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Evaluative Adjectives – an Attempt at a Classification²

Abstract In my paper, I propose a certain classification of evaluative expressions. I hypothesize that the basic criterion to distinguish between evaluative and descriptive terms is the faultless disagreement test. Next, I discuss a few kinds of phenomena which seem to render this distinction dubious: context-sensitivity, vagueness and using descriptive terms to express evaluative judgments. Further, I investigate Ch. Kennedy's proposal (2016) according to which gradable adjectives can express two kinds of subjectivity (one being generated by vagueness and one stemming from evaluativity). I modify this account by postulating another sub-class of subjective adjectives ("experiential adjectives") which are not subjective due to vagueness and which are not evaluative either as they do not necessarily encode any valence. I propose a linguistic test to identify these expressions. Finally, I check where my classification of adjectives places the predicate of personal taste "tasty". I suggest that "tasty" is both evaluative and experiential and additionally, it carries a condition of its own use, that is the information that can be used to positively assess the taste of something. This, I argue, makes it similar to thin evaluative terms as it carries no descriptive component at all.

Keywords faultless disagreement, subjectivity, evaluativity, predicates of personal taste, vagueness

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0. Introduction

Some types of utterances are more controversial than others. Consider the following exchange:

- (1) A: Donald Trump is handsome.
B: Not at all! Donald Trump isn't handsome!

This disagreement is definitely more difficult to solve, and exchanging arguments is likely to last longer than in the case of the conversation below:

- (2) A: Donald Trump is 180 cm tall.
B: No, he's only 175 cm tall.

It is quite easy to determine the truth values of the utterances in (2). In order to do that, we could, for example, measure the US President's height with a tape measure. It is, therefore, immediately obvious that at least one of the speakers has said something false. In the case of (1), the issue is much more complicated. There are no widely available tools with which one could measure the degree to which somebody is handsome. Moreover, there is no consensus about which property or set of properties is connoted by the expression "handsome" and so, there is no consensus about what somebody has to be like to be considered handsome.

One of the important differences between (1) and (2) is that the former, and dialogues similar to it, can be classified as cases of faultless disagreement, at least at first sight. Faultless disagreement is a situation which invokes two conflicting intuitions in an observer: that the participants of the conversation are disagreeing in some fundamental way (that they are in disagreement or in conflict) and that neither of them has made a mistake in their utterance (since both have expressed a proposition they were justified in expressing)³. It seems that this feature which dialogues like (1) have, is connected with the

³The faultless disagreement problem has received many formulations in the last couple of years. Only some of them are neutral with respect to a semantic theory. E.g., Max Kölbel (2003) understands faultless disagreement as a situation consisting in a pair of contradictory propositions expressed in utterances or beliefs (p and $\text{not-}p$). Some contextualists believe that this formulation does not allow them to satisfactorily explain faultless disagreement and therefore decide to adopt its different construal (see, e.g., Lopez de Sa, 2015, Marques, 2016). Here, I am neutral about the definition of faultless disagreement and I restrict myself to characterising its pre-theoretical intuition in the most general way possible.

fact that the speakers express their opinion or assessment, that is, instead of attributing some easily verifiable, speaker-independent quality to something or someone, they attribute value to it. They do this by using expressions belonging to a certain class, namely the class of evaluative expressions.

In the present paper, I will take a closer look at evaluative expression and sketch their classification, hoping that a better understanding of their semantics will prove helpful in the discussion on faultless disagreement. I will be mostly interested in the distinction between evaluative and descriptive expressions. I will try to show that this division is not exhaustive. In particular, it does not allow for an adequate description of predicates of personal taste such as “tasty” which have been at the center of attention of the faultless disagreement theorists for the last couple of years but which have not received many analyses in terms of lexical semantics. Finally, I will propose my own characterization of these terms.

1. Evaluative and descriptive terms

As I have mentioned above, the lexical items used by speakers to express evaluation are evaluative terms (evaluatives). It should be stressed that this group comprises not only adjectives and adverbs (“beautiful”, “beautifully”), but also nouns (“genius”, “athlete”). There are reasons to think that such verbs as “to wail” (in the sense of singing badly), “to scribble” or “to rumble” contain a lexically encoded element of evaluation too and therefore can be considered evaluative as well.

Evaluative terms are to be distinguished from descriptive terms. The latter are such expressions that denote objective qualities of objects. For the purposes of the present paper, I will define descriptive terms as those which do not encode evaluation in their lexical meaning, for instance: “170 cm tall”, “green” or “a hundred years old”. Using such expressions is usually aimed at describing the world by invoking intersubjective properties of objects.

(3) John is 1.8 m tall.

“is 1.8 m tall” is a descriptive term since, firstly, it is true if and only if John is 1.8 m tall no matter who utters (3) and secondly, there is no element of evaluation encoded in its lexical meaning. The division between evaluative and descriptive terms is not as sharp as the comparison between (1) and (3) would suggest. Many terms are composed of both descriptive and evaluative information.

1.1. Thin and thick terms, all-purpose terms

In the present paper, I assume the distinction between thin and thick terms, which is widely recognized in ethics (lately also in aesthetics and philosophy of language), formulated by Bernard Williams (1985). An expression is thin with respect to evaluation when it is used only to express evaluation and no description. Some paradigmatic thin terms are: “good”, “bad”, “beautiful”, “right”, “wrong”, etc. Saying about some act that it is good does not tell us anything more than that the speaker values it positively (or claims that someone, everyone or some society recognizing a certain standard would value it positively). Thick evaluatives, on the other hand, are, e.g., “cruel”, “mean”, “nice”, “generous”, “lewd” or “chaste”. They carry both evaluative and descriptive content. To call somebody cruel means to say that this person tends to inflict suffering on others for her own pleasure and to value her negatively because of that. In contrast, to call someone bad, does not inform the hearer in what way this person is bad. The element of evaluation contained in a thick evaluative becomes obvious when we notice that the same behaviour might be evaluated in different ways and therefore, two different evaluatives would be used to talk about it. For example, a person who gives a lot to other people without expectation of reward might be evaluated positively in virtue of that and called generous or evaluated negatively and called profligate. Similarly with the pairs: “courageous”/“reckless”, “audacious”/“assertive”, etc.

Thin terms can in a sense function as thick ones. This is a property of a class of terms sometimes called *all-purpose terms*. For example, in:

(4) John is a good father.

“good” does not serve its usual role of a thin evaluate since the speaker of (4) as it communicates something different than that John is a father and that John is good. Instead, “good” functions as an all-purpose term. To say that someone is a good father it to say that he has some particular traits, e.g., that he spends a lot of time with his kids, that he is affectionate, and so on, which relates to the positive assessment of this person. To say that a knife is good is to say that it is sharp and durable, which translates to a positive assessment. The semantics of such expressions is so underdetermined that it is often uncertain what properties exactly the speaker wishes to invoke. Calling someone a good father meant something else two hundred years ago in a rural area than it means nowadays in a big European city. Simplifying it a bit, we can agree, however, that if two speakers occupy the same cultural

and linguistic context, then by using the term “good father” they will refer to some, if not most, of the same substantive properties.

I take the faultless disagreement test to be the basic diagnostic which can be used to determine if a given expression is evaluative or purely descriptive. If two speakers can faultlessly disagree about a property to which a given expression refers, it should be considered evaluative – this can be seen in dialogue (1) above. There are, however, exceptions from this rule. For this, and other reasons, the intuitive distinction between descriptive and evaluative terms may raise doubt. In the next section, I will describe these qualms, try to find their source and decide whether they are grounded.

1.2 Context sensitivity

There are adjectives which may seem problematic for the intuitive evaluative-descriptive distinction, e.g. “tall”, “old” or “worn off”. They are problematic for a few reasons. One might be tempted to argue that the difference between (5) and (6) below:

(5) John is 1.80 m tall.

(6) John is tall.

consists in the fact that (5) constitutes an objective description of reality, while (6) carries something more – the speaker of (6) *decides* that John is tall enough to be classified as a tall person. Should we say then that “tall” contains some evaluative component? I believe the explanation should be sought elsewhere.

It may happen that uttering (6) in one context, we mean something else than in another. John does not always have to be at least 1.80 to be considered tall. For instance, if he is a six year old, it is enough if he measures 1.15 m for (6) to be true. On the other hand, If John is a basketball player, his 1.80 might not be enough for (6) to be true. The property of the expression “tall” described here is common to all relative gradable adjectives (Kennedy, 2007).

The fact that specifying truth conditions of a sentence containing a gradable adjective requires taking into account a comparison class (“for a six year old”, “for a basketball player”), explains why some descriptive adjectives may seem slightly less subjective than others. The speaker must choose a comparison class and recall an approximate threshold from which the object is considered to have the property in question. Deciding whether the value

that the object exemplifies is higher or equal to the threshold, is, to a certain extent, a judgment call. It is not, however, the kind of evaluation that is delivered while attributing properties expressed by evaluatives. Nothing from the lexical meaning of “tall” suggests that it is either good or bad to be tall. Moreover, when the speakers coordinate, i.e., agree on the specific comparison class that is invoked in the context, the disagreement about whether someone is tall will turn out to be an easily solved misunderstanding.

1.3 Vagueness

Another reason why relative gradable adjectives are problematic for our distinction is that according to some philosophers (Wright, 1997, Barker, 2002, Richard, 2004) in some situations speakers may faultlessly disagree about whether someone is tall.

“Tall”, like other vague predicates, has clear classes. For instance, a seventeen year old who measures 1.90 m is definitely tall but his 1.20 m peer – is definitely not tall. In the case we invoke a different comparison class (say, of NBA basketball players), then a 2.10 m tall sportsman will be considered definitely tall, while his 1.90 m teammate will be described as average. What is important, even once we establish what comparison class we are invoking in a given conversation, the threshold above which we will consider someone tall will still fall on a slightly different point of the scale for each speaker. Nevertheless, most competent speakers will agree about the applicability of the predicate for the vast majority of cases. That is why the disagreement about whether some 2.10 m tall basketball player is tall or not, will not seem faultless.

The situation is different, according to some, when the speakers are disagreeing about borderline cases of adjectives, for instance when the term “tall” is used in the following case: (Reggie Bullock – a player from the Phoenix Suns – is 201 cm tall which puts him in the mean of height of NBA players):

(7) A: Reggie Bullock is tall.

B: No, Bullock is not tall.⁴

⁴If the Reader is not keen on agreeing that (7) seems faultless at all, I suggest to imagine a context in which A and B are looking at Reggie Bullock (and not e.g., just talking about him on the phone), in order to rule out the situation in which one of them makes a mistake stemming from the fact that she does not remember how tall the player is, or has false information about it.

Chris Barker (2013) argues that in a situation in which the disagreement is about a borderline case of a vague predicate, then – since there is no higher linguistic authority that would be able to decide who is right – neither of the speakers has made a mistake in his or her use of the predicate. Deciding whether 201 cm of height qualifies a basketball player to the extension or the anti-extension of the predicate “tall” is not possible in the framework of the used language – this language is simply not precise enough.

In the introduction of the present paper, I assumed that it is the evaluative terms and not the descriptive ones that generate faultless disagreement. Does it mean that agreeing that such dialogues as (7) are faultless disagreements implies that “tall” and other vague predicates are evaluative? Or the other way round: that we can faultlessly disagree whether someone is tall proves that we should reject this assumption? There is a third possibility and this is the one I would like to argue for. Namely, there are reasons to consider the faultless disagreement whose faultlessness stems from the speaker’s *right* to express her opinion on the extralinguistic issues to be a different phenomenon than the faultlessness stemming from vagueness. I provide detailed argumentation for this claim in another paper (2016). Here, I will restrict myself to recall Christopher Kennedy’s (2016) argument in a similar spirit.

1.3.1 Two kinds of subjectivity according to Kennedy

Kennedy (2016) analyses the distinction between subjective and non-subjective expressions. He proposes two tests which serve to decide to which of these two groups a given term belongs. The former has already been mentioned here: it is the answer to the question of whether this term generates faultless disagreement. The latter consists in finding out whether the expression can be embedded under the “to find x P ” construction. Kennedy believes that the fact that there are expressions that pass the first test for subjectivity, that is, they generate faultless disagreement but they do not pass the other one, suggests that there is more than one kind of subjectivity.

The first test is passed by some uses of gradable adjectives, such as exemplified by the example (7). That would suggest that all such expressions are subjective (at least when they refer to borderline cases). Kennedy reminds us, however, that gradable adjectives are vague only in the positive form. Their comparative forms are no longer such. Thus, the adjective “tall” in the sentence “Adam is tall” is vague, but in “Adam is taller than Andrew”,

it isn't. It stems from the fact that in a positive form the adjective expresses the property of having some degree of height which is higher or equal to some threshold (for a given comparison class). This threshold should be equated with a standard of significance which does not only depend on the facts connected with height, but also from a subjective decision of the speaker (that is the decision about what value of height is significant enough – in other words – if it sufficiently exceeds the average to call someone tall).⁵ In its comparative form, on the other hand, it expresses the property of having a degree of height which is above the degree of height possessed by someone else (here: by Andrew).

Kennedy admits that a disagreement about borderline cases of vague predicates can be faultless because of their vague character. However, there are still faultless disagreements for which no such vagueness-related account can be given, for example, when the speakers are using comparative forms of adjectives. It happens when this adjective is evaluative, e.g.:

- (8) A: Chocolate cake is tastier than strawberry cake.
 B: That's not true. Strawberry cake is tastier.

It seems, therefore, that for some expressions, it is not vagueness that is the source of subjectivity, but their lexis. Therefore, for the subjective adjectives in the comparative form, Kennedy applies another test which consists in embedding the sentence containing such an expression under the construction “to find x P ”⁶. “Find” is a verb used to express subjective judgments, so if used with an objective term, the sentence will sound infelicitous:

⁵Kennedy here invokes Delia Graff Fara's account of vagueness (Graff Fara, 2000).

⁶According to Kennedy's account, gradable adjectives denote functions from objects to degrees, so the interpretation of the adjective “tall” in type-theoretical semantics looks the following way: $[[\text{tall}]] = \text{height}_{\langle e, d \rangle}$. The general schema of the morpheme of the adjective (g) in its positive form is: $[\text{POS}] = \lambda g \langle e, d \rangle \lambda x. g(x) \geq \text{stnd}(g)$, where ‘ $\text{stnd}(g)$ ’ means the standard appropriate to the measurement expressed by g . The schema of the adjective morpheme in its comparative form is: $[\text{COMP}] = \lambda g \langle e, d \rangle \lambda d_{\text{than}} \lambda x. g(x) \geq d_{\text{than}}$. In order for the adjective g to say something true of the object x , the degree to which x has the property a which g denotes must be higher than the degree expressed by the component marked as d_{than} . Thus, putting together the adjective and the name of the object (“Adam” – a type e expression) gives us the measure to which this adjective possesses the property denoted by this adjective.

The denotation of “tall” in its positive form looks like that: $[\text{POS}]([[\text{tall}]]) = \lambda x. \text{height}(x) \geq \text{stnd}(g)$.

Its denotation in its comparative form: $[\text{COMP}]([[\text{tall}]]) = \lambda d_{\text{than}} \lambda x. \text{height}(x) \geq d_{\text{than}}$.

- (9) Adam finds the cake tasty.
- (10) #Adam finds Anna tall.
- (11) Adam finds the chocolate cake tastier than the strawberry cake.
- (12) #Adam finds Anna taller than Kate.

Sentences (9) and (11) sound felicitous and therefore pass the test, while (10) and (12) are more difficult to accept. Kennedy obtains the following results:

	Adjective in positive form		Adjective in comparative form	
	Faultless disagreement	find	Faultless disagreement	find
<i>Tall</i>	+	-	-	-
<i>Tasty</i>	+	+	+	+

It turns out that vagueness on its own is a sufficient condition for faultless disagreement, but it is not a necessary one (see (8)). Vagueness is not a sufficient condition for felicity under “find”. Being evaluative, on the other hand, is a sufficient condition for both being acceptable under “find” and for faultless disagreement. Kennedy infers from this that even though faultless disagreement is always generated by subjective adjectives, this subjectivity comes in two kinds. One of them has to do with vagueness and is characteristic for every relative gradable adjective used to refer to a borderline case – let us call it subjectivity_V. The other kind of subjectivity is shown by evaluative expressions due to their lexical meanings – subjectivity_E.

This distinction is reflected in the semantics of these expressions. In line with the classical type theory, non-subjective adjectives, such as “metal” are of $\langle e, t \rangle$ type (the function takes an object, e.g., “Eiffel tower” of type e and yields the meaning of the sentence – its truth value of type t). According to a contextualist proposal by Kjell Johann Sæbø (2009), which Kennedy adopts, subjective adjectives, such as “tasty” are of type $\langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$, where the argument (type e) is the judge: a person or a group of people who consider something tasty. Sæbø’s idea explains it in this way why non-subjective expressions sound odd when embedded under “find” – there is a type mismatch.

Let us sum up the results of our considerations until now. It turns out that not only evaluative expressions generate faultless disagreement.

Also descriptive adjectives (more precisely – relative gradable adjectives in their positive form) under some circumstances can generate it, but it is faultlessness of a different kind, coming from another type of subjectivity, viz. subjectivity_V. The test which helps rule out descriptive subjective expressions consists in checking their acceptability under “find”. It has to be stressed that if, after Kennedy, we believe that distinguishing two kinds of subjectivity is justified, the demarcation line between objective and subjective terms does not run where the demarcation line between descriptive and evaluative terms does. The set of subjective expressions contains both evaluative terms (subjective_E, e.g. “beautiful”), as well as descriptive terms (subjective_V, e.g. “tall”). Joanna Odrowąż-Sypniewska (2016) has a different but interesting view of this issue. She believes that all vague terms are objective in their clear cases (in this sense that they have semantic type $\langle e, t \rangle$), but become subjective in borderline cases (they change their type to $\langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$ by being enriched with a judge parameter).⁷

It seems that despite some doubts provoked by the issues connected with vagueness and context-sensitivity, we have been able to defend the intuitive division line between descriptive and evaluative expressions, which is designated by the results of the faultless disagreement test. This is not the end of the complications, however. It turns out that propositions containing only descriptive expressions may turn out to be evaluative. First, it happens sometimes that descriptive words are used to express evaluative judgments. Second, there are polysemous terms which have both descriptive and evaluative senses, while the former seems more basic. These two possibilities are discussed in sections 1.4 and 1.5 below.

1.4. Polysemous expressions

Some expressions have both a descriptive sense and an evaluative sense. By this we do not merely mean that they have different semantic components within one sense (which is the case for the thick evaluatives, such as “generous” mentioned above), but that they have two distinct senses. Consider the following example:

- (13) This sauce is heavy.

⁷Odrowąż-Sypniewska does not use type theory in her text, but it seems that the interpretation presented above is in accord with her account.

“Heavy” has a non-subjective sense relating to something measurable. This sense would be expressed in (13) if the speaker was holding a weighty saucepan. “Heavy” also has a subjective sense – to call sauce heavy means saying something about its culinary value. According to Kennedy (2016), the “find” test allows for the identifying of only this subjective^E sense of the term. Sentence (14) sounds good only if the adjective is used evaluatively:

(14) I find this sauce heavy.

On the other hand, embedding “heavy” under “find” when the former is used descriptively is no longer acceptable, e.g. when I am looking at a bag of potatoes on which the label says “10 kilos” (15) or when an airline employee puts my luggage on the belt (16):

(15) #I find this bag heavy.

(16) #Our airline finds this bag heavy.

The reason for the infelicity of these utterances is, as it has been mentioned in the previous section, the fact that gradable adjectives which are subjective only because they are vague (in my terminology they are subjective_v), do not pass the “find” test:

(17) #I find John tall.

It seems, however, that (18) is acceptable from the perspective that the bag does not weigh so much but I am really tired:

(18) I find this bag heavy.

Similarly, when I’m holding one bag in each hand and I know that they both weigh the same but one of them has a very uncomfortable handle, I can felicitously say:

(19) I find this bag heavier than the other one.

“Heavy” in (15) seems to have a meaning closer to the one in (18) and (19), that is, it operates on the scale of weight. Where does the difference in results of the test come from then? Presumably (18) expresses yet another sense of the adjective, namely, the subjective and sensual experience of heaviness. An airline cannot have this sort of experience, just like I cannot

have the experience that John is tall. I can only *consider* John tall just like an airline, as a collective subject, based on its regulations, can consider the bag too heavy.

This diagnosis seems to be in accordance with Kennedy's account, according to which such adjectives as "long", next to the objective sense, can have an evaluative – one can say – qualitative sense:

- (20) I find the flight from Chicago to Hong-Kong longer than the flight from Hong-Kong to Chicago.

The utterer of (20) may be aware of the fact that the flights last the exact same time but want to express his subjective experience of their duration. That might happen, for instance if he flies business class to Hong-Kong for vacation and the flight seems long to him since he can't wait to get there. When he is coming back to Chicago, on the other hand, the journey seems short because it brings him closer to his duties (and on top of that, he only gets to fly economy class).

It seems that invoking polysemy of some expressions does not sufficiently explain the problem of untypical uses of the expressions mentioned above. In particular, it does not explain why "heavy" in utterance (13) would mean something different than in (18). This, I believe, stems from the fact that Kennedy seems to identify evaluativity of expressions with them being subjective_E. Clearly, the adjective "heavy" used with reference to a bag means (in a strong sense) something else than it does when referring to a sauce, namely, in the first case it says something about weight, and in the second – about texture. Moreover, according to Kennedy, in the first case, it has a quantitative/dimensional⁸/objective sense, while in the other – a qualitative/evaluative/subjective sense. However, "heavy" in example (18) proposed above is only a special use of the term in the first sense. In my opinion, it has a qualitative, subjective and dimensional (and not evaluative) sense. This is why I would like to propose a modification – or enrichment – of Kennedy's account which consists in distinguishing two subclasses of subjective adjectives among the adjectives which are subjective_E.

⁸"Dimensional/evaluative" is a vocabulary adopted by Bierwisch (1989) which Kennedy uses. It does not entirely correspond with our terminology ("descriptive/evaluative") since not all descriptive terms are dimensional, even though all dimensional terms are descriptive. It is not problematic for my analysis, especially that Bierwisch juxtaposes dimensional and evaluative adjectives.

1.5 Subjective_E adjectives – experiential vs. evaluative

I would like to argue that subjective_E adjectives can be divided into evaluative adjectives and adjectives which I will call *experiential*. Experiential adjectives are such terms which are used to describe our experiences – often sensory experiences. Some examples are: “heavy” (when talking about a bag carried by the speaker) and “long” (when talking about a flight which seems long to the speaker). The fact that they can be embedded under “find” stems from the fact that there is an experiencer parameter in their semantic structure. This person – the experiencer – experiences some quality in a subjective way peculiar to her. It is rather in accordance with experience than with the state of the world that determines the truth value of the utterance. Therefore, in order to experience the subjective quality of heaviness, I cannot just look at a bag – I need to try to lift it. Nevertheless, neither “heavy”, nor “long” lexically encode the evaluation. If I say that some flight is long, I do not necessarily assert that it is good or bad. As we know, evaluative terms always carry evaluation, e.g. “tasty”, “beautiful” or “handsome”. Some adjectives are, I believe, both evaluative and experiential, for instance “tasty”. One cannot say that something is tasty, if she has never tried this thing or something of the same kind. At the same time, calling something tasty implies an unambiguously positive evaluation of this object.⁹

Now the question is whether there is some diagnostic which would enable us to tell experiential subjective_E terms from evaluative subjective_E ones. My proposal consists in checking if a given sentence containing a subjective term is acceptable such as the construction “*x* seems *P* to me”, while the

⁹A distinction similar to mine is proposed by Louise McNally and Isidora Stojanovic in their *Aesthetic Predicates* (2014) where they claim that the adjectives including an experiencer parameter (which are acceptable under “find”), should be distinguished from evaluatives (which are not acceptable under “find”). They believe that the rare acceptability of, e.g., “beautiful” under “find” stems from the fact that it is treated experientially, that is, the object in question is being compared to other objects that the speaker has already seen. I agree with their account to some extent, except that I believe that such predicates as “tasty” are both experiential and evaluative. Stojanovic and McNally, unlike me, do not analyse such adjectives as “heavy” when used in such a way, which suggests the presence of an experiencer parameter. We also differ when it comes to linguistic intuitions: according to these Authors, “I find this painting beautiful” sounds odd and is felicitous only under special circumstances. I, on the other hand, do not sense any infelicity there and I don’t see a problem with using “find” with evaluatives, although, I admit that it might be the case that they are being used experimentally (e.g. “I find murder repugnant” might sound okay only because the speaker has a gut feeling that it is wrong (as moral intuitionists would say) – so a kind of experience but agreeing that this is the case requires adopting some specific metaethical stance).

resulting phrase would have to be as synonymous as possible with the same sentence embedded under “find” (in the sense that it would have to be possible to use it to express the same thing). In particular, reformulating the sentence into a construction of the “seem” kind should not lower the epistemic certainty expressed by the speaker. It seems that:

(21) I find this bag heavier than the other one.

is synonymous with:

(22) This bag seems heavier to me than the other one.

No matter how much we know about the weight of the bags. Similarly when I say: (23) I find the flight from Chicago to Hong-Kong longer than the flight from Hong-Kong to Chicago.

Knowing that the flights last the same, I can mean the same as:

(24) The flight from Chicago to Hong-Kong seems to me longer than the flight from Hong-Kong to Chicago.

The sentences with “find” which contain experiential subjective_E adjectives can be translated into those including “seem” with virtually no difference in meaning. Can this also be achieved with prototypical evaluative adjectives?

(25) I find Mona Lisa beautiful.

The sentence (25) is not synonymous with (26):

(26) #Mona Lisa seems beautiful to me.¹⁰

Similarly for predicates of personal taste:

(27) I find this cake tasty.

(28) #This cake seems tasty to me.

¹⁰Of course, it is not the case that (26) is unacceptable in general. It could be an utterance by a person manipulated by art critics who knows that according to the standard accepted in her community, Da Vinci’s painting is not supposed to be considered beautiful, but she thinks that it is. I would like to thank an Anonymous Referee for bringing my attention to this possibility.

The unacceptability of (28) turns out to be problematic for my analysis since I take them to be expressed by subjective adjectives while they are both experiential and evaluative. Therefore, I should modify the interpretation of the test so that it expects that the rephrasing from “find” to “seem” is survived only by those subjective_E adjectives which are not evaluative.

The reason why the test proposed above gives the expected results remains unclear and requires further study. At this point, I would only like to suggest that adjectives that are purely experiential sound felicitous in constructions with “seem” because the speakers tend to allow their senses to be deceived by them to a certain extent and “seem” generally lowers epistemic certainty of the judgment it precedes. At the same time, they refer to the qualities which are, in a sense, measurable, and as such we will usually agree with others (and if we don’t, others can correct us if we are wrong). If we say that something seems so-and-so to us, we allow for the fact that it might be different in reality. Expressing evaluation – so asserting that something has a positive or negative value – allows for a higher certainty of the speaker. After all, it is to these standards that one has to make the utterance true or false (at least in their view). This sketch of an explanation is just a suggestion requiring additional philosophical and linguistic reflection.

Before going any further, I should verify the hypothesis I tentatively posed at the beginning. In the introduction I stated that evaluative adjectives, unlike descriptive ones, generate faultless disagreement. The first qualification to this claim was made in section 1.3.1: some descriptive adjectives, namely, subjective_V terms generate it when they are used to refer to borderline cases. Another caveat of the results from the analysis presented in this part of the text: not only evaluative and subjective_V adjectives give rise to faultless disagreement. Experiential subjective_E terms are capable of that too. In a sense, it is not a new achievement – these terms have been considered subjective. I, however, distinguish a separate class of subjective_E terms which are not evaluative.

Someone, however, might want to object to the claim that such utterances as (13) are not evaluative at all. Perhaps the cakes we make are sometimes praised precisely because they are fluffy and light? Aren’t sauces criticized as being heavy or, worse still, burned? My answer is: certainly. This does not, however, go against the conclusions reached in this section. Descriptive expressions are sometimes used to make evaluative claims. I tackle this phenomenon in the next part.

1.6. Descriptive expressions which are used to make evaluative judgments

Descriptive expressions have this deceptive property that they can be used to express evaluative judgments. For instance, when I describe a piece of art in such words as: “dynamic”, “sombre”, “harmonious” or “powerful”, I often thereby express some evaluation even though I am not using evaluative terms *sensu stricto*, i.e. such as “beautiful”. According to Louise McNally and Isidora Stojanovic (2014), (29) might, but does not have to express an evaluative aesthetic judgment:

(29) Picasso’s Guernica is dynamic.

Sentence (29) expresses an aesthetic judgment because the predicate “dynamic” denotes an aesthetic concept. Nevertheless, whether this judgment is evaluative or not, depends on the context which includes a speaker’s intentions.

Similarly, in some contexts saying of a man that he is tall and fit may carry a positive judgment of this individual:

(30) A: Is Bob handsome?

B: He’s tall and fit.¹¹

This does not mean that adjectives like “tall”, “harmonious” or “fit” are themselves evaluative. They do not lexically encode any reference to value (e.g. aesthetic value). It is the context which makes it possible to use them to express evaluation. The fact that “harmonious” usually has a positive connotation, for instance when used to talk about a piece of music or a ballet recital, does not mean that for some current trends in art, e.g. contemporary performance, it cannot be used to express negative judgment.

Other examples of evaluative uses of descriptive terms have been shown by Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016). One of them is the term “gypsy” which is a descriptive noun denoting a member of a certain ethnic group of Indian origin (its homonym being a related adjective). Consider:

(31) Our neighbourhood is ethnically diverse. Czechs, Vietnamese, Gypsies and Nigerians live here.

¹¹Certainly, we cannot exclude that the context of (30) is such that *B*, not wanting to be rude, points to other characteristics of Bob, conversationally implicating that he does not have a nice-looking face. Here, however, we assume that *B* gives a positive answer to the question (nodding and using approving tone). I will say a bit more about implicatures below.

In (31) the term “Gypsies” was used descriptively. Sometimes, however, it is used as a slur. Nevertheless, just as “harmonious” or “tall”, it does not semantically encode evaluation (as its at-issue content)¹².

It is certainly not the case that one can always express evaluation with a descriptive term. If someone asked me if I like my neighbours’ kids and replied that I don’t because they are loud, then I would not only describe them some way but I would also express my negative attitude to loud people. On the other hand, if I replied that I do not like them because they are tall, it would make no sense. The question arises then, what semantic or pragmatic mechanisms decide if a given expression can be used to express an evaluative judgment in a given context. On one understanding, it is the question which Stojanovic and McNally pose at the end of their 2014 paper.

My attempt at an answer is as follows: an evaluative judgment expressed with the use of descriptive terms is expressed only indirectly. Many evaluative terms – both thick and thin – are semantically underdetermined. This means that if I say that some painting is beautiful, I express a positive evaluation but I do not say what aesthetic properties make me judge it this way. In other words, my interlocutor does not have to know, what makes the painting beautiful to me, although if she is a competent speaker, she should know which properties are relevant for the semantics of “beautiful”. Such a competent speaker knows that the size of the painting, the thickness of its frame, the smell of the canvas or the use of acrylic paint will not be relevant to my use of this predicate. It seems, therefore, that if someone asks me, like in example (30), whether Bob is handsome and I reply that he is tall and fit, then I communicate something along the lines: “I don’t know exactly what ‘handsome’ means to you but Bob has such-and-such qualities, now you decide if that is relevant to your question”. In everyday life, when we talk with people whom we know, we can assume that we know, more or less, what some evaluative predicates mean for them in various contexts. We can, therefore, answer directly. Similarly, we tend to be more straightforward when we intend to say that someone is handsome according to our standards and criteria.

¹²The claim that slurs does not carry evaluation as truth-conditional content is not uncontroversial or universally shared. There are so-called semantic accounts of slurs (see, e.g. Hom, 2008). Cepollaro and Stojanovic adopt an account according to which, evaluation is communicated via semantic presupposition. In the present text, I do not take a stance on this problem. I only use the example to illustrate a wider scale on which descriptive terms can be used to express evaluation.

The pragmatic mechanism I propose works well also in explaining some conversational implicatures. In a famous example by Grice (1989), a professor is writing a recommendation letter for his student. The letter is supposed to answer the question whether the student is a good researcher. The professor, who does not think very highly of his charge, lists his traits such as punctuality and good handwriting and does not mention his academic merits. A linguistically competent addressee of the letter understands that semantics of the expression “good scientist” does not include such character traits as punctuality, and therefore is able to calculate the implicature.

It seems, therefore, that the problems connected with context sensitivity and vagueness do not change much about where the intuitive demarcation line between descriptive and evaluative expression runs. These issues are nevertheless responsible for clouding this division. I hope to have clarified the picture a little. In the last part of the paper, I would like to briefly summarize the sketch of my classification of evaluative adjectives and apply it to the analysis of the term “tasty”.

2. “Tasty” – an attempt at classification

In the present text I begin with the classical distinction between evaluative and descriptive terms. I hypothesize that the former, unlike the latter, generate faultless disagreement. That turns out to be problematic, however, since faultless disagreements arise sometimes when descriptive vague predicates are used to denote borderline cases. I adopt an independent division line, that is, between objective and subjective adjectives. I analyse Christopher Kennedy’s proposal in which he distinguishes two kinds of subjectivity: the kind that has to do with vagueness and the kind connected with evaluativity. Assuming, after i.a. McNally and Stojanovic, that there is a separate group of adjectives which include an experiencer parameter, I postulate completing Kennedy’s analysis by dividing the class of subjective expressions in the latter sense into proper evaluatives and experiential terms. The set of experiential terms would include those special senses of descriptive adjectives. I also propose a linguistic test useful in identifying these expressions.

Predicates of personal taste are probably the most often used expressions in discussions about faultless disagreement. Nevertheless, they have not received much detailed analysis in terms of descriptivity, evaluativity, thickness or thinness. In the last part of the present paper, I am going to draft a proposal of such an analysis in the light of the discussion above.

- (31) A: Raspberry tomatoes are tastier than plum tomatoes.
B: No, plum tomatoes are tastier.

It looks like the disagreement in (31) can be called faultless and thus “tasty” should be considered subjective. It is clear that it is subjective_E. Since it is used in the comparative form, it cannot be the case that it is being used to talk about a borderline case. The “seem” test is not conclusive because it is designed only to show that a given expression is not evaluative. “Tasty” is evaluative on first glimpse, however – it is difficult, if not impossible¹³, to think of a context in which it does not carry positive evaluation of something. It is also experiential because this evaluation comes from the subjective experience of tasting something.

That “tasty” is a subjective_E predicate, does not mean that it is not subjective_V in a sense. It is a gradable adjective and therefore, it is vague. In my opinion, predicates of taste can have borderline cases only *intrapersonally* (not interpersonally) because of the presence of an experiencer. This is why cucumber soup might be definitely tasty to me, asparagus soup definitely not tasty and cauliflower soup “borderline tasty”. There are no foods which would be borderline tasty to all language users.¹⁴

Finally, we should decide whether “tasty” is a thin or a thick term. I’m afraid that it is not an easy decision to make. On one hand, it seems that it cannot be thin since it says a little bit more than that something is good. On the other, it is not as thick as, for example, “generous”. Someone is generous if she gives a lot to other people without expectation of reciprocity. Something is tasty – when? It seems that all the meanings that “tasty” encodes have two pieces of information: that it is good and that it can be used to talk about food (which is, plausibly, a metasemantic condition of its use). To say “*x* is tasty” is to say “*x* is good with respect to gustatory experience”. Structurally, it is a counterpart of “*x* is beautiful” which would be equivalent to “*x* is good

¹³It should be stressed that this claim is limited to attributive uses of the predicate. It is possible that one can make a non-evaluative judgment, using “tasty” referentially, e.g., *A* asks: “Which cookies do you want me to buy?”, *B* answers: “Buy me the tasty ones”.

¹⁴The fact that the borderline zone on a scale of a predicate is not totally shared by all language speakers is common to all vague predicates to some extent. Speakers sometimes disagree about whether a given object is clearly *P* or borderline *P*. It is conceivable that there are such speakers who would say that someone who is 2.20 m tall is not clearly tall. The difference between these innocent gradable adjectives as “tall” and “tasty” is that one can always say that something that all others consider clearly tasty is disgusting. On the other hand, the person who calls a 2.20 m tall man not clearly tall, would be presumed as not grasping the meaning of “tall”.

with respect to aesthetic experience”. What remains to be explained is the mechanism by which this metasemantic information is communicated. Some patterns of behaviour of the term, including projection patterns, suggest it might be presupposition.

Providing a detailed lexical semantics of predicates of personal taste requires further deliberation. I hope that the classification proposed by me is a step in the right direction.

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