

A Direction Effect on Taste Predicates

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1. Introduction

Consider an utterance of ‘Fish sticks are tasty’ as made by a speaker who likes fish sticks. How will the speaker assess this claim when, at some later point in her life, she comes to dislike fish sticks? As true or as false? Will she retract her earlier statement or stand by it? More generally, will she use her present taste standard in assessing the claim or the standard she had at the time of the original utterance? The answer to this question is of vital importance for the recent discussion on the semantics and pragmatics of so-called “predicates of personal taste” (e.g. “tasty” and “fun”).

The two major contenders for a semantics of predicates of personal taste are relativism and contextualism. Although these views make similar predictions in many cases, they crucially come apart when it comes to the indicated types of situations. Relativism predicts that the speaker’s assessment will depend on her later taste standard, that is, the taste standard governing the so-called “context of assessment” (e.g. Kölbel, 2003; Lasersohn, 2005; Stephenson, 2007; MacFarlane, 2014; Egan, 2014; Dinges, 2017). Meanwhile, contextualism predicts that the speaker’s assessment will depend on her original taste standard, that is, the taste standard governing the so-called “context of use” (e.g. Glanzberg, 2007; Stojanovic, 2007; López de Sa, 2008; Moltmann, 2010; Schaffer, 2011; Sundell, 2011; Huvenes, 2012; Plunkett and Sundell, 2013; Pearson, 2013; Marques, 2014; Zakkou, 2019).

Which prediction is borne out by the data? Both relativists and contextualists typically take the data to favor their position. MacFarlane (2014: 141), for instance, holds that

speakers will retract (rather than stand by) an earlier assertion that something was tasty, if the flavor the thing had at the time of the assertion is not pleasing to their *present* tastes — even if it was pleasing to the tastes they had then.

Raffman (2016) disagrees. She “would have no inclination to retract” and suggests that “our intuitions are sufficiently divergent, and/or

simply anemic, that MacFarlane's constructed examples cannot always bear the weight he places on them" (Raffman, 2016: 172). Indeed, relativist claims about ordinary intuitions have been challenged with experimental data in discussions of epistemic modals (e.g. Knobe and Yalcin, 2014; Marques, 2018) and, more recently, predicates of personal taste (Kneer, ms).

Part I of our paper aims to clarify how ordinary speakers actually respond to the relevant type of cases, focusing specifically on the predicate "tasty" as one prominent predicate of personal taste. We explain where contextualism and relativism come apart (§2) and suggest a general paradigm to test the respective predictions (§3). We present experiments constructed within the suggested paradigm (§4) and end with a brief summary of the discussion so far (§5). Our experiments converge on two interesting findings. First, ordinary speaker intuitions are just as split as the intuitions of the reported philosophers. Second, whether ordinary speakers have relativist or contextualist intuitions depends on the direction in which they change their taste. They are more inclined to assess previous taste claims as false when they start out disliking the food in question than when they start out liking it.

Part II of our paper aims to make sense of this data. We propose what we call hybrid relativism to explain why ordinary speaker judgments about the relevant cases are split between relativism and contextualism (§6). The idea will be that taste claims have both a relativist and a contextualist reading and that people respond differently depending on which reading they happen to select. We then address the indicated direction effect (§7). The suggestion here will be that people are more inclined to favor the relativist reading when they start out disliking the food in question due to an independent preference to interpret speakers negatively. We address some alternative candidate accounts of the data (§8) before we conclude (§9).

Part I: Gathering the data

2. Relativism and Contextualism

In this section, we'll explain relativism and contextualism and where they come apart. We'll be using a semantics in the spirit of Kaplan (1989) and Lewis (1981). We will thus assume that sentences express propositions at a given context of use and that these propositions have truth-values relative to a circumstance of evaluation, that is, a tuple of parameters including, e.g., a possible world or a point in time.¹

According to *relativism*, sentences of the form 'F is/isn't tasty' invariably express the same proposition independently of the context in which they are used. We can refer to the respective proposition simply as the proposition that F is/isn't tasty.² The proposition that F is/isn't tasty isn't just expressed by the sentences in question, according to relativism; it also features as the object of assertion. Thus, you will assert that F is/isn't tasty when you assertively use the sentence 'F is/isn't tasty' in a given context. For economy of expression, we'll refer to the proposition a speaker asserts when she assertively uses a given sentence as the proposition *the sentence asserts*. Relativists are thus committed to the following principle:

R1. The proposition asserted by 'F is/isn't tasty' in a given context κ (invariably) is the proposition that F is/isn't tasty.

Relativists hold further that this invariably asserted proposition has truth-values only relative to what we'll call a *taste standard*. More specifically, they propose to add a taste standard to the circumstance

1. We will spend considerable effort on clarifying where relativism and contextualism come apart because it has been argued (influentially) that these views are just notational variants of one another (e.g. Stojanovic, 2007). We want to dispel any such concern.
2. We are simplifying here, glossing over sources of context-sensitivity such as sensitivity to a contextual threshold for tastiness (e.g. Glanzberg, 2007: 9) or context-sensitivity in the term replacing "F". This should be unproblematic because all our example cases hold respective context factors fixed.

of evaluation and argue that the truth-value of the proposition that *F* is/isn't tasty depends on what the taste standard happens to be.³ For simplicity, we will ignore all parameters in the circumstance of evaluation beyond the point in time and the newly added taste standard.⁴ We'll use the notation $\langle t, s \rangle$ to refer to the circumstance of evaluation comprising the point in time, t , and the taste standard, s . Against this background, a relativist can characterize the indicated dependency of truth-values on taste standards as follows.

R2. The proposition that *F* is/isn't tasty is true relative to $\langle t, s \rangle$ iff, at t , *F* is/isn't tasty by the lights of s .

To illustrate, take the proposition that licorice is tasty. Let t^* stand for a given point in time, s_+ for a taste standard by the lights of which licorice (as it tastes at t^*) is tasty, and s_- for a taste standard by the lights of which licorice (as it tastes at t^*) is not tasty. On these assumptions, the proposition that licorice is tasty is true relative to $\langle t^*, s_+ \rangle$ but false relative to $\langle t^*, s_- \rangle$.

Following MacFarlane (2014), we'll assume that semantic theories of the type above make predictions about our ordinary use of language by way of the norms governing speech acts. There are different types of speech acts one might consider here. We'll focus on assertions in this paper. With respect to assertions, there are different types of norms one might invoke. The most prominent candidates are truth, justification, and knowledge norms. For concreteness, we'll assume a

3. Some relativists add a taste standard to the circumstance of evaluation, as we do, while others add a judge. We focus on the former version because we think it's better equipped to make sense of the data we'll report below. In particular, relativists using a judge parameter have a hard time explaining why we would ever want to say that a previous taste claim "was" false after we have changed our taste standard. Relativists using a standards parameter can make sense of this. More on this below. See also MacFarlane (2014: 162–165) for discussion of the differences between the indicated versions of relativism.
4. Relativists don't have to include a point in time in the circumstance of evaluation. Whether they include this parameter depends on whether they have "temporalist" or "eternalist" leanings (Richard, 1981). We chose a temporalist (i.e. time relative) framework because it makes some of the subsequent discussion easier to follow. Nothing of substance should depend on this choice.

truth norm. Again, the truth norm can be spelled out in different ways. We'll use a so-called "reflexive" implementation that ties the permissibility of assertions to one's present context:

R3. One is permitted to assert that p in a context κ iff the proposition that p is true relative to the circumstance of evaluation determined by κ .

Take again the proposition that licorice is tasty. Whether you are permitted to assert that proposition will depend on your current context and which circumstance of evaluation it determines. Assume that the circumstance determined by your context is $\langle t^*, s_+ \rangle$. Then you will be permitted to assert that licorice is tasty because this proposition is true relative to $\langle t^*, s_+ \rangle$.

So far, we've characterized the general outlines of a relativist framework. One crucial element is missing, namely, an account of how a context determines a circumstance of evaluation $\langle t, s \rangle$ as required in R3. The determination of the point in time, t , in $\langle t, s \rangle$ is relatively straightforward. The time of a context of assertion will simply be the time at which the assertion is made. But how does a context determine a taste standard? Different versions of relativism say different things here.⁵

What we call *simple* relativism answers the question as follows:

R-SIMP. The taste standard determined by a given context is the taste standard that the speaker of that context has at the time of the context.⁶

Suppose you assert at t^* that licorice is tasty and that you happen to like licorice, that is, that your taste standard is s_+ . By R-SIMP, the circumstance of your context will be $\langle t^*, s_+ \rangle$. This means that, by R3, your

5. Note that the idea of a context determining a circumstance is already present in Kaplan's (1989: 522) work when he speaks of "the circumstance of the context" (our emphasis) (see also MacFarlane, 2014: 77).
6. See Kölbel (2008: 19) and MacFarlane (2014: 143–144) for further discussion of the idea of a taste standard and the idea of having a certain taste standard. See also Dinges and Zakkou (2020).

assertion is permissible because the proposition that licorice is tasty is true relative to $\langle t^*, s_+ \rangle$. The assertion would have been impermissible if you hadn't liked licorice and hence your taste standard had been s_- .

Flexible versions of relativism assume more flexible determination relations. They might say that the taste standard of a given context is the taste standard of an idealized version of the speaker, the taste standard of the most salient subject in the conversation, the taste standard of a salient group of people such as the speaker and her audience, etc. By R₃, such views would imply that you are permitted to assert that licorice is tasty in a context κ iff an idealized version of yourself, the most salient person in the conversation, or you and your audience like licorice. We'll leave such versions of relativism aside for now and come back to them later.⁷

Contextualism, in contrast to relativism, has it that sentences of the form 'F is/isn't tasty' express different propositions at different contexts of use. We can generically refer to the proposition expressed in a given context κ as the proposition that F is/isn't tasty *by the lights of the taste standard determined by* κ .⁸ Contextualists think that these expressed propositions typically feature as the objects of assertion. They are thus committed to the following principle:

C₁. The proposition asserted by 'F is/isn't tasty' in a given context κ is the proposition that F is/isn't tasty by the lights of the taste standard determined by κ .

Contextualists hold that, given the new flexibility in the asserted proposition, we no longer need a taste standard in the circumstance

7. One might complain that relativism as defined here is not actually relativism but "non-indexical contextualism" (see e.g. MacFarlane, 2009 for this distinction). Note, however, that the difference between genuine (or assessment) relativism and non-indexical contextualism is standardly assumed to be purely technical as long as we consider only the speech act of assertion and leave retraction aside (see e.g. Kölbel, 2015b). We will leave retraction aside, so there is no need to use the technically more complex assessment-sensitive framework.

8. The considerations from footnote 2 apply *mutatis mutandis*.

of evaluation. According to contextualism, this parameter can simply be dropped. Given the previous simplifications, we can thus construe a circumstance of evaluation as comprising just a point in time, and we can offer the following, unsurprising truth-conditions for the just-indicated contextualist propositions.

C₂. The proposition that F is/isn't tasty by the lights of s is true relative to $\langle t \rangle$ iff, at t , F is/isn't tasty by the lights of s .

As before in the case of relativism, we'll additionally assume that contextualists want to link their semantics to ordinary usage via the already familiar reflexive truth norm of assertion.

C₃ (= R₃). One is permitted to assert that p in a context κ iff the proposition that p is true relative to the circumstance of evaluation determined by κ .

Suppose, for instance, that you assertively utter 'Licorice is tasty' at t^* . According to C₁, you will thereby assert that licorice is tasty by the lights of the taste standard determined by your current context. Assume that this taste standard is s_+ . Then, the assertion will be permissible given C₃ because the proposition that licorice is tasty by the lights of s_+ is true relative to $\langle t^* \rangle$.

These are the basic outlines of a contextualist theory. Note that the determination relation described in C₃ will no longer raise eyebrows in a contextualist framework where the circumstance of evaluation comprises just a point in time. As indicated, the point in time determined by a given context of assertion plausibly is the time of the assertion. But contextualists make use of a context determining a taste standard in their assumption C₁. Just like in the case of relativism, one may wonder how this determination relation is supposed to be cashed out.

Simple contextualism offers a simple account, which mirrors the respective assumption of simple relativism.

C-SIMP (= R-SIMP). The taste standard determined by a given context is the taste standard that the speaker of that context has at the time of the context.

To illustrate, assume that you like licorice and hence have the taste standard s_+ . You assertively utter ‘Licorice is tasty’ at t^* . According to C1 and C-SIMP, you thereby assert that licorice is tasty by the lights of s_+ . This proposition is true relative to $\langle t^*, s_+ \rangle$ given C2, and hence the assertion is permissible given C3. The assertion would have been impermissible if you hadn’t liked licorice and hence your taste standard had been s_- .

Flexible versions of contextualism have more complicated stories to tell. On such views, the taste standard of a context could again be that of an idealized version of the speaker, the most salient subject, or a salient group. As before in the case of relativism, we’ll stick with simple contextualism for now and return to more complicated views later.

Given how simple relativism and simple contextualism have been defined, it may be hard to see how they could conflict. For instance, on both theories, it is permissible to assertively use ‘Licorice is tasty’ at a given context iff licorice is tasty by one’s own lights. Indeed, the conditions for permissible assertions of plain “tasty” sentences are the same according to simple relativism and simple contextualism.

To tear the positions apart, we need to look at other types of sentences. The sentences we want to look at in what follows are sentences of the form ‘What X said was true/false’. Simple relativism and simple contextualism yield competing verdicts here. To make this clear, two assumptions are required.

The first assumption is this:

REF. Expressions of the form ‘what X said’ are normally used to refer to the objects of assertions, that is, the proposition we assert when we make an assertion.

For instance, suppose I say, “We should go”, and thereby assert that we should go. When I later ask whether you agree with “what I said”, I will refer to the asserted proposition that we should go according to REF.⁹

The second assumption is that the semantics of sentences of the form ‘P was true’ is governed by principles along the following lines.

T1. The proposition asserted by ‘P was true/false’ in a given context κ is the proposition that P was true/false.

T2. The proposition that P was true/false is true relative to $\langle t, s \rangle$ iff, for some time t' prior to t , P is true/false relative to $\langle t', s \rangle$.

T1 says that sentences like ‘P was true/false’ invariably express the same proposition. T2 offers deflationary truth-conditions for the predicate ‘was true’, where this predicate basically shifts the point in time relative to which the embedded proposition is evaluated. (Note that T1 and T2 assume a relativist framework where circumstances of evaluation comprise a point in time and a taste standard. We can simply drop the reference to taste standards in order to align the principles with contextualism.)

A full defense of REF, T1, and T2 goes beyond the scope of this paper, but we hope these principles are plausible enough to be taken for granted for now. With these principles in place, we can derive competing verdicts from our initial definitions of simple relativism and simple contextualism when it comes to assertions of ‘What X said was true/false’.

Suppose, for instance, that Hannah assertively used ‘Fish sticks are tasty’ in a context κ_1 . Suppose she assesses this assertion later on in κ_2 by asserting “What I said was true”. Under what conditions will the assertion in κ_2 be permitted? Relativism entails that the permissibility of Hannah’s assertion is tied to her taste standard in κ_2 . Contextualism entails that it is tied to her taste standard in κ_1 . Here is why.

9. See e.g. Kölbel (2008: 15; 2009: 392; 2015b) and Khoo and Phillips (2019: 312) for a similar assumption in a related context.

Consider relativism first. According to relativism, and the assertion norm R_3 in particular, the assertion in κ_2 will be permitted iff the asserted proposition is true relative to the circumstance $\langle t_2, s_2 \rangle$ determined by κ_2 . To assess whether this condition holds, we first have to get clear on what proposition Hannah asserted at κ_2 . By T_1 , this will simply be the proposition *that what Hannah said was true*. The question now is whether this proposition is true relative to $\langle t_2, s_2 \rangle$. Given REF, 'what Hannah said' refers to the proposition she previously asserted. According to relativism, and R_1 in particular, the proposition Hannah previously asserted is the proposition *that fish sticks are tasty*. The proposition *that what Hannah asserted was true* should thus be true relative to $\langle t_2, s_2 \rangle$ iff the proposition *that the proposition that fish sticks are tasty was true* is true relative to $\langle t_2, s_2 \rangle$. By T_2 , this condition holds iff, for some time t_1 prior to t_2 , the proposition *that fish sticks are tasty* is true relative to $\langle t_1, s_2 \rangle$. According to R_2 , this condition is met iff, at t_1 , fish sticks are tasty by the lights of s_2 . According to R-SIMP, s_2 is the taste standard Hannah has at the context κ_2 . Thus, the permissibility of her assertion of 'What I said was true' at κ_2 depends on her taste standard at κ_2 . The assertion will be permissible only if she likes fish sticks at κ_2 .

Consider contextualism next. According to the contextualist norm of assertion C_3 , Hannah's assertion in κ_2 will be permitted iff the asserted proposition is true relative to the circumstance $\langle t_2 \rangle$ determined by κ_2 . Given the principle T_1 , the asserted proposition will again be the proposition *that what Hannah said was true*. Given REF and the contextualist assumption C_1 , 'what she said' refers to the proposition *that fish sticks are tasty by the lights of the taste standard s_1 determined by κ_1* . Thus, the proposition *that what Hannah said was true* should be true relative to $\langle t_2 \rangle$ iff the proposition *that the proposition that fish sticks are tasty by the lights of s_1 was true* is true relative to $\langle t_2 \rangle$. According to T_2 , this condition holds iff, for some time t_1 prior to t_2 , the proposition *that fish sticks are tasty by the lights of s_1* is true relative to $\langle t_1 \rangle$. According to C_2 , this condition in turn is met iff, at t_1 , fish sticks are tasty by the lights of s_1 . C-SIMP now has it that s_1 simply is the taste standard Hannah has at the context κ_1 . This means that the permissibility of her assertion

depends solely on this earlier taste standard. Her present taste standard at κ_2 doesn't matter.

Generalizing a bit, we arrive at competing verdicts for the following types of scenarios, where a speaker changes her taste standard over time:

Σ_1 . In κ_1 , F is tasty by the lights of S's taste standard. Correspondingly, S asserts "F is tasty". In κ_2 , S's taste standard has changed so that F is no longer tasty by the lights of S's taste standard.

Σ_2 . In κ_1 , F isn't tasty by the lights of S's taste standard. Correspondingly, S asserts "F isn't tasty". In κ_2 , S's taste standard has changed so that F is now tasty by the lights of S's taste standard.

Simple relativist verdict about Σ_1 and Σ_2 :

In κ_2 , it is permissible for S to assert "What I said was false" and impermissible to assert "What I said was true".

Simple contextualist verdict about Σ_1 and Σ_2 :

In κ_2 , it is permissible for S to assert "What I said was true" and impermissible to assert "What I said was false".

This concludes our presentation of relativism and contextualism. We have presented simple versions of each of these positions. They agree that the taste standard of a given context is the taste standard that the speaker of the context has at the time of the context. By way of this agreement, they make widely similar predictions. The views come apart though when it comes to truth-value assessment of previously asserted contents.

This is not the only place where the views come apart. They can naturally be spelled out to make competing predictions for when speakers disagree (e.g. MacFarlane, 2014: ch. 6), when they should retract

previous assertions (e.g. MacFarlane, 2014: ch. 5), or when interpreting more complex linguistic constructions (e.g. Kneer et al., 2017). Our focus will be exclusively on the indicated truth-value assessments.

3. Methodological Remarks

To see whether the contextualist or the relativist verdict is correct, we have to derive testable predictions. This can be done in various ways. In the present section, we explain how we chose to go about it. To begin with, let us briefly address one seemingly straightforward way to test the verdicts that we won't employ.

The indicated verdicts involve normative assessments, in particular, claims about which assertions are permissible. To the extent that 'permissible' in ordinary English (or some other expression such as 'correct', 'right', or 'appropriate') tracks the notion of permissibility in play here, we could directly test whether people's "permissibility" judgments are in line with the indicated verdicts. This could confirm or disconfirm these verdicts if ordinary speakers generally know under which conditions an assertion is permissible.

We aren't entirely opposed to this approach. Knobe and Yalcin (2014: Experiment 4), for instance, use this method when they ask people to make "appropriateness" judgments; Marques (2018: 3353n) and Kneer (ms) similarly ask about what is "required" of a given speaker; and Khoo and Knobe (2018) test "correctness" intuitions. All these studies have merits.

Still, we think the method is not without problems. The notion of permissibility and similar normative notions scholars use to formulate norms of speech seems to be at least semi-technical. An assertion can be permissible or impermissible in many different ways. Assertion norms are presumably intended to capture only one specific flavor of permissibility, one that is dictated by linguistic rather than, say, social, moral, or prudential norms. Consequently, one runs the risk that people's judgments latch on to the wrong flavor. If they do, linguistic permissibility won't play a role in what they judge to be "permissible".

In light of this worry, we want to suggest a different strategy to test the indicated verdicts, if only for the purposes of methodological diversity. The basic idea will be to look at what people judge they *would say* in a given context rather than what they judge *is permissible to say*. Take the verdicts derived from relativism and contextualism. They don't directly entail predictions about what people judge they would say. But we can derive such predictions in two steps.

First, norms of speech, and the norm of assertion more specifically, are supposed to govern our linguistic behavior. So assuming that the norms are correct, we would expect respective permissibility facts to be reflected in our speech behavior. In particular, we would expect that, other things being equal, people prefer permissible over impermissible assertions. Other things being equal, relativism thus predicts that, if people found themselves in scenarios like Σ_1 and Σ_2 , they would assess their previous claim as false ('What I said was false') rather than true ('What I said was true'). Meanwhile, contextualism predicts that, other things being equal, people would assess their previous claim as true rather than false.¹⁰

Second, people presumably are good counterfactual reasoners at least as far as their own speech behavior is concerned. That is, they generally make correct judgments about what they would say in this or that scenario.¹¹ In particular, if people would prefer to assess their previous claim in Σ_1 and Σ_2 as true or false, we would expect that they also *judge* that this is so.

10. The "other things equal"-qualification is important. People sometimes prefer linguistically impermissible assertions over permissible ones. We just assume that this requires special circumstances (e.g. confusion or insincerity). The cases we'll consider below don't feature such special circumstances. At least, the burden of proof seems to be on our opponents here.
11. This should be our default assumption if we want to avoid error-theoretic commitments. See additionally Dunaway et al. (2013) for evidence that *philosophers* are good at predicting the speech behavior of *others*. We see no obvious reason why philosophers should be special in this regard, and, on the face of it, it should only be easier to predict one's own speech behavior. More generally, counterfactual reasoning is such an integral part of our lives that it is difficult to see how we could get along if we weren't good at it (see e.g. Byrne, 2016).

This gives us the following testable predictions for Σ_1 and Σ_2 :

Simple relativist predictions for Σ_1 and Σ_2 :

People will judge that: if they found themselves in κ_2 , they would prefer to assert “What I said was false” over asserting “What I said was true”.

Simple contextualist predictions for Σ_1 and Σ_2 :

People will judge that: if they found themselves in κ_2 , they would prefer to assert “What I said was true” over asserting “What I said was false”.

We chose to test these predictions in our experiments.

Note that the suggested methodology is much in line with how philosophers and linguists often present alleged data in support of their theories. In many cases, they don’t start out with intuitive normative assessments, but rather offer intuitions about what people “would say” in a given case (e.g. MacFarlane, 2014: 13–14). We’ll employ this arm-chair method in a formal experimental setting.

4. Experiments

With these preliminary considerations in mind, we can turn to our experiments. We report three experiments in this section. Experiment 1 tests whether people prefer to assess previous taste claims as true or false after a change in taste. The findings are as indicated in the introduction. First, people are split. On average there is no preference in either direction. Second, the preference for assessing a previous taste claim as true or false depends on the direction in which people change their taste standard. Experiment 2 and 3 corroborate these findings by ruling out deflationary accounts. Experiment 2 underwrites the direction effect by ruling out the hypothesis that it is just the result of an aversion towards negations. Experiment 3 underwrites the result that people are split by ruling out the hypothesis that participants just answered randomly because they didn’t understand their task.

4.1 Experiment 1

Participants were presented with one of two vignettes. In each vignette, they were asked to imagine themselves in a situation where they change their taste standard over time. They were then asked to assess how likely they would be to judge a previous taste claim as true or false. The two vignettes differed only in whether participants start out liking the food in question and then come to dislike it or *vice versa*.

4.1.1 Method

289 participants were recruited through Prolific Academic (56% female, mean age 38). Each participant was randomly assigned to either of two conditions. The first condition (“NLtoL” for not liking to liking) read as follows:

Picture yourself in the following scenario.

Yumble is a new brand of bubblegum. You have never had a Yumble. One day you decide to try one. You don’t like the taste. You tell your friend Paul:

“Yumble isn’t tasty.”

A few weeks later, you and Paul meet at the check-out in the supermarket. Yumble hasn’t changed its taste, but you have now come to like it. You take a pack from the shelf. Paul says:

“That’s funny, I have a clear recollection of you saying ‘Yumble isn’t tasty’ last time we met!”

After reading this vignette, participants received instructions to rate how likely they would be to judge what they said before as true, and how likely they would be to judge it as false. Answers could be given by moving sliders, one for each response, on a scale from 0 to 100. The sliders were independent from one another (i.e. responses didn’t have to add up to 100). Thus, participants could set both sliders to 0 to indicate that they would assess their previous claim as neither true

nor false. By default, the sliders were set to 0. The specific instruction read as follows:

For each of the following responses, please tell us how likely you would be to give this response to Paul's remark in the given context.

The specific response options were "What I said was false. Yumble is tasty" and "What I said was true. Still, Yumble is tasty." We inserted "still" in the second response because we felt that there was a contrast between the first and the second sentence even on a contextualist view, and we didn't want to downgrade the response by leaving this contrast unarticulated.¹²

The second condition ("LtoNL" for liking to not liking) differed from the first in that participants started out liking rather than disliking Yumble and ended up disliking rather than liking it. It read as follows:

Picture yourself in the following scenario.

Yumble is a new brand of bubblegum. You have never had a Yumble. One day you decide to try one. You like the taste. You tell your friend Paul:

12. Contextualists might still complain that we are artificially downgrading the "true" response. A more natural way of putting it, they might say, would be something like "What I said was true. Still, Yumble is tasty *to me now*". Contextualists would presumably explain the difference in naturalness between this response and the one we offer by assuming some kind of communicative ideal to make tacit arguments explicit whenever there is a threat of misunderstanding. Note, however, that our primary concern is whether people prefer the "true" to the "false" response or *vice versa*. Even if our "true" response fails to live up to the indicated ideal, it should still be preferable to the "false" response according to contextualism. After all, even as stated, the "false" response is false according to contextualism and the "true" response true. One would normally not prefer to say something outright false to saying something true just because the true claim is not ideal in terms of a possible misunderstanding. This is not to say, of course, that it would be uninteresting to modify the "true" response in the suggested way and to see how this affects results. We'll leave this for another occasion. Similar considerations apply to the "true" response in the next condition.

"Yumble is tasty."

A few weeks later, you and Paul meet at the check-out in the supermarket. Yumble hasn't changed its taste, but you don't like it anymore. When you refuse to buy Yumble, Paul says:

"That's funny, I have a clear recollection of you saying 'Yumble is tasty' last time we met!"

Again, participants were asked to rate how likely they would be to judge what they said before as true and how likely they would be to judge it as false, by moving sliders on a scale between 0 and 100. The assessments in this condition were "What I said was false. Yumble isn't tasty" and "What I said was true. Still, Yumble isn't tasty".

4.1.2 Results

Mean responses by condition are displayed in Figure 1.

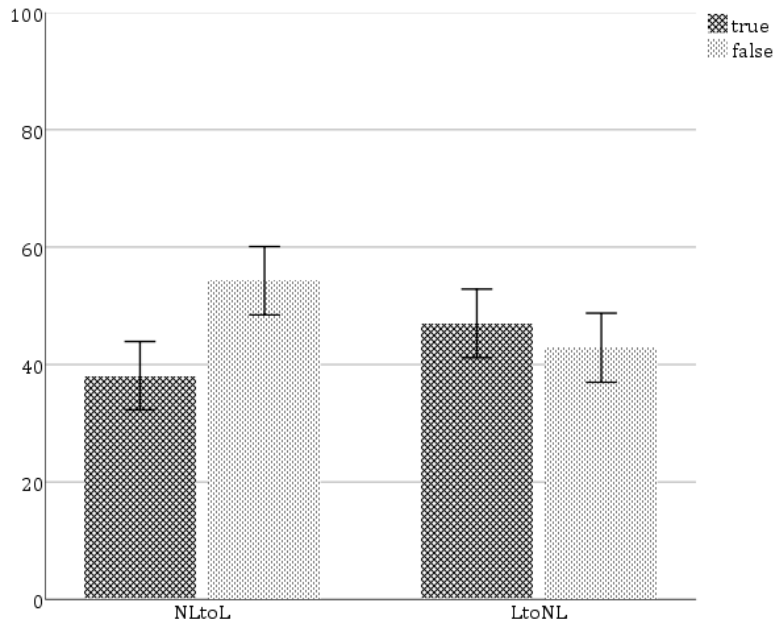


Figure 1. Mean responses by condition in Experiment 1. Error bars show 95% CI.

The data were analyzed using a mixed-model repeated measures ANOVA, with condition (NLtoL vs. LtoNL) as a between-subject variable and statement (“true” vs. “false”) as a within-subject variable. There was no significant main effect of statement, $F(1, 287) = 2.58, p = .11$, and no significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 287) = .45, p = .50$. But there was a significant interaction, $F(1, 287) = 7.36, p = .007$. The effect size was small ($\eta_p^2 = .025$).

To further explore this interaction, we compared judgments for the two statements within each condition. In the NLtoL condition, participants gave higher ratings for the “false” statement ($M = 54.28, SD$

$= 35.46$) than for the “true” statement ($M = 38.10, SD = 35.47$), $t(144) = 3.01, p = .003$. The effect size was small to medium ($d = .456$). In the LtoNL condition, participants gave slightly higher ratings for the “true” statement ($M = 47.01, SD = 35.41$) than for the “false” statement ($M = 42.87, SD = 35.76$), but this difference wasn’t statistically significant, $t(144) = .78, p = .435$.

Even though average responses across conditions all range somewhere around the mid-point of our scale, individual participants tended to have more categorical preferences in that they gave very different ratings for the different statements. As a rough statistical measure for this, we found that the average absolute value of the difference between the response to the “true” and the “false” statement was pretty high in the LtoNL condition ($M = 54.67, SD = 32.30$) and the NLtoL condition ($M = 58.17, SD = 30.28$).

4.1.3 Discussion

We can report two main findings. First, ordinary speakers seem just as split as philosophers are when they assess previous taste claims after a change in taste standards. They have relatively clear preferences for whether to assess the previous claim as true or false, but these preferences are more or less equally likely to go one way rather than the other. Call this result the *even split*. Second, which preference people have is affected by the direction in which they change their taste standard. In particular, there is a stronger preference for an assessment as false when people start out disliking rather than liking the food in question. Call this the *direction effect*.

We think that both of these effects are interesting and surprising. Before we derive semantic/pragmatic conclusions from them, however, we want to rule out some deflationary accounts of the data. One might try to explain away the direction effect as follows. People simply have a slight aversion toward negated claims because negated claims are somewhat harder to process. This gives rise to more “false” responses in NLtoL, where the assessed statement is “Yumble isn’t tasty”. Regarding the even split, one could propose the following deflationary

account. Our experimental paradigm just isn't working properly. People don't understand the type of task they are asked to perform and answer at random. The following experiments aim to rule out these hypotheses.

4.2 Experiment 2

This experiment addresses the suggested deflationary account of the direction effect in terms of an aversion towards negated claims. To test this hypothesis, we eliminated all relevant negations by replacing "is tasty" by "tastes good" and "isn't tasty" by "tastes bad" in the vignettes and the prompts. This should eliminate the direction effect if the negation hypothesis is sound.

4.2.1 Method

251 participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (49% female, mean age 36). As before, participants were randomly assigned to either of two conditions. The conditions were exact copies of the above NLtoL and LtoNL conditions except that we replaced "Yumble is tasty" with "Yumble tastes good" and "Yumble isn't tasty" with "Yumble tastes bad".

4.2.2 Results

Mean responses by condition are displayed in Figure 2.

A Direction Effect on Taste Predicates

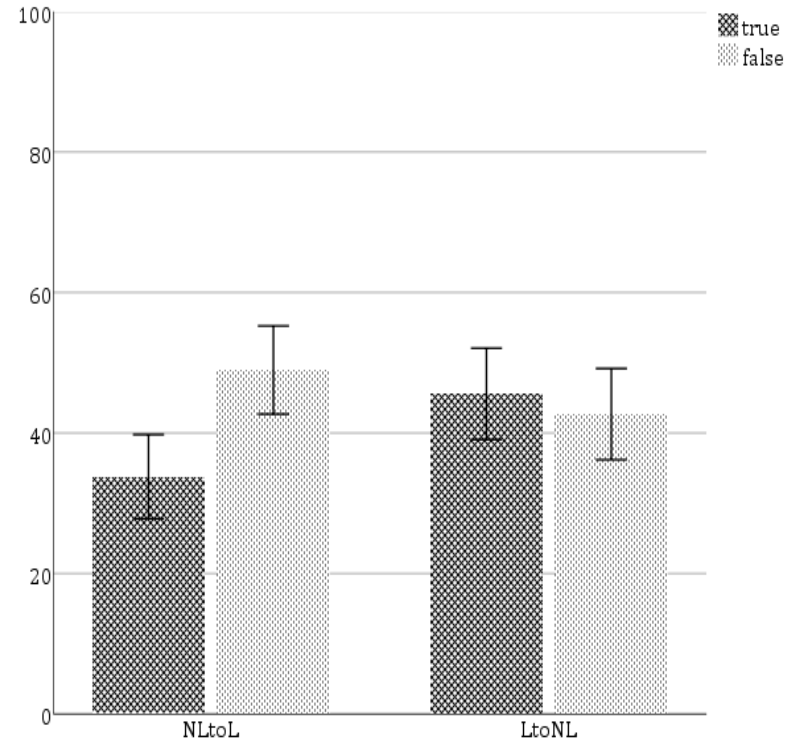


Figure 2. Mean responses by condition in Experiment 2. Error bars show 95% CI.

As before, the data were analyzed using a mixed-model repeated measures ANOVA, with condition (NLtoL vs. LtoNL) as a between-subject variable and statement ("true" vs. "false") as a within-subject variable. There was no significant main effect of statement, $F(1, 249) = 2.32$, $p = .13$, and no significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 249) = 1.87$, $p = .17$. Again, though, there was a significant interaction, $F(1, 249) = 5.02$, $p = .026$. As before, the effect size was small ($\eta_p^2 = .020$).

To further explore the interaction, we compared judgments for the two statements within each condition. In the NLtoL condition,

participants gave higher ratings for the “false” statement ($M = 48.96$, $SD = 36.19$) than for the “true” statement ($M = 33.78$, $SD = 34.51$), $t(129) = 2.81$, $p = .006$. The effect was small to medium sized ($d = .429$). In the LtoNL condition, participants gave slightly higher ratings for the “true” statement ($M = 45.58$, $SD = 36.12$) than for the “false” statement ($M = 42.69$, $SD = 36.07$), but as before, this difference wasn’t statistically significant, $t(129) = .48$, $p = .632$.

Again, the average absolute difference between responses to the “true” and the “false” statement was high in the LtoNL condition ($M = 57.31$, $SD = 32.71$) and the NLtoL condition ($M = 54.17$, $SD = 32.72$).

4.2.3 Discussion

The experiment replicated our results from Experiment 1. Across conditions, there was no preference for the “true” or the “false” response. The “false” response was preferred in cases where participants started out disliking Yumble, but there was no clear preference either way in the other condition. These results put pressure on the negation hypothesis: We find a direction effect even when no negations are involved.

4.3 Experiment 3

This experiment was designed to test the deflationary account of the even split, according to which people simply don’t understand the task they are asked to perform and consequently respond at random. To test this hypothesis, we reran experiment 1 with “Yumble is/isn’t tasty” replaced by “I find/don’t find Yumble tasty”. Since contextualist treatments of the latter sentences are more or less uncontroversial, we get the more or less uncontroversial theoretical prediction that the “true” response should be favored. Meanwhile, if participants don’t understand our task, we should still see random, middling responses. Incidentally, this setup gave us another way to test the previous negation hypothesis. This hypothesis still predicts a direction effect because we still have a negation in only one of the vignettes.

4.3.1 Method

252 participants were recruited through Prolific Academic (70% female, mean age 34). The study design was as described.

4.3.2 Results

Mean responses by condition are shown in Figure 3.

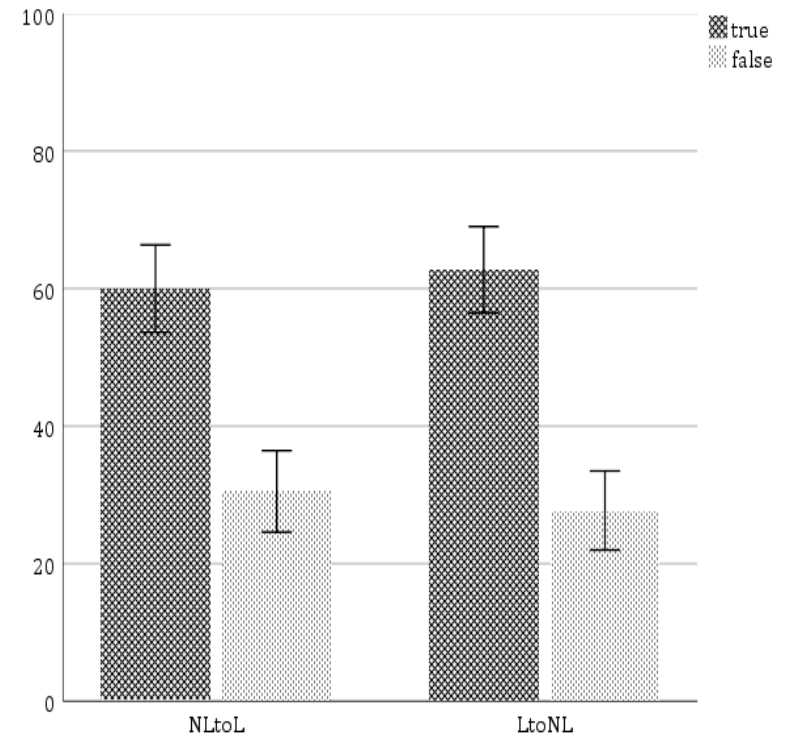


Figure 3. Mean responses by condition in Experiment 3. Error bars show 95% CI.

Again, the data were analyzed using a mixed-model repeated measures ANOVA, with condition (NLtoL vs. LtoNL) as a between-subject

variable and statement (“true” vs. “false”) as a within-subject variable. There was a significant main effect of statement, $F(1, 244) = 71.20$, $p < .001$, with participants preferring the “true” response over the “false” response. The effect size was large ($\eta_p^2 = .226$). There was no main effect of condition, $F(1, 244) < .001$, $p = .99$, and there was no interaction either, $F(1, 244) = .523$, $p = .47$.

4.3.3 Discussion

People had a clear preference for the “true” response across conditions, thereby tracking an uncontroversial theoretical prediction. This suggests that they understood our prompts and hence that we need a more specific explanation of the even split. In addition, the results put further pressure on the negation hypothesis. On this hypothesis, we would have expected a direction effect, which we didn’t find.

5. Intermediate Conclusion

This concludes the first part of our paper. We have explained how to derive competing predictions from contextualism and relativism and how to test them in an experimental setting. We have tested them and found two interesting effects: the even split and the direction effect. For each of these effects, we have ruled out deflationary accounts, according to which the results have no semantic/pragmatic significance. From now on, we will assume that the effects should be accommodated at the level of semantics/pragmatics. The subsequent part of the paper looks at how this could be done.¹³

13. A reviewer points out that one’s reactions upon trying Yumble once might not suffice to settle whether it tastes good to one, e.g. because the circumstances might have been weird. This could explain the even split even on a simple contextualist account. It might also help to explain the direction effect if it is easier to imagine circumstances where something appears not tasty to you while in fact being tasty to you than the other way around (we grant this latter assumption though it seems controversial). To put pressure on this proposal, we reran experiment 1 ($N = 259$), this time stating that the protagonist had tried Yumble “many times before under various normal circumstances”. Depending on the condition, she either “always liked the taste” or “never liked the taste”. This should settle the relevant facts pretty firmly. Thus, on the indicated simple contextualist account, we should now see a clear preference for

Part II: Explaining the data

In this part of the paper, we present an account of the two effects we found: the even split and the direction effect. After presenting the account we favor, we raise some challenges to alternative accounts.

6. The Even Split

To explain the even split, we want to suggest what we call *simple hybrid relativism*. The basic idea behind this view is that there is an ambiguity in taste claims that is unresolved in our vignettes. People are torn between two competing readings, which leads to average responses in a middling range. We begin by presenting simple hybrid relativism in more detail and further clarify how it explains the even split below.

Simple hybrid relativism crucially departs from simple relativism when it comes to R1, the claim that ‘F is/isn’t tasty’ invariably asserts that F is/isn’t tasty. According to simple hybrid relativism, sentences of this form are ambiguous (or polysemous) between a relativist and a contextualist reading. They can be used to assert either that F is/isn’t tasty (relativist reading) or that F is/isn’t tasty by the lights of the taste standard determined by the context of utterance (contextualist reading).¹⁴ The assumptions R2, R3, and R-SIMP remain as before. Simple hybrid relativists need a further assumption that specifies

“true” and no direction effect. But the direction effect remained unaffected ($F(1, 251) = 7.33$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .028$). And while we did see a small preference for “true” ($F(1, 251) = 7.30$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .028$) across conditions, this effect was entirely driven by the LtoNL condition ($M = 53.17$, $SD = 35.39$ vs. $M = 32.17$, $SD = 32.74$, $t(126) = 3.99$, $p < .001$), with no significant difference between “true” and “false” in the NLtoL condition ($M = 42.60$, $SD = 35.26$ vs. $M = 42.61$, $SD = 35.47$, $t(125) = -.003$, $p = .998$). This still seems puzzling (also contrast the results from Experiment 3).

14. The suggested ambiguity in ‘F is/isn’t tasty’ could arise in two ways. The expression ‘tasty’ could either be ambiguous or it could feature a slot for a pronoun that can be filled in in a relativist or a contextualist way (see e.g. Stephenson, 2007: 503 for the latter proposal). For our present purposes, either account works fine. Notice that Stephenson allows for contextualist readings of ‘tasty’, and so her view may count as a version of hybrid relativism in our sense. Her primary reason for positing a contextualist reading, however, seems to reside in considerations about exocentric contexts (for which e.g. MacFarlane, 2014: 155–156 offers an alternative, relativist account). We think

the truth-condition for the proposition asserted on the contextualist reading. To do so, they use C2 from above, adapting it to a semantic framework where circumstances of evaluation contain a taste standard in addition to a point in time. In sum, hybrid relativism comprises the following claims.

H1. The proposition asserted by 'F is/isn't tasty' in a given context κ is either the proposition that F is/isn't tasty (relativist reading) or the proposition that F is/isn't tasty by the lights of the taste standard determined by κ (contextualist reading).

H2a (= R2). The proposition that F is/isn't tasty is true relative to $\langle t, s \rangle$ iff, at t , F is/isn't tasty by the lights of s .

H2b (\approx C2). The proposition that F is/isn't tasty by the lights of s' is true relative to $\langle t, s \rangle$ iff, at t , F is/isn't tasty by the lights of s' .

H3 (= R3). One is permitted to assert that p in a context κ iff the proposition that p is true relative to the circumstance of evaluation determined by κ .

H-SIMP (= R-SIMP). The taste standard determined by a given context is simply the taste standard that the speaker of that context has at the time of the context.

Note that even though we'll stick with simple hybrid relativism for the purposes of this paper, we are not committed to simplicity. We think that H-SIMP makes correct predictions for the contexts in the specific conditions we consider (NLtoL and LtoNL). But there might be other contexts that force us to make the view more flexible. So-called "exocentric" contexts (Lasersohn, 2005), for instance, might be

contextualist readings play an important role even in autocentric contexts, and in particular, in the kinds of contexts described in our vignettes.

better accounted for if we replace H-SIMP by some principle to the effect that e.g. the taste standard of a context is the taste standard of some salient subject in the context. These issues are orthogonal to our present project, so we'll leave them aside.¹⁵

To see that the ambiguity suggested in H1 is not *ad hoc*, consider the following dialogues quoted from Schaffer (2011: 213–215; see also Stojanovic, 2007: 693–694 and Bylinina, 2017: 298):

[δ_1]

Ben: Hey Ann, I'd like to buy you a gift. What's your favorite treat?

Ann: Licorice is tasty

Ben: No, licorice is not tasty

Ann: Listen, I was just saying that *I* like it

[δ_2]

Ann: Licorice is tasty

Ben: No, licorice is not tasty

Ann: Yes it is

Like Schaffer, we think that both of Ann's responses in the above dialogues are fine. The suggested ambiguity explains this. In δ_1 , "Licorice is tasty" is read in terms of simple contextualism. Thus, Ann is (roughly) saying that licorice is tasty *to her* in her first utterance. It makes perfect sense then for her to point this out later on. In δ_2 , "Licorice is tasty" is read in terms of relativism. Thus, Ann and Ben are expressing contradicting propositions (that licorice is tasty vs. that licorice isn't tasty), and it makes sense for Ann to insist on that.¹⁶

15. See e.g. Lasersohn (2005); Stephenson (2007); and MacFarlane (2014: 155–156) for further discussion of the relevant phenomena in relativist-friendly terms.

16. See Kölbel (2014: 105) for details on how to define contradictoriness in a

Simple hybrid relativism can be used to explain the even split as follows. Take NLtoL (the story for LtoNL is analogous). According to simple hybrid relativism, the utterance of ‘Yumble isn’t tasty’ in the initial context can receive either a simple relativist or a simple contextualist reading. Suppose a participant chooses the relativist reading. Then we can use the derivation in §2 and §3 to arrive at the prediction that they will prefer to judge the initial utterance as false later on. Suppose they adopt the contextualist reading. Again, we can use the derivation in §2 and §3 to arrive at the prediction that they will later assess the initial utterance as true. Now, in the context of the initial utterance, nothing clearly disambiguates between the contextualist and the relativist reading (unlike in δ_1 and δ_2 , where a clear disambiguation is made in the course of the ongoing discussion). We would thus expect that some people choose one reading, some people the other, and that some people are torn between these readings. This gives rise to the even split.

What remains to be seen is how simple hybrid relativism can be used to explain the direction effect, that is, the result that there is a slightly stronger preference for “false” in NLtoL than in LtoNL. The basic idea will be that there is a slightly stronger preference for the relativist reading in this condition. The following sections outline how this strengthened preference for the relativist reading comes about.

7. The Direction Effect

Our account of the direction effect has two ingredients in addition to simple hybrid relativism. The first ingredient is a principle about how people tend to resolve ambiguities. The suggested principle says,

relativist framework. Once we accept this definition, hybrid relativism makes exactly the same predictions about familiar disagreement data as standard forms of relativism. The only difference is that these predictions are restricted to contexts like δ_2 , where the respective sentences receive a relativist reading. Dialogues like δ_1 show that this restriction is desirable. Analogous things can be said about retraction data. Of course, there is by now a wide-ranging debate on whether relativism makes the right predictions about disagreement and retraction data. We cannot enter this debate here, but see e.g. Dinges (2017) and Beddor and Egan (2018) for recent relativist-friendly discussion.

roughly, that negative interpretations tend to be favored. The second ingredient is a Stalnakerian framework of assertion. We use this framework to derive an asymmetry in how negative the contextualist and the relativist readings respectively are.

7.1 First ingredient: when in doubt, assume the worst

The first ingredient in our account of the direction effect concerns how hearers select a specific reading in cases of ambiguity or more generally, cases where different candidate interpretations of a given speech act are available. In particular, we will assume that a principle along the following lines plays some default interpretive role.

NEG. If it’s possible to interpret a speaker as making a more or a less negative assessment, then, other things being equal, the more negative one is what the speaker has in mind.¹⁷

To see the plausibility of NEG, suppose you are confronted with a claim that can be read in a more negative and a more positive way and that the context doesn’t clearly disambiguate between these readings. Here is a natural train of thought. If the speaker wanted to convey the positive message, she presumably wouldn’t have taken the risk of being interpreted in the more negative way. After all, negative messages can have bad consequences. A negative assessment can make the addressee mad at you, hurt their feelings, or lead them to see you as a negative person. The speaker apparently took that risk, so she presumably didn’t want to convey the positive message but the negative one instead. Why didn’t she say it straight? Maybe she was just being polite, leaving open a more positive, face-saving interpretation.

Suppose, for instance, that I say, “It wasn’t the best talk I ever heard”. I could mean that the talk in question wasn’t the best but that it was

17. To a first approximation, an assessment can be understood here as a speech act that conveys (semantically or pragmatically or in some other way) that a target object has certain features. It is more or less negative depending on how (un-)desirable these features are in an object of the relevant type. See relatedly Ruytenbeek et al. (2017: 4–6) on “evaluative polarity”.

still quite good. I'm more likely to be understood though as conveying the more negative message that the talk was bad. It's natural to think that the kind of reasoning just described plays some role at least in the selection of this reading. The speaker presumably wouldn't have taken the risk of being understood in such a negative way unless she really wanted to communicate the negative message. And she's presumably just being polite in leaving open a more positive, face-saving interpretation. Note the contrast here to "It wasn't the worst talk I ever heard", which is much less likely to receive a strengthened, positive reading to the effect that the talk was good.¹⁸

To be sure, the reasoning described in support of NEG is highly defensible and maybe some people don't engage in such types of reasoning at all. NEG should be construed as similarly weak. Note, though, that we will use NEG as an ingredient in an account of the direction effect. This effect is robust but small, so a slight tendency is just what we need.

7.2 *Second ingredient: a Stalnakerian account of assertion*

Here is the second ingredient in our account of the direction effect. We want to embed hybrid relativism in a Stalnakerian account of assertion, according which an assertion is a proposal to add the asserted proposition to the common ground (Stalnaker, 1978).¹⁹ The common ground

18. Horn (1989: 333–334) observes a similar asymmetry in a broad range of cases featuring negated positive vs. negated negative adjectives. Ruytenbeek et al. (2017) confirm this asymmetry experimentally. Horn also suggests that the asymmetry results from politeness considerations of the kind above. He notes, for instance, that "[i]f I tell you that I don't approve of your behavior, you may infer that (presumably to spare your feelings) I am concealing my active disapproval" (334). See Leech (1983: 135–136) and Brown and Levinson (1987) for more on the politeness norms that might be in play here. See Krifka (2007) for a competing account of the asymmetry (and Ruytenbeek et al., 2017: 6–8 for a helpful reconstruction of Krifka's account). We can't settle the dispute between Horn and Krifka here, but we hope that the above general considerations in favor of NEG are plausible enough independently of whether they fully explain the indicated asymmetry.

19. The Stalnakerian account of assertion is consistent with our previous assumption of norms of assertion. In fact, it might even support these norms (see e.g. MacFarlane, 2011: 89). Notice that while we're assuming that certain

is typically taken to comprise the mutually accepted propositions. We will assume that people have no reason to accept anything other than what they believe in our cases NLtoL and LtoNL. Thus, for our purposes, the common ground will comprise the mutually believed propositions. An assertion will thus be understood as a proposal to come to mutually believe what's been asserted.²⁰

This view has the important consequence that we can accommodate a relativistic assertion only if our taste standards agree with respect to the food in question. Suppose, for instance, that you assert that fish sticks are tasty. On the given view, this assertion is a proposal to update the common ground with the proposition that fish sticks are tasty. To accommodate the assertion, we have to mutually believe this proposition. We can properly do this, though, only if the asserted proposition is true relative to the taste standard of all the participants in the conversation. For otherwise, people end up believing things that aren't true from their perspective (we are assuming a reflexive belief norm analogous to the assertion norm H₃ above; see e.g. Kölbel, 2003: 70).

7.3 *Accounting for the direction effect*

With these ingredients at hand, we can explain the direction effect. Consider NLtoL. Given simple hybrid relativism, 'Yumble isn't tasty' as uttered in the initial conversation can be read in a relativist and a contextualist way. On either interpretation, the resulting assertion reflects negatively on Yumble. Given the Stalnakerian account of assertion, though, the relativist reading is more negative. On the contextualist

norms govern assertions, we aren't committed to the idea that these norms are constitutive of assertion (see Williamson, 1996).

20. See e.g. Egan (2007: 15–21; 2014: 91–92); and Kölbel (2013) for more technical accounts of the common ground and how to adjust them to make room for relativistic assertions. See e.g. Kölbel (2013) for the idea that we sometimes propose to update the common ground not with the *asserted* proposition but with some suitable surrogate. We are happy to grant this general point. It suffices for us if plain "tasty" sentences add what they assert (as Kölbel, 2013: 118 grants).

reading, the speaker is merely reporting her own disliking. On the relativist reading, she proposes to update the common ground in a way that is acceptable only if everybody in the conversation (i.e. Paul and the speaker) dislikes Yumble. Consequently, NEG creates pressure to choose the relativist reading.²¹

Consider now the LtoNL condition. Given simple hybrid relativism, ‘Yumble is tasty’ as uttered initially can again be read in a relativist or a contextualist way. On either interpretation, the assessment of Yumble is positive. Given the Stalnakerian account, the assessment of Yumble is less positive on the contextualist reading. Again, this is so because, on the contextualist reading, the speaker merely pronounces on her own positive opinion; whereas on the relativist reading, she makes a proposal to update the common ground that can be accepted only if everybody (the speaker and Paul) likes Yumble. By NEG, there is pressure to choose the contextualist reading.

NEG works in different directions in NLtoL and LtoNL. In particular, it pressures us towards the relativist reading in the former condition and towards the contextualist reading in the latter. We would thus expect a stronger preference for the relativist over the contextualist reading in NLtoL. Via the derivations described in §2 and §3, this gives rise to a stronger preference for the “false” over the “true” response i.e. the direction effect.

This concludes the presentation of our account of the data. We think that the account is independently motivated and plausible. We still grant that further work will need to be done. The motivation for NEG, for instance, remains at an intuitive level and the ambiguity posited by hybrid relativism may give rise to independent predictions that will have to be explored. Instead of addressing these questions, though, we want to discuss some alternative accounts of our data. The task will be to assess whether the switch to hybrid relativism is motivated or

21. Note here that our participants have to decide which reading they most plausibly intended to convey in the story described. It’s natural to think that they use the same types of methods to figure this out as they would otherwise use to interpret other speakers.

whether more familiar forms of relativism and contextualism already make sense of our findings.

8. Conservative Accounts

8.1 Contextualism

Let’s begin with contextualism. It should be clear that simple contextualists have a hard time making sense of our data. As we saw in §2 and §3, people should show a preference for assessing the initial utterances in NLtoL and LtoNL as true across conditions if simple contextualism holds. In fact, however, we found the even split.

There are three ways for contextualists to revise their view in light of this outcome. The first is to adopt a flexible version of contextualism, according to which the taste standard determined by a context isn’t univocally tied to the current taste standard of the speaker of the context (e.g. Stojanovic, 2007; Schaffer, 2011; Dowell, 2011). Schaffer (2011: 191–192), for instance, suggests that stereotypical contexts either determine this individual taste standard or else the taste standard of “the typical person”. Thus, a sentence like ‘Yumble is tasty’ has an *individualistic* reading, where it roughly expresses that the speaker likes Yumble, and a *generic* reading, where it roughly expresses that people generally like Yumble. One might think that the even split results because the context doesn’t clearly determine either one of these interpretations.

But it does. The speaker’s own personal experience with Yumble provides at best a weak justification for the propositions that people in general like or dislike Yumble. This justification seems too weak to assert these generic propositions. To see this, just consider how overly strong such assertions would sound in the contexts we describe (see Lasersohn, 2005: 652 and MacFarlane, 2014: 12 for related considerations). By a principle of charity, participants should favor the perfectly justified individualistic interpretation. This, in turn, should lead to a preference for the “true” response, not the even split. Maybe a case

could be made that the generic interpretation remains in play somehow, but the burden of proof seems to be on our opponents.

Note here that similar worries don't arise in the case of simple hybrid relativism, where both assumed readings yield justified assertions. The initial assertions in LtoNL and NLtoL are justified on the simple contextualist reading, for the speaker knows that she likes/dislikes Yumble at the initial point in time. They are justified on the simple relativist reading too because the speaker knows that the correctness conditions described in H₃ are satisfied. Again, this just requires that they know they like/dislike Yumble at the initial point in time.

A second strategy on behalf of contextualism is to stick with simple contextualism and add a pragmatic overlay instead. Contextualists could say, for instance, that 'tasty' triggers a "presupposition of commonality", i.e. a presupposition to the effect that a relevant group of people shares the speaker's taste preferences (López de Sa, 2008; 2015). Alternatively, they could appeal to "metalinguistic negotiation" (Sundell, 2011; Plunkett and Sundell, 2013) and suggest that "tasty" claims somehow convey that 'tasty' ought to be used in a particular way (see Zakkou, 2019 for a related account). This might help to make sense of the even split as follows. Some people assess the proposition expressed, which is true; some people assess the proposition pragmatically conveyed, which is false. On average, we end up in the middle.

Such pragmatic accounts face challenges, too. First, it needs to be argued that merely pragmatically conveyed contents have that strong an effect on whether we assess "what is said" as true or false. Larson et al. (2009a) and Larson et al. (2009b), for instance, provide evidence that many pragmatically conveyed contents only mildly affect truth-value assessments of the relevant kind. Second, even if we grant the suggested account of the even split, it is unclear how pragmatic contextualism could be developed further to make sense of the direction effect. The basic idea would presumably have to be that there are asymmetries in how much people focus on the pragmatic rather than the semantic content in NLtoL vs. LtoNL. We don't see how these asymmetries should come about.

A third and more radical strategy would be to go pluralist or "cloudy" (e.g. Cappelen and Lepore, 2005; von Fintel and Gillies, 2011). A contextualist might hold that the respective initial assertion in our vignettes puts into play a cloud of propositions about various different groups of tasters, including groups containing just the speaker, the speaker and their audience, and maybe consumers of Yumble in general. This cloudiness, in turn, might be taken to result in the even split.

But as far as we can see, cloudy contextualism properly understood doesn't predict the even split, but rather a preference for the "true" response. The later assessments of "what is said" as true or false presumably inherit the cloudiness of the respective initial utterance, thereby putting into play the very same groups of tasters as before. Following von Fintel and Gillies (2011: 120), proper cloudy assertion requires that the speaker is "in a position to flat out assert one of the [propositions in the cloud]". Now, take an assertion of 'What I said was true' in e.g. NLtoL. As indicated, one proposition in the cloud here should be that it's true that the speaker disliked Yumble. This proposition is certainly assertable, and so the assertion should be fine by the indicated norm of assertion. Contrast 'What I said was false'. Here, it is much less clear that the respective cloud contains an assertable proposition. The speaker isn't in a position to assert that it's false that she disliked Yumble. To the contrary, she disliked Yumble and she knows that. She isn't in a position either to assert that it's false that she and Paul disliked Yumble. For all she knows, Paul disliked Yumble, too. Finally, she isn't in a position to assert that it's false that people in general disliked Yumble. Again, maybe people generally did dislike Yumble, just as the speaker herself did initially. In summary, we should expect a preference for the "true" response, not the even split.

8.2 Relativism

Consider relativism. Again, it is clear that simple relativism falters when it comes to the even split. On this view, there should have been a preference for the "false" response across conditions (§2 and §3).

To our knowledge, pragmatically amended or cloudy versions of relativism haven't been suggested in the literature. The reason presumably is that these amendments on behalf of contextualism are usually introduced to mimic predictions relativists get for free (e.g. predictions about disagreement). This leaves relativists with the option of adopting a more flexible view on how contexts determine a taste standard. For instance, they could say that the taste standard in a given context need not belong to the speaker but may belong to a salient subject in the conversation.

This could explain the even split as follows. In the initial conversation where our speakers say 'Yumble is/isn't tasty', no interesting subject is salient beyond the speaker and their interlocutor (see, relatedly, the worry with flexible contextualism above). However, when participants later assess this claim for truth and falsity, there are two taste standards in play: their present taste standard and the taste standard they had when they initially made the utterance. If they choose to assess their previous taste claim in the light of their present taste standard, they should judge it as false (§2 and §3). If they choose to assess it in the light of their previous taste standard, they can properly say that what was said was true.²²

We think this is a very nice account of the even split. The remaining challenge, though, is to make sense of the direction effect. The basic idea would presumably have to be that, in NLtoL, people are more inclined to assess their previous taste claim in the light of their present taste standard than in LtoNL. The problem is that there is no apparent explanation for this assumed inclination (see, relatedly, the worry with pragmatically amended versions of contextualism above). Beddor and Egan (2018), for instance, suggest that the "question under

discussion" fixes which taste standard is relevant in a given context. But there seem to be no relevant differences between NLtoL and LtoNL when it comes to the question under discussion at the point where participants are asked to assess their previous taste claims.

It might be possible to meet the indicated challenges for contextualism and relativism. But we hope to have made a *prima facie* case that these positions won't do. This further motivates hybrid relativism. Of course, even if the indicated versions of contextualism and relativism fail, hybrid relativism isn't the only remaining option. For instance, we haven't discussed expressivism (Eriksson, 2016), realism (Schafer, 2011) or genericity accounts (Moltmann, 2010; Pearson, 2013). It might be possible to develop an alternative account of our data based on these views. We see no obvious way to go and leave a thorough investigation for another occasion.

9. Conclusion

We have reported a novel set of data regarding the assessment of taste claims after a change in taste standards. The results suggest, first, that people have no clear preference on whether such claims should be assessed as true or false. Second, whether people assess them as true or false depends on the direction in which they shift their taste standard. We think that both of these results are unexpected and hope they will inform future semantic theorizing. For a start, we have suggested one strategy to accommodate the data, namely, an account that appeals to hybrid relativism. On this view, people have no clear preference regarding the truth-value of previous taste claims, because these claims are ambiguous between a relativist and a contextualist reading. The direction effect, in turn, results from a preference for negative interpretations.

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22. A closely related proposal would be that 'was true' doesn't always accord with T₁ and T₂ but sometimes expresses a property more along the lines of 'was correct' as used in the assertion norm H₃. On the latter reading, participants should say that the initial utterance "was true(=correct)"; on the former, they should say that the utterance "was true" for the reasons outlined in §2 and §3. See Kölbel (2015a: 39–40) and Khoo and Phillips (2019: 318–320) for related ideas.

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