adequate account of the licensing conditions of ‘find’.

We have seen that ‘tall’ can felicitously embed under ‘find’; yet there are several illuminating exceptions. First, although ‘tall’ can be felicitous under ‘find’ in the positive form, as in

(94)

it is marked in the comparative (§2):

(101) #I find Robb taller than Ed.

Our account from §§2–3 locates a salient contrast between (101) on the one hand, and (91)/(94)–(100), on the other. The embedded clause in (101) isn’t sensitive to a contextual parameter. By contrast, in (91)/(94)–(100) the positive form adjectives are sensitive to a contextual degree standard, and the comparative adjectives are sensitive to a contextual perspective (and possibly an independently represented dimensional element (§3)).

This might seem to suggest that sensitivity to a contextual parameter is what licenses embedding under ‘find’. Simply saying this, however, would fail to exclude ordinary uses of paradigm context-sensitive expressions: (92) is infelicitous even though the complement includes the definite description ‘the cake’ and it is sensitive to (something like) a contextual salience ordering on cakes; likewise for (11) with ‘the number’ or (102) with ‘the prime number between 20 and 25’.

(11) #Fritz finds the number prime.

(102) #Fritz finds 23 the prime number between 20 and 25.

Further, importantly, not all uses of ‘tall’, even in the positive form, are felicitous under ‘find’. Purely descriptive uses — uses which distinguish among worlds solely
with respect to their extra-contextual features, rather than (e.g.) among live degree standards — are infelicitous:

\[(103) \quad \text{[Context: It’s common ground that the standard for tallness is } 6’\text{. We are talking about how much Robb grew over the summer and how tall he is.]} \]

\[A: \quad \text{Robb isn’t tall. He's only } 5’7”. \]

\[B: \quad \text{#You might not find Robb tall. But } I \text{ find him tall.} \]

This suggests that what is relevant for licensing under ‘find’ isn’t semantic context-dependence but a certain sort of use of context-sensitive language: Roughly put, in order for ‘S finds ϕ’ to be felicitous, it must be that updating with the complement would adjust live values for a contextual parameter. This kind of use is the same familiar kind of use observed in the discourse dynamics — indeed, as Silk 2014, 2016a shows, it isn't specific to adjectives but arises with context-sensitive expressions generally. The patterns of (in)felicity in examples with ‘find’ can be captured in terms of a general, independently attested kind of use of context-sensitive language.

In §2 I introduced the label ‘discourse-oriented’ as a descriptive label for uses where, intuitively speaking, speakers are managing their assumptions about what standards, tastes, etc. to accept; such uses were characterized more precisely in §3.4 in light of the formal semantics from §3. Drawing on our treatment of the discourse dynamics, call a use of ϕ context-oriented if updating with ϕ would (non-trivially) distinguish among worlds \(w\) in the context set based on features determining the representation of context \(g_c\) in those worlds (Silk 2016a; cf. Barker 2002, though see n. 11). (One can think of the notion of context-oriented use as a theoretical counterpart to our informal notion of discourse-oriented use.) The proposed condition for embedding under ‘find’ can now be put thus: in order for ‘S finds ϕ’ to be felicitous, the complement ϕ must be used in a context-oriented way.

Note that the representation of context targeted in felicitous uses of ‘find’ needn’t be that of the global discourse context. Though the literature has focused primarily

---

\[3^4\] Here is one example from Silk 2014:

(i) \[\text{[Context: It is America before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Chip is a well-known sexist. It is common ground which groups of individuals are and are not legally permitted to vote (e.g., that white men can, children can’t, etc.).]} \]

\[\text{Chip:} \quad \text{Ain’t America great? Everyone can vote.} \]

\[\text{Dorothy:} \quad \text{No, not everyone can vote. I still can’t.} \quad (\text{Silk 2014: 120}) \]

Intuitively, Chip’s and Dorothy’s utterances target the value for the quantifier domain restriction variable; what is at-issue is whether women are included in the conversationally relevant domain of individuals to be considered in questions about voting rights. See also Umbach 2015 on “metalinguistic” uses of nominal predicates (her terminology; see n. 11).
on first-person examples, third-person examples like (104) indicate that ‘find’ can be felicitous if the use distinguishes among live values for a contextual variable in a relevant local context — in (104), the local context representing Katie’s state of mind (Stalnaker 1988, 2014, Heim 1992, Geurts 1998).

(104)  Me: We all agree that the painting is beautiful. What does Katie think?
You: Katie finds it beautiful too.

Here it is common ground that the painting \( p \) is beautiful, i.e. that \([B]^{\phi}(p)\) is at least as great as the degree standard for beauty. What is at-issue is what Katie’s aesthetic perspective is like, i.e. what value for \( B \) is supplied by the local context representing Katie’s state of mind. Your utterance in (104) is felicitous insofar as it distinguishes among live values for \( B \) in the local attitude context; it distinguishes among worlds \( w \) in the context set based on features determining the representation of Katie’s state of mind \( g_{K_w} \) in those worlds.

In light of these examples, I offer (105) as a formalization of the felicity condition for ‘find’ (n. 4) — where, for a world \( w \) in the context set \( CS \), \( W_w \) is an equivalence class of worlds in \( CS \) with the same relevant extra-contextual features as \( w \); \( g_{u_w} \) represents the conversational situation in \( w \); and \( g_{S_w} \) represents \( S \)’s state of mind in \( w \).

(105) An utterance of ‘S finds \( \phi \)’ is felicitous only if

(i) for some \( u \in CS \), \([\phi]^{g_{u_w}} = 0\), and
for some \( v \in W_u \), \([\phi]^{g_{v_w}} = 1\),
or
(ii) for some \( u \in CS \), \( Dox_{S,u} \notin [\phi]^{g_{u_w}} \), and
for some \( v \in W_u \), \( Dox_{S,v} \subseteq [\phi]^{g_{v_w}} \).

This says that ‘find’ is felicitous only if the use distinguishes among live representations of context, local or global.

Let’s briefly see how this formalization works with certain of our examples. First, take the infelicitous use of ‘find x tall’ in (103). Suppose the prior context set \( CS \) is \( \{u, v, z\} \); Robb is ‘5’/’7’” in \( u \) and \( v \), and Robb is ‘6’/’4”’ in \( z \); the conversational situation in \( v \) determines a degree standard for tallness of ‘6’/’1”’, and the conversational situation

---

42

---

35 As in §3.4 I assume that it is presupposed in the conversation that the conversation is taking place. \( CS \) is the context set before the acceptance or rejection of the utterance’s asserted content. Note that in (ii) the contextual features determining the set \( W_w \) may include features that help determine how the local context is to be characterized, i.e. features determining what abstract representation \( g \) is taken to represent the subject’s state of mind. For clause \( \phi \), \([\phi]^{g_{w}} \) is the set of worlds \( w \) at which \( \phi \) is true, \( \{ w : [\phi]^{g_{w}} = 1 \} \); I continue to omit world parameters and world-indexing when not relevant.
in $u$ and $z$ determines a degree standard for tallness of $6'$ (i.e., $[s]^g_{u, z} (tall) = 73$, and $[s]^g_{v, z} (tall) = 72$). Uttering 'I find Robb tall' is correctly predicted to be infelicitous in the context since the complement clause $\phi$ is false at a world in $CS$ only if it's false at every world in $CS$ with the same extra-contextual features — i.e., since $\phi$ is false precisely at $\langle g_{cu}, u \rangle$ and $\langle g_{cv}, v \rangle$, and $W_u = W_v = \{u, v\}$. By contrast, second, uttering 'I find the cake tasty' in the context specified in (76) from §3.4 is correctly predicted to be felicitous: Every world in the context set is equivalent in its extra-contextual features, and so $W_w = CS$ for any $w \in CS$. Condition (i) in (105) is satisfied since (e.g.) the complement clause is false at $\langle g_{c1}, w_1 \rangle$ and true at $\langle g_{c2}, w_2 \rangle$, with the relevant features of these worlds reproduced in (106) (assume again for simplicity that degrees of tastiness can be represented with numbers, though see §3.1).

\begin{equation}
\text{Context: Same as \ref{eq:76}}
\end{equation}

\begin{align*}
w_1: \quad \langle T \rangle^{g_{c1}} &= T_{s1} \\
\langle s \rangle^{g_{c1}} &= s_7 \\
w_2: \quad \langle T \rangle^{g_{c2}} &= T_{s8} \\
\langle s \rangle^{g_{c2}} &= s_7 \\
\vdots
\end{align*}

Finally, turning to the third-person example in (104): Suppose the context set is $\{u, v\}$, where $u$ and $v$ are identical except for the state of Katie's state of mind, specifically her tastes; and for simplicity assume that Katie's state of mind in $u$ and $v$ can be represented by assignments with the same relevant features as $g_{c1}$ and $g_{c2}$, respectively, from (76)/(106), i.e. $g_{Ku} = g_{c1}$, and $g_{Kv} = g_{c2}$. Assuming that the cake's micro-physical properties are the same across Katie's belief-worlds, then the content of the complement $\phi$ in $g_{Ku}$, $[\phi]^{g_{Ku}}$, is the empty set of worlds, and the content of $\phi$ in $g_{Kv}$, $[\phi]^{g_{Kv}}$, is the set of all worlds. So, Katie's belief-worlds in $v$, $\text{Dox}_{K, v}$, are a subset of $[\phi]^{g_{Kv}}$, but Katie's belief-worlds in $u$, $\text{Dox}_{K, u}$, are not a subset of $[\phi]^{g_{Ku}}$.

We began this section with a contrast between 'tasty' and 'vegan'/prime under 'find.' The condition in (105) suggests that examples with context-insensitive predicates should improve to the extent that the predicate's conventional meaning can be readily associated with some kind of scale, such that the predicate can be coerced into being used in a context-oriented way. This prediction seems to be borne out:

\begin{equation}
\text{Context: We have been discussing the rights of animals and the ethics of food. Neither of us eats meat, but you are much stricter in your dietary habits, and vocally so. For something to count as properly "vegan," by your}
\end{equation}

\footnote{Though we have been abstracting away from world-indexing standards and perspectives, suppose here for simplicity that the values for the relevant variables deliver the same taste perspectives and standards across worlds — e.g., that $[s]^{\xi}(w) = [s]^{\xi}(w')$, for any $w, w'$.}
lights, it can’t even be produced by a company that makes animal products. We agree that the cake doesn’t contain any animal products, though the company that makes it also sells meat. I take a slice of the cake.]

You: How can you eat that cake? It isn’t vegan.
Me: Well, I find it vegan. Just relax.

Plausibly what is happening in [107] is that ‘vegan’ is being coerced into a gradable adjective, with a denotation in the domain of $s$ (cf. KENNEDY 2007, BURNETT 2012). Other things equal, food produced by companies that make animal products is treated as “less vegan” than food produced by companies that don’t. We agree about the ingredients in the cake, but we disagree about “how vegan” something needs to be for it to count as vegan. Analogous examples with ‘prime’ seem harder to come by. This cline of difficulty is predicted: it is hard to imagine a relevant scale with which to associate primeness.

Let’s recap. Many theorists have appealed to felicitous embedding under ‘find’ as a diagnostic for PPTs and other “subjective” expressions. However, much of the assumed data, and subsequent theoretical conclusions that have been drawn from them, are problematic. My aims in this section have been twofold: first, to provide a more adequate body of data concerning embedding under ‘find’, drawing on examples from §2 and, second, to illustrate how the treatments of context-sensitivity in uses of adjectives from §§2–4 shed light on the broader array of data. I have suggested that we explain felicitous embedding under ‘find’, not fundamentally in terms of some independent notion of subjectivity, but in terms of a general, independently observed kind of use of context-sensitive language — informally described as “discourse-oriented use” in §§2–3, and precisely characterized under the heading of “context-oriented use” in this section. The formalization in (105) provides a unified way of capturing felicitous examples with ordinary positive form RGAs and (positive and comparative) evaluational adjectives (contrast FLEISHER 2013). The account improves on existing accounts in empirical coverage and promises a more precise, explanatory account of the broader array of embedding data. I hope the

But perhaps not impossible. Consider the following, adapted from an example due to Max Bane (cited in KLECHA 2014: 64n.13):

(i) [Context: $A$ and $B$ are considering different ways of ranking integers in terms of Euler’s totient function $\phi(n)$, which equals the number of integers less than or equal to $n$ that are co-prime with $n$. $A$ suggests considering the difference between $n$ and the nearest $n'$ to $n$ such that $\phi(n') = n' - 1$. $B$ suggests using the quotient $\phi(n)/(n - 1)$. Observing $A$ and $B$’s conversation, you say:] $B$ finds 6 less prime than 8.
preliminary discussion here may provide a richer body of data to be incorporated in future accounts, as well as a fruitful framework for theorizing about these data.

6 Conclusion

This paper has demarcated a theoretically interesting class of adjectives, which I have called *evaluational* adjectives. This class includes not only predicates of personal taste but also adjectives expressing various kinds of normative and epistemic evaluation — aesthetic, moral, probabilistic, etc. Like 'tall', positive form relative gradable adjectives such as 'tasty', 'beautiful', 'likely', etc. are interpreted with respect to a contextually supplied degree standard — a threshold relative to which things count as tasty, beautiful, likely, etc. Evaluational adjectives are distinguished empirically from gradable adjectives like 'tall' in giving rise to certain phenomena often associated with context-sensitivity, not only in the positive form, but also in comparatives. Such phenomena include discourse-oriented use, felicitous embedding under 'find', and, surprisingly, vagueness phenomena like sorites-sensitivity. Informally put, evaluational adjectives are in general sensitive to a relevant perspective of evaluation — body of tastes, values, norms, etc. — which evaluates how tasty, beautiful, likely, etc. things are. On the degree-based implementation adopted here, the notion of perspective is formalized in terms of context-dependent measure functions: What distinguishes evaluational adjectives semantically is that no particular scale or mapping from things to degrees is determined by the adjectives’ conventional meanings. Evaluational adjectives denote context-dependent functions (“evaluational perspectives”) which map items to a degree of taste, beauty, probability, etc., depending on the adjective. This “perspective-sensitivity” characteristic of evaluational adjectives cannot be assimilated to multidimensionality or sensitivity to an experiencer class argument.

Though there may be other linguistic differences among them, evaluational adjectives are semantically unified in denoting context-dependent measure functions. Contrary to what is often assumed, giving the adjectives a common context-sensitive semantics doesn’t imply that evaluational issues are in general merely a “matter of taste.” Questions about subjectivity (universality, attitude-dependence, etc.) with evaluational adjectives can be located in the metasemantics of what makes it the case that such-and-such evaluational perspectives represent the operative tastes, values, norms, etc. in a concrete discourse context. Speakers’ substantive assumptions about these issues can lead to differences among evaluational adjectives in patterns of use. The formal semantics provides a basis for broader philosophical theorizing about
matters of taste and normative and epistemic evaluation.

Examining the range of evaluational adjectives raises challenges for certain alleged diagnostics for PPTs, and common explanatory appeals to notions of “subjectivity” in linguistic theorizing. For instance, more careful attention to context shows that felicitous embeddings under ‘find’ can occur with a broader range of adjectives than is often assumed — e.g., with positive form relative gradable adjectives (in certain uses), non-evaluative multidimensional adjectives, PPTs, and non-PPT evaluational adjectives (aesthetic, moral, epistemic, etc.). Not all of these adjectives need be intuitively classified as “subjective” or as concerning matters of taste. Rather than giving fundamental explanatory weight to some independent notion of subjectivity, I suggested explaining the spectrum of examples in terms of an independently attested kind of use of context-sensitive language: What licenses embedding under ‘find’ is a context-oriented use of a context-sensitive complement. This kind of use can be precisely analyzed in light of the previously developed semantics and pragmatics for the adjectives. The proposed appeal to context-oriented use improves on existing accounts in empirical coverage, details of formal implementation, independent motivation, and explanatory power.

Our discussion has raised various questions for future research. For instance, in §2 I appealed to vagueness phenomena as one empirical ground for distinguishing among various evaluational and non-evaluational adjectives. However, we noted that the various sources of context-dependence, while often associated with vagueness, aren’t necessary or sufficient for it. It is non-trivial how familiar accounts of vagueness with positive form gradable adjectives may be extended to the comparative cases in §2. The issue is particularly pressing in traditional semantic frameworks for gradation where the problematic transitivities are effectively hardwired into the scale structure (as in degree-based approaches, like in §3) or qualitative orderings on individuals (as in delineation-based approaches) (see Silk 2016a: §§6.3–6.4, 7.3, 2017c). Second, I offered further data concerning embedding under ‘find’, and a preliminary proposal for how to capture it. There is still much to be explained. For instance, although felicitous embeddings are possible with the range of RGAs, evaluational adjectives, and multidimensional adjectives, not all embeddings are equally well attested. Detailed investigation of distributional differences among context-sensitive expressions under ‘find’, as well as under related verbs like ‘consider’ and ‘look’, is called for (see McNally & Stojanovic 2014 for preliminary corpus searches and discussion). Third, the primary focus in the paper was on what unifies evaluational adjectives and distinguishes them as a class in the formal semantics. I outlined conversational explanations for certain discourse differences among them, and briefly flagged possible differences in argument structure.
The interactions with multidimensionality and experiencer-sensitivity warrant careful examination, not only with adjectives but also with verbal and nominal predicates. More comprehensive investigation of grammatical, lexical, and discourse differences among the adjectives is needed.

References


Silk, Alex. 2017c. Vagueness, comparatives, and scale structure. MS, University of Birmingham.


Taranto, Gina. 2005. How discourse adjectives synchronize the speaker and listener’s beliefs (It is clear that Briscoe is a detective). In Efthymia Georgala & Jonathan Howell (Eds.), Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 15, pp. 241–257. Ithaca: CLC Publications.


Umbach, Carla. 2015. Evaluative propositions and subjective judgments. In Janneke van Wijnbergen-Huitink & Cécile Meier (Eds.), Subjective meaning: Alternatives to relativism. de Gruyter.


