

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
Faculdade de Letras



THE CASE FOR A NON-UNIFORM ACCOUNT OF
EVALUATIVE DISAGREEMENTS AND
RETRACTIONS

DIOGO FERREIRA CODINHA DOS SANTOS

Orientadores: Professora Doutora Maria Adriana Sequeira da Silva Graça
Professora Doutora Maria Teresa Matos Ferreira Marques

Tese especialmente elaborada para a obtenção do grau de Doutor em Filosofia

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Resumo

O discurso avaliativo está largamente presente em interacções humanas. É uma parte vital das nossas interacções. O nosso discurso contém uma imensidão de asserções avaliativas. Avaliamos pessoas, acções, comida, entretenimento, arte... As teorias semânticas sobre termos avaliativos propõem-se, entre demais fins, a fornecer uma imagem clara acerca de sob que condições asserções avaliativas são (in)correctas. Tais teorias são motivadas pelo comportamento linguístico de termos avaliativos e fenómenos relacionados com o uso dos mesmos. Focar-me-ei em dois desses fenómenos: desacordo e retractação. A respeito do desacordo, alguns filósofos levam a sério a intuição de que desacordos avaliativos podem ser *irrepreensíveis*—i.e. desacordos nos quais nenhum dos envolvidos comete uma falha por manter a sua posição apesar do desacordo—e argumentam que uma teoria semântica apropriada deve levar em conta essa possibilidade. A respeito de retractação, alguns filósofos consideram que retractações de asserções avaliativas são obrigatórias quando aferidas como não sendo verdadeiras, mesmo que tal asserção, tal como foi usado e inicialmente aferida, seja correcta e não tenha violado qualquer norma. Aqui o meu fito é examinar se há razões para uma explicação semântica não-uniforme a respeito destes dois fenómenos, desacordo e retractação avaliativos. Argumento que há ,mostrando que ambos não se comportam uniformemente independentemente da área de discurso avaliativo de que estejamos a falar. Comparo discurso sobre questões de gosto pessoal e discurso moral para ilustrar esse comportamento não-uniforme. Este resultado debilita a suposição que permeia o debate sobre avaliativos, de que, independentemente da área de discurso avaliativo, é expectável que uma teoria semântica explique adequadamente os fenómenos em causa.

Palavras-chave

Contextualismo, desacordo irrepreensível, termos avaliativos relativismo, retractação.

Abstract

Value talk is pervasive in human interactions. Our discourse is filled with evaluative claims. We evaluate persons, actions, food, entertainment, art... Semantic theories about evaluative terms aim to give us, among other things, a clear picture on under which conditions evaluative claims are (in)accurate. Those theories are motivated by the linguistic behaviour of those terms and related phenomena. I focus on two of those phenomena: disagreement and retraction. Regarding disagreement, some theorists take the intuition that evaluative disagreement can be *faultless*—i.e. where neither party involved in the disagreement is *at fault*—seriously, and argue that a proper semantic view on evaluative terms needs to account for such a possibility. Regarding retraction, some theorists consider that agents are obliged to *take back* an evaluative assertion when the asserted content is assessed as not true, even when their assertion, as was used and initially assessed, was accurate and did not violate any norm. Here my aim is to assess whether there is a case to be made for a non-uniform semantic account regarding these two phenomena. I argue that there is, by showing that both, evaluative disagreements and retractions, do not behave uniformly across different areas of evaluative discourse. I compare discourse on matters of personal taste and moral discourse to illustrate this. These findings undermine the assumption—ubiquitous in the debate—that, regardless the area of evaluative discourse, a single semantic view will account for the disagreement and retraction phenomena.

Keywords

Contextualism, faultless disagreement, evaluatives, relativism, retraction.

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1 Introduction

Value talk or evaluative talk is discourse deployed to evaluate objects as positive or negative.¹ The more immediate aim of evaluative discourse is not to describe objects, but assess them as pleasurable, displeasurable. Contrary to descriptive talk, evaluative talk is typically portrayed as depending, in some way, on our own idiosyncrasies, tastes and preferences. Thus, contrary to descriptive talk, evaluative talk has, at the very least, a semblance of not being completely objective or solely dependent on an object's properties.²

Evaluative discourse is supposedly connected with normative talk, with what one *ought* to do. For instance, if drinking the glass of red wine the agent has in front of her is viewed as a pleasurable (or a positive) experience to her and drinking the wine is an accessible action to her, then, all other things being equal, she has a reason to pursue that action. The example illustrates a crucial aspect of evaluative discourse, its motivational role. When agents engage in evaluative talk, assessing objects as (dis)pleasurable, carries with it the conveyance of conative attitudes. It is the conative aspect of evaluative discourse which is paramount to how pervasive value talk is, given the need for agents to coordinate their attitudes in a social setting. Hence many of our social interactions concerning evaluative matters. We deploy value-words constantly when discussing subjects such as food, art, politics, humour, morality... The vast majority of discussions, debate, disagreements involve, at some point, value talk. Value talk plays crucial social roles. It functions to signal value and attitudinal convergence or value and attitudinal divergence among agents, thus contributing to social cohesion and social tension.

The degree to which value talk contributes to social cohesion and social tension varies depending on the sort of value talk agents are engaging in. For instance, talk about morality appears to tend to contribute more strongly to social cohesion or tension than talk about food—i.e. agents typically place a more decisive social weight to moral or political talk than art, food or humour talk. Putting it differently, e.g. moral talk is more easily divisive than other value issues. Thus, depending on what sort of value talk (on morality, politics, art, food...) one is engaging with, divergence and convergence of opinions do not carry the same social weight.

There can be distinct issues at hand when it comes to value. Evaluative discourse can be divided into different areas: aesthetic discourse, moral discourse, personal taste discourse, among other. As the reader will notice, further on, when presenting the main arguments, I will be focusing mainly on moral and personal taste discourse, but it is worth surveying the three areas which the literature on evaluative

¹ Or neutral, even. For instance, the adjective 'interesting' is used as a value-word and, in many contexts, it has a neutral connotation. Arguably, even with a neutral connotation, 'interesting' may be used evaluatively.

² I remain agnostic, since it goes beyond the purposes of this thesis, whether value judgments are representational states, motivational states or a hybrid of the two. This is my attempt of distinguishing evaluative discourse from merely descriptive discourse in neutral terms.

terms typically focuses on, so that one gets a better grip on what each area consists in and how to distinguish them.

Aesthetics, discourse-wise, is the discourse concerning aesthetic value—i.e. the value arising from objects having particular perceptual qualities. Typically, partially due to their perceptual qualities these objects, under appropriate conditions, trigger aesthetic experiences. The distinction between aesthetic discourse and personal taste discourse may not be straightforward, given that, arguably, discourse concerning personal taste value also arises from objects having particular perceptual qualities. However, the distinction here is that those qualities, when it comes to personal taste, heavily rely on individual idiosyncrasies and, thus seem to have a greater degree of subjectivity than aesthetic experiences and value *per se*.

Isolating moral discourse is more straightforward. Moral discourse has to do with talk which focuses on actions, behaviours, attitudes and personal characters—it concerns what the right action is, which virtues are conducive to the right actions. Moral talk is typically considered the most objective and universal area of evaluative discourse.

Paradigmatic aesthetic adjectives include ‘beautiful’, ‘elegant’, ‘sublime’, ‘harmonious’, ‘ugly’, ‘pleasurable’, ‘displeasurable’ just to name a few. The point of those adjectives is typically to convey that the objects have perceptual qualities which are responsible for triggering aesthetic experiences. Paradigmatic cases of personal taste adjectives include among others: ‘fun’, ‘boring’, ‘tasty’, ‘delicious’, ‘enjoyable’, ‘loud’. On the other hand, paradigmatic cases of moral adjectives include: ‘permissible’, ‘obligatory’, ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘brave’, ‘lewd’, ‘courageous’, ‘wrong’.

Evaluative talk displays curious linguistic and pragmatic features that have given scholars much to consider. These features can be seen in such phenomena as how evaluative adjectives may appear in sentence construction. For instance, sentences containing a certain set of evaluative adjectives are felicitous with *for/to X* constructions. Some evaluative disagreement may plausibly be faultless—i.e. a disagreement where neither of those involved in it are *wrong* (or at *fault* for holding the view they hold and not revising it in light of the disagreement). Another example is the retraction of evaluative claims, some philosophers hold that one ought to retract an evaluative assertion even if that assertion was correct (when originally performed). These phenomena, and others also related with evaluative discourse, have motivated specific views that attempt to account for how agents interact with each other with the deployment of evaluative language by proposing novel semantic frameworks.

Given that faultless disagreements and retraction have been at the forefront of the debate on evaluative terms, I will mainly focus on those, evaluative retractions and evaluative faultless disagreements. By focusing on them I want to explore whether they are uniform, regardless of the area of evaluative discourse one is concerned with and, in case these phenomena are not uniform, what lessons should theorists take regarding the sort of account of evaluative discourse one should expect, if a monist or a moderate pluralist account, sensitive to the salient area of discourse.

With these distinctions and clarifications in mind, this thesis has multiple aims: The first aim is to make a case in favour of a genuine class of evaluatives, distinguishing it from other non-evaluative gradable adjectives. I will be presenting linguistic evidence in favour of the claim and then argue that a strategy like the one Sundell applies to aesthetic terms is not successful in undermining the case for evaluatives being in a semantic and linguistic class of their own. I marshal two main reasons for this: (i) borrowing ideas from Marques 2017, I argue that metalinguistic negotiations fail to capture evaluative disagreements for reasons that are not merely practical and (ii) I show that metalinguistic usage of evaluative terms fails to account for a distinction between disagreements employing thick terms and employing thin terms. While the former have a looser connection to underlying non-merely-practical reasons, the latter have a stronger connection to underlying non-merely-practical reasons.

The second aim is to show that evaluative disagreements are not a uniform phenomenon across different areas of evaluative discourse and that scholars should look in places other than evaluative disagreement (specifically, faultless disagreement) to properly motivate a specific view on evaluative terms. For a compelling case that evaluative disagreement is a non-uniform phenomenon; i.e. evaluative disagreements display different behaviours, according to whether the disagreement is on moral matters or matter of personal taste, I appeal to Stojanovic 2019. Isidora Stojanovic shows that there are significant differences in terms of linguistic behaviour when one compares moral predicates and predicates of personal taste which transpose to moral and personal taste disagreements.

Then, I argue that the phenomenon of faultless disagreement to which some philosophers have appealed to motivate their views on evaluative terms is unwarranted, given that there is nothing particular in how evaluatives occur in faultless disagreements—i.e. other multidimensional non-evaluative gradable adjectives display the same patterns.

The third aim is to show that retraction of evaluative assertions is not a uniform phenomenon either. I do this by arguing that moral retractions and retractions targeting personal taste assertions have relevantly distinct features. The two last and main aims build up on the fact that evaluative disagreements and retraction display different features depending on the area of discourse they belong to. This being so, it follows that expecting a uniform account of evaluative terms is unwarranted, thus opening the way for the real possibility of a pluralist account on evaluative discourse. Moreover, the non-uniformity of these two phenomena should necessarily be portrayed as part of the desiderata, even if one's project is a monist one.

In order to fulfil the multiple aims the road map for the dissertation is the following: In chapter 2 I begin by introducing and explaining evaluatives linguistically, by shedding light on their linguistic features and explaining why they are gradable adjectives—i.e. they are predicates which apply to object along a scale and their application is relative to a comparison class which triggers a standard according to which the threshold for something to count as it is determined.

I assess the case in favour of evaluative terms being part of their own linguistic and semantic class, distinct from other gradable terms—i.e. whether they are evaluative or their evaluative content is

purely a result of pragmatic effects (as occurs with other words which are sometimes used as value-words, such as ‘tall’, ‘healthy’, ‘fat’, ‘expensive’, ‘sharp’, which depending on contextual features may be used to convey evaluative information). By “evaluative term” I shall mean words such as those in this (non-exhaustive) list: ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘beautiful’, ‘tasty’, ‘funny’, ‘courageous’. By “being evaluative” I will understand the condition of appraising the value of something.

Denying that evaluative adjectives are (relevantly) semantically distinct from other gradables is motivated by parsimony. Since words are sometimes used to convey evaluative content as a result of pragmatic effects, one needs a positive reason to include a further linguistic and semantic class. In response to this concern, I offer a linguistic characterisation and point out that, although far from decisive, there are empirical data supporting the relativisation of evaluatives to a standard determined by an experiencer or appraiser being encoded in their semantics. Thus, these evidence that these terms are evaluative proper and, hence, should be counted as belonging to a class of their own, distinct from other gradables. Notwithstanding, and since the data are not decisive, in chapter 3 I explore whether one can find motivation to consider evaluative terms as belonging to semantic class of their own by looking at disagreements. To assess if there is such motivation, I spell out a recent proposal from Sundell 2016 and apply it to other areas of evaluative discourse. The proposal is that one need not assume that evaluative terms are semantically evaluative to account for the *persistence* of some evaluative disagreements. I argue that the strategy is ineffective, since thin terms are strongly connected to the evaluative content they convey and this connection cannot be explained if one denies that there are evaluative terms (proper).

Notice this assumes that there is a distinction between semantics and pragmatics. I do not wish to provide here a view on the purported distinction and will assume a distinction consistent with the distinction assumed in the discussion. Although there is open discussion on where the boundary between semantics and pragmatics lies (and whether there is such a boundary),³ it suffices to say that the assumption in the discussion I focus on is that semantics deals with lexically encoded in the meaning of words and expressions (i.e. their conventional meaning), while pragmatics deals with those elements that are not lexically encoded in the meaning of linguistic expressions. So, when Sundell (2016) makes a case for scepticism about aesthetic adjectives being semantically evaluative, his view is that one should be sceptic about the evaluative content conveyed by the use of aesthetic adjectives being part of their lexically encoded or conventional meaning.

In chapter 4 I spell out the different available semantic views on evaluative terms. I explain their different mechanisms and features and which testable predictions they make about how agents use actual evaluative language. I focus mainly on prediction regarding disagreements and retraction, thus preparing the grounds for the next two chapters.

Chapter 5 is on disagreement. After explicating the varieties of disagreement, I show how one may make a compelling case in favour of the possibility of faultless disagreement from the pervasive

³ See e.g. Bach 1994, Cappelen & Lepore 2005, Carston 1988, 2008, Recanati 2004 and Stanley 2000.

persistence of evaluative disagreements. Considering the intuition that faultless evaluative disagreements are possible I investigate whether the phenomenon is uniform when one compares moral discourse and personal taste discourse. I conclude that, considering the linguistic evidence, the phenomenon is not uniform. I also investigate whether the phenomenon has any specificity to evaluative discourse. Usually, scholars point to evaluative faultless disagreements being triggered even when evaluative adjectives occur in the comparison form. I show that this is not a specific feature of evaluative faultless disagreements and conclude that faultless disagreements should not be perceived as a motivation for semantic views developed to specifically account for evaluative discourse.

Chapter 6 is on retraction. I characterise retraction as the exercitive of taking back another speech act, or the illocutionary commitments undertaken with the performance of the targeted speech act. I then expand on how one can make a case for a retraction norm governing the withdrawal of assertions and, thus, partly constituting the act of asserting. I also explain how that norm motivates truth relativism. I then confront the norm with empirical data on retraction of assertions on personal taste and conclude that, as a result, a flexible version relativism and contextualism are in a better position to account for the data. I then argue that further empirical data suggest that retraction is not a uniform phenomenon when one compares retractions of moral assertions and personal taste assertions.

An important contribution relies on experimental data about how agents interact by deploying evaluative language. There are, of course, limitations to the experimental data and disputable assumptions by relying on such information; namely, the assumption intuitions of participants in the empirical studies are relevant for philosophical inquiry. Although the debate on evaluatives makes empirical predictions about actual languages and their users, it may, nonetheless be denied that relying on ordinary users' intuitions is the proper way to test those predictions.⁴ Ordinary speakers have different biases that may negatively affect their interpretation of a given experimental case. I am sympathetic to the concern, however I am sure philosophers display similar biases when relying on their own intuitions about language-usage and I am unsure if there is a better method to test the empirical predictions arising from the different theories which are considered criteria when comparing them in terms of their theoretical plausibility. Moreover, even if I were very sceptical about ordinary intuitions, scholars involved in the debate on evaluative discourse heavily rely on them and, without a decisive defeating reason, I believe this licenses my reliance on intuitions as well.

In the concluding remarks I summarise the dissertation, reinforce its main claims and conclusions. I show how the main claims and conclusions support two important lessons: (a) the findings support the view that a pluralist approach is a plausible approach to evaluative discourse and (b) the lack of uniformity is to be interpreted as part of the desiderata any account of evaluatives should deliver and thus properly rendering it should be considered a criterion according to which one

⁴ See e.g. Williamson 2017 on this.

should evaluate said accounts. I end by pointing out possible avenues for future research and briefly outline the dissertation's main contributions to the debate on evaluative discourse.

2 Evaluatives and their linguistic features

Often speakers use adjectives to describe the world around them. At least as often, they use adjectives to evaluate the world around them. In this part my aim is twofold: (i) to spell out the linguistic features of evaluative adjectives, and (ii) given those features, to determine whether there are good reasons to consider evaluative adjectives as being evaluative proper.

In the following chapter will be borrowing conclusions from work by other scholars on the linguistic features of gradative adjectives and evaluative adjectives. I will treat evaluative adjectives as gradables mainly due to the fact that they appear in comparison constructions. Thus, for the most part I will be explaining most of the evaluatives' linguistic behaviour by appealing to their gradability and to the distinctive ways gradables linguistically behave.

Since many gradables are not evaluatives and most of the behaviour of evaluatives can be explained away because they are gradables, one option on the table is to dismiss the idea that there are evaluative terms proper. On such view, it just so happens that speakers use these terms to evaluate and this is determined by contextual features—i.e. there is nothing semantically special about these terms. I will consider a recent attempt by Sundell (2016) to show that there are no good reasons to consider evaluative adjectives proper and explain how such an attempt may explain away recent empirical findings.

2.1 Evaluatives and descriptives

Many descriptive terms can be used to classify or evaluate something or someone. Hence, claiming that evaluative terms are those that are used to evaluate and not just describe is not enough to capture a distinction between evaluative and descriptive adjectives. For instance, an adjective like 'tall' is purely descriptive, for it conveys information about someone's height. Notwithstanding, given the appropriate context it can be used to convey an evaluation about someone. Consider an example with the descriptive adjective 'socialist':

Larry Kudlow, a notorious Republican and member of the former Trump administration, was invited to speak at the Conservative Political Action Conference 2020 (CPAC 2020). Consider him stating the following during his speech: "The virus is not going to sink the American economy. What is [going to], or could, sink the American economy is our [socialist] friends on the other side of the aisle."⁵

Kudlow is using 'socialist', which is a descriptive term—it describes a person who endorses Socialism or a policy which is based on the principles of Socialism—, to not just describe those “on the other

⁵ I have slightly adapted Kudlow's remark to better fit the example, but I trust that I have preserved the spirit of what he was aiming at.

side of the aisle”, but also to express and to induce in the audience disdain targeted against Democrats. Whence, the term, although descriptive, is being used to convey evaluative content. Obviously, this does not entail that ‘socialist’ is an evaluative adjective—it is not—for its primary function is not to evaluate but describe a particular political view. I believe that a better characterisation for evaluative adjectives is that their primary function involves the expression of conative attitudes or to describe something as (dis)pleasing. As a rough approximation of what I want to say: a term’s primary function somehow arises from the term’s semantic features. Specifically for the case of evaluative terms, it is widely accepted that their relativisation to an experiencer or appraiser and their evaluative content—these two are connected—arise from their semantic features. Evaluatives trigger a comparison class which determines the relevant standard of relativisation—an experiencer or appraiser—and it is relative to the triggered standard of comparison that the evaluative content is expressed.

In the following sections I will be detailing how this comes to fruition—by appealing to recent work on gradables.

2.2 Evaluatives as gradable adjectives

When someone asserts the sentence ‘Boris is tall.’, one is describing Boris. The statement is either true or false depending on Boris’ height and depending on which class we are comparing his height to; if we are comparing it to the height of basketball players, if we are comparing it to the height of children, if we are comparing it to the height of jockeys, and so on. A height threshold will be determined relative to the relevant comparison class. If Boris’ height is above or equal to the threshold for tallness, he counts as tall, if not, he does not.

Consider that the relevant comparison class is *twelve year old individuals* and that Boris’s height is 175 centimetres. Given these, Boris certainly meets the threshold for tallness. But now, consider that the relevant comparison class is *professional basketball players*. Given the latter comparison class, his height falls under the threshold, which means that it is false to say that Boris is tall. There are data indicating that the comparison class for ‘tall’ is contextually determined. For instance, the adjective ‘tall’ is used in FOR Δ constructions felicitously: ‘Boris is tall for a basketball player’. But for other gradables, such as ‘flat’, the comparison class is already semantically encoded. The adjective ‘flat’ is not used with FOR Δ constructions felicitously;⁶ e.g. # ‘Sweden is flat for a country’.⁷

This is perhaps the most important feature shared by gradable adjectives—that they are relative to a comparison class. Notwithstanding, they are defined as gradables because they felicitously appear in comparative constructions, such as the following:

⁶ I signal infelicitous constructions or infelicitous utterances of the sentence by using ‘#’ before the sentence and ‘?’ to signal when it is doubtful whether the infelicity is doubtful.

⁷ This consists in the distinction between relative and absolute gradable adjectives. The comparison class for relative gradable adjectives is contextually determined, while the comparison class for absolute gradable adjectives is semantically encoded. See Kennedy & McNally 2005.

(C1) ‘Boris is taller than Stephanie.’

Evaluatives behave in the same way. They appear in comparative constructions and are relative to a comparison class. With regard to appearing in comparative constructions, consider the following cases:

(C2) ‘Lionel Messi’s play is more beautiful than Ronaldo’s.’

(C3) ‘George Carlin is funnier than C. K. Lewis.’

(C4) ‘This dish is as tasty as the dish we had last night.’

(C5)# ‘It is as freezing outside as it is freezing inside.’

Moreover, evaluatives may be used with adverbs like ‘very’, ‘bit’, ‘extremely’; as gradable adjectives; but cannot be used with adverbs like ‘absolutely’ and ‘completely—’again, behaving as gradable adjectives. Consider the following examples, with a non-gradable adjective, ‘freezing’, and the evaluative ‘funny’:

(C6)# ‘It is extremely freezing outside.’

(C7)# ‘George Carlin is absolutely funny.’

(C8) ‘George Carlin is extremely/completely funny.’

(C9) ‘It is absolutely freezing outside.’

Some exceptions are worth pointing out, though. Some evaluatives, such as ‘amazing’, do not appear in some comparative constructions (they only felicitously appear in ‘as... as’-constructions) nor are they used with adverbs like ‘very’, ‘bit’, ‘extremely’... although using ‘absolutely’ is fine. This indicates that it is not clear that indeed every evaluative behaves as a gradable. Nonetheless, it is certainly true that virtually every evaluative term is gradable.

(C10)# ‘Lionel Messi’s play is more amazing than Ronaldo’s.’

(C11)# ‘Lionel Messi’s play is very amazing.’

(C12) ‘Lionel Messi’s play is as amazing as Ronaldo’s.’

(C13) ‘Lionel Messi’s play is absolutely amazing.’

Another reason for considering that evaluatives fall under the gradable adjectives category is that they are relative to a comparison class (some felicitously appear in FOR Δ constructions, while others do not, for their comparison class is semantically determined—I will get into more detail on this later on).

Since we can state that virtually every evaluative adjective is a gradable adjective, many features of evaluative adjectives are present in virtue of their gradability. This explains why inquiring about the linguistic behaviour of gradables is paramount to understanding the linguistic behaviour of evaluatives.

Recent work has provided new insights regarding the inner linguistic work of gradable adjectives. (See Kennedy 2007, Kennedy & McNally 1999, Kennedy & McNally 2005) Important for our purposes is that there is linguistic data seemingly supporting a distinction about how gradable adjectives trigger their comparison class and, hence, the relevant standard. In the next sections I carefully consider the linguistic data about gradables and their distinctive features and how the transposition of those features to evaluatives matter in terms of their semantic treatment.

2.2.1 *Gradable adjectives and the standard of comparison*

Among gradable adjectives one can make several distinctions regarding their linguistic behaviour with modifiers and other expressions. Consider the use of the modifiers ‘very’, ‘well’ and ‘much’. Gradable adjectives vary in terms of acceptability when used with those modifiers. As Kennedy and McNally (2005) point out, “these modifiers differ in terms of their acceptability with different adjectival participles” (345). For instance:

- (D1) ‘Your help was much appreciated.’
- (D2)# ‘Your help was very appreciated.’
- (D3)# ‘Your help was well appreciated.’
- (D4) ‘The dish is very tasty.’
- (D5)# ‘The dish is much tasty.’
- (D6)# ‘The dish is well tasty.’
- (D7) ‘The study is well documented.’
- (D8)# ‘The study is very documented.’
- (D9)# ‘John is much documented.’

These examples show that modifiers that are usually used with gradable adjectives are not acceptable with every adjective. Assuming that all the adjectival forms used in the examples are gradable adjectives,⁸ an explanation for this phenomenon is warranted.

In order to explain this, some semantic assumptions need to be made explicit. An important feature of gradable adjectives is that they are context-dependent—i.e. their application-conditions vary from context to context. One way to explain their context-dependence is to introduce the notion of standard of comparison. The standard of comparison can be thought of as contextually defined and it is relative to it that the application-conditions for gradable predicates are determined. Thus, sentences

⁸ Kennedy & McNally (2005) consider explaining the data by denying that ‘appreciated’ and ‘documented’ and other similar deverbal expressions are not gradable. This option is put aside because there is compelling data to consider them gradable. “We therefore conclude that the facts [...] can be explained neither in terms of a category mismatch nor in terms of the nongradability of the predicate: these deverbal expressions are gradable adjectives.” (347)

containing gradable predicates are assessed in terms of the relevant standard of comparison given the context. Consider the following examples:

(D11) ‘Pau Gasol is tall.’

(D11*) ‘Pau Gasol’s height exceeds the standard of tallness for a-*S*.’

(D12) ‘The dish was expensive.’

(D12*) ‘The dish’s cost exceeds the standard of expensiveness for a-*S*.’

The paraphrases suggested in (D11*) and (D12*) of the original sentences describe what is being literally conveyed by sentences (D11) and (D12), respectively. How is the standard of comparison determined? It is determined relative to a *comparison class*—i.e. the comparison class is the class of the relevantly similar objects. For instance, given the appropriate context, the comparison class for tallness in (D11) and (D11*) may well be the class of basketball players. Given such class, a standard of tallness may vary, it may be placed high or low across the *scale*—i.e. “the set of ordered degrees”—but once the standard is set, the height of every entity above it counts as tall and below it counts as not tall. We have three further ingredients here: *degree*, which is each of the points ordered along some dimension; the *dimension* (e.g. height, distance, weight, cost...), which provides the measurement, and the *scale*, which is the set of ordered degrees.

The comparison class restricts comparison standards, not just with respect to restricting dimension and scales, but also by determining an admissible interval for the standard. If the comparison class for (D11) and (D11*) includes only children, then the standard will determine the threshold for tallness lower than it would if the comparison class were only to include basketball players. In the latter case, the threshold for tallness would have to be placed high (or relatively high). Whatever the standard of comparison turns out to be it is to be provided via context. The semantic picture thus offered allows to explain the context-sensitivity of gradable adjectives by claiming that the standard of comparison (though determined relatively to a comparison class) is ultimately contextually determined. However, this does not say anything about the asymmetry that we have previously pointed out in the linguistic data, specifically regarding the felicitous use of modifiers with gradable adjectives. The explanation for the data requires further distinctions.

Adjectival scales have three crucial parameters, each of which must be specified in the lexical entry of any particular gradable adjective: a set of degrees, which represent measurement values; a dimension, which indicates the kind of measurement (cost, temperature, speed, volume, height, and so forth); and an ordering relation. This means that scales may in principle be distinguished from each other—with linguistic consequences—in three different ways: in terms of properties of the set of degrees, in terms of the dimensional parameter, or in terms of the ordering relation. (Kennedy & McNally 2005: 351)

Since adjectival scales have these three crucial parameters, they can vary with respect to each parameter. Scales may vary in terms of the measurement values, with respect to what the value measure and with respect to the order relation. The latter is an important factor in distinguishing antonym adjectives ('tall'/'small', 'long'/'short', 'pretty'/'ugly', 'tasty'/'tasteless', 'inexpensive'/'expensive', 'full'/'empty'...), which the scale does not differ with respect to the kind of measurement and measurement values. The idea is that the scale for the adjective 'tall', used in context C, specifies the ordering relation Φ while the scale for 'short', used in the same context C, specifies the inverse ordering relation Φ^{-1} .⁹ The dimensional parameter distinguishes scales that have the same set of measurement values and the same ordering relation (e.g. 'tall' and 'flexible'), and the distinction concerns the kind of measurement involved (height for 'tallness' and flexibility for 'flexible').¹⁰

Another interesting distinction that I would like to focus on is the one with respect to the set of measurement values. With respect to the set of degrees, scales can be either open (they lack a maximum or minimum value—the disjunction is inclusive) or closed (they have a maximum and minimum value). Candidates for adjectives with open scales are 'old', 'expensive', 'long', 'tall'. This is supported by the fact that the following examples are infelicitous.

(D13)# 'That picture is mostly/half old.'

(D14)# 'The dish is mostly/half expensive.'

(D15)# 'The plane trip is going to be mostly/half long.'

(D16)# 'Pau Gasol is mostly/half tall.'

Given that the scales of the adjectives in (D13–6) are open, it makes perfect sense that their use with the modifiers 'mostly' and 'half' is infelicitous. There is no half (or most) in open scales, because there is no maximal or minimal value in the scale, you would require at least one to make sense of what most or half would mean.

Contrast this behaviour with the behaviour of adjectives which scales are closed. Some candidates: 'full', 'empty', 'closed', 'invisible'.

(D17) 'The glass is half/mostly full.'

(D18) 'The room is half/mostly empty.'

(D19) 'The door is half/mostly closed.'

(D20) 'The letter is half/mostly invisible.'

The examples (D17–20) are all felicitous uses of the modifiers 'half' and 'mostly' with gradable adjectives. This contrast in behaviour with the examples (D13–6) is very compelling. The best

⁹ This will have important consequences regarding the behaviour of gradable antonyms.

¹⁰ I say more about this further on.

explanation for this is that there are gradable adjectives with open scales and gradable adjectives with closed scales.¹¹

Regarding how closed the scale is displays important linguistic effects. Three other distinctions with regard to closed scales should yet be considered: closed scales that only allow for maximal values, closed scales that only allow for minimal values and closed scales that allow for both. These further distinctions are also connected with distinct linguistic behaviour. Consider the following examples with the modifiers ‘100%’, ‘completely’ and ‘fully’. Naturally, assertions with open scale gradables would be infelicitous with these modifiers. However, scales that, although close, do not allow for a maximal value would also generate infelicitous assertion if used with those modifiers. Naturally only closed scale gradables that have maximal values (or both) would be used felicitously with ‘completely’, ‘fully’, and so on.

How the antonym relation is explained in this semantic framework is of the utmost importance. Two gradable adjectives are antonyms because they only differ with respect to the ordered values in a specific way, the order relation of an antonym is the inverse of the other, and vice-versa. That explains the analyticity of sentences such as this ‘Sarah is shorter than Felicity iff Felicity is taller than Sarah.’ and entailment relations between two sentences containing gradable antonyms. Since antonyms (necessarily) (only) differ with regard to the ordering of degrees in the manner just described, it is natural to conclude that for any closed scale gradable adjective F which only allows for a maximal/minimal value in the scale and for any F^{-1} , F and F^{-1} are antonyms only if F^{-1} only allows for a minimal/maximal value in the scale. This permits the use of antonyms to test if adjectives allow for maximal value, a minimal value, or both.

(D21) ‘The hotel was 100% full/empty.’

(D22) ‘George Carlin is fully certain/#uncertain that there is no upright position.’

(D23) ‘The students became completely #loud/quiet.’

(D24) ‘Sarah is completely #tall/#short.’

(D25) ‘The treatment is completely/100% safe/#unsafe (or #dangerous).’

The examples allows to distinguish open scale adjectives (D24), only maximal scale adjectives (‘certain’, ‘quiet’, ‘safe’) only minimal scale adjectives (‘uncertain’, ‘loud’, ‘unsafe’ or ‘dangerous’) and strictly closed scale adjectives (D21). From now on let us call—following Sassoon (2012)—adjectives that only allow for a minimal value *partial*, adjectives that only allow for a maximal value *total*—we will use *closed* only for adjectives whose scale is strictly closed (allow for both a maximal and a minimal value). If the gradable adjective is total or partial will have great affects in the conditions of its application.

¹¹ Assuming that gradable antonyms differ only in the ordering relation, it follows from the analysis that if a gradable is open, then its antonym is also open; and the same similarity applies to closed gradables. The antonym relation will be even more revealing when we get to other distinctions.

The distinction between total and partial adjectives will be important further on to understand the relationship between totality or partiality (as properties of some gradable adjectives) and *conjunctiveness* and *disjunctiveness* (as properties of some gradable multidimensional adjectives).

2.2.2 *Absolute and relative gradables*

The distinctions made so far do not explain the difference in behaviour when it comes to the use of adjectives with the modifiers ‘very’, ‘much’ and ‘well’ which I started with when introducing the distinctive linguistic behaviours among gradable adjectives. Arguably the linguistic differences point to further distinctions in the structure of the scales of gradable adjectives. The behaviour of gradables with the modifiers ‘very’ (and presumably ‘much’), according to Kennedy and McNally (2005) and Liao et al (2016), show a distinctive feature of gradable adjectives; that also has to do with the scale structure, but now specifically with implications about how the comparison classes are restricted.

Some gradable adjectives, such as ‘long’ and ‘tall’, are typically interpreted relative to a contextually determined comparison class. Other gradable adjectives, such as ‘spotted’ and ‘flat’, typically are not. (Liao et al 2016: 2)

Here we would like to claim that the correlation [between the total/partial adjectives and absolute/relative adjectives] arises specifically because scale structure influences a crucial feature of the interpretation of gradable adjectives in context: the determination of the standard of comparison. (Kennedy & McNally 2005: 355)

The distinction between absolute and relative gradables relies on a distinction between adjectives which the comparison class is contextually determined and adjectives which the comparison class is somewhat already (somehow) semantically encoded. This distinction, however—so Kennedy and McNally argue—is deeply connected with the scale structure. How is this connection supposed to work?

[S]calar analyses of gradable predicates assume that the standard of comparison is determined contextually, as a function of some variable in the semantic representation; under our assumptions, this is the comparison class variable introduced by the pos morpheme. An expectation of this type of analysis is that all predicates headed by (unmodified) gradable adjectives should give rise to the sort of vagueness observed with tall and expensive. This is not the case, however: there are many adjectives that are demonstrably gradable but whose standards of comparison are not context-dependent in the way discussed above.

For example, the adjectives [awake, visible, open, bent] simply require their arguments to possess some minimal degree of the gradable property they introduce; they do not require that the degree to which the arguments possess this property be greater than some contextually determined standard. (Kennedy & McNally 2005: 355–6)

Scale structures that only require that individuals fall under some degree above 0 across the scale do not require that the standard be contextually determined. The same goes for scale structures that only require that individuals fall under some degree below a maximal value (let us say 1) across the scale do not require that the standard be contextually determined. Thus, for absolute adjectives that have this feature (that are partial or total—i.e. only allow for a minimal or maximal limit, respectively) the determined standard is not provided contextually, because they “do not require that the degree to which the arguments possess this property be lesser (for total adjectives) or greater (for partial adjectives) than some contextually determined standard.” According to Kennedy and McNally’s analysis, the standard for some gradable adjectives (for absolute) is not contextually determined, and this hinges on their scales’ structure.

Given that modifiers like ‘very’ and ‘much’ influences the comparison class that the adjective uses to determine its standard, restricting that class to individuals to which the adjective truthfully applies in the context [...]” (Liao et al 2016: 8), if a standard for a gradable adjective is not determined contextually—as is arguably the case for absolute adjectives—then for such adjectives the use with ‘very’ is either infelicitous or the absolute adjectives are interpreted as if they were relatives.

Now, where does this leave us with respect to evaluatives? Most evaluatives are gradables, do they fall under the category of relative adjectives or absolute adjectives? This is important, because if one takes the idea that for absolute gradables the standard need not be contextually salient seriously, then that is a very strong indication that the standard of comparison for absolute gradables is already semantically encoded. Thus, evaluatives being used felicitously with ‘very’ (or ‘much’) and their entailment patterns are strong indications regarding how their standard of comparison is determined. This evidence may favour certain semantic proposals for evaluatives.

(E1) ‘The fish is very tasty.’

(E2) ‘George Carlin is very funny.’

(E3) ‘The painting is very beautiful.’

(E4) ‘His comments were wrong. They were very wrong, and reprehensible.’

(E5) ‘Felicity is looking very elegant.’

(E6) ‘That was a very ugly thing to say.’

The evidence is pretty clear. (E1-6) indicates that evaluatives are felicitously used with ‘very’, which indicates that the standard for evaluatives is contextually determined (or restricted). Entailment patterns evidence the same conclusion (See Liao et al 2016: 8–10). Though far from conclusive, this initial evidence indicates that an appropriate semantic approach towards evaluatives should allow for the comparison class for evaluatives to be contextually determined. Notwithstanding, the context playing a role in restricting which objects the predicate applies to is consistent with the adjective’s comparison

class being semantically restricted.¹² As I will spell out later, further linguistic evidence supports the claim that the comparison class for evaluatives is indeed semantically restricted.

I also want to add more about how scales may vary with respect to dimensions, specifically how scales for the same predicate may vary in such respect and how this is connected to the scale structure.

2.2.3 *A brief remark on multidimensionality*

Multidimensionality is a feature of many evaluatives. Evaluatives are a particular class of scalar adjectives. This means that their interpretation largely depends on entity values along at least one scalar dimension. An adjective like ‘tasty’ assumes—under a possible interpretation—different values along a distance (proximity to target flavour) scale. Thus, the interpretation of evaluatives such as ‘tasty’ include at least two important components: (i) a function from set of individuals to degrees in a scale and (ii) a standard according to which an object counts as *tasty* or not; i.e. an object is *tasty* if and only if it does not exceed the standard (or the threshold determined by the standard). The interpretation of many evaluatives does not only depend on the entity value along one scalar dimension, but along more than one dimension. For instance, an adjective like ‘ugly’ is usually interpreted as multidimensional. One can characterise multidimensionality as involving a function from set of individuals to degrees in more than one scale and, thus, as involving more than a standard—a standard for each dimension. It is relevant not to think of multidimensionality as involving some sort of ambiguity. Multidimensional predicates are not predicates that are ambiguous about which is the relevant scale dimension, or that the relevant scale dimension may vary across contexts. That may be the case, but what characterises multidimensional adjectives is that their interpretation depends (or may depend) on the value across more than one scale dimension. An object counting (or not) as *ugly* depends on more than a dimension, and that is what makes it multidimensional.

Multidimensionality poses its own challenges. One such challenge involves how the set of dimensions is contextually determined. Another is how the information regarding the many dimensions is contextually unified to generate a uniform interpretation. Finally, another challenge concerns how the interpretation of the adjective is determined by each scale dimension. These challenges assume a particular importance in the case of evaluatives; for the standard to which these predicates are relativised to is believed to involve some experiencer/appraiser relativisation. How this feature integrates with the challenges posed by multidimensionality is a particular difficulty of multidimensional evaluatives that I will get to later on.

¹² Liao et al (2016) argue that this only shows that “it is possible to use ‘very’ to restrict the comparison class to those individuals to which an adjective truthfully applies in a specific context” and not that the comparison standard is already semantically encoded. This is important because, as it will be further developed, other linguistic data evidence that evaluatives have their relativisation to a comparison class semantically restricted.

Beginning with the more general challenges that concern multidimensionality. Recent work (cf. Sassoon 2012) has shown that it is relevant to divide multidimensional adjectives into three categories: (a) conjunctive; (b) disjunctive and (c) mixed.

Here is how Sassoon (2012) distinguishes the three categories:

- a. Adjectives like healthy are by default **conjunctive**. Entities are required to reach the standard in ALL of their dimensions.
- b. Adjectives like sick are by default **disjunctive**. Entities are required to reach the standard in at least ONE of their dimensions.
- c. Adjectives like intelligent are **mixed**. Pragmatics determines whether e.g., being intelligent in but one dimension (say, mathematics) suffices to count as intelligent, or every contextually relevant dimension counts. (340)

The distinction is based on linguistic data that concern how multidimensional adjectives behave with a ‘except (for)’ construction. Conjunctives allow for the felicitous use of the ‘except (for)’ construction. For instance:

(F1) ‘Except for the flu, Betty is healthy.’

The felicity of (F1) signals that ‘healthy’ is conjunctive. According to Hoeksema (1995) exception phrases take a sentential argument (e.g. Betty is healthy with respect to every dimension) and an exception argument (e.g. except with respect to the flu). For ‘except (for)’ constructions to be felicitous their sentential argument has to be interpreted as “semantically equivalent to an universal statement” (Sassoon 2012: 343). Thus, one natural to interpret it is to interpret it as the use of ‘healthy’ required to reach the standard in all of its dimensions. Contrast this with:

(F2)# ‘Except for cancer, Betty is sick.’

One plausible interpretation is that (F2) is infelicitous because the sentential argument with the use of ‘sick’ cannot be interpreted as “semantically equivalent to an universal statement”, for in the case of ‘sick’ entities are required to reach the standard in but one of its dimensions. Thus, the sentential argument would have to be something along the lines of the following: Betty is sick with respect to at least a dimension. One can quickly see that the same felicity condition appears to fail in cases where a universal statement is not clearly present as the sentential argument and it seeming holds when it is clearly present.

(F3)# ‘Except for Betty, some people arrived late to the party.’

(F3*) ‘Except for Betty, everyone arrived late to the party.’

Data indicate that entities fall under multidimensional adjectives like ‘healthy’ if and only if they exceed the standard(s) in every scalar dimension of the adjective. Whereas for falling under a multidimensional adjective like ‘sick’ entities need only to exceed that standard in at least some scalar dimension of the adjective.

Sassoon (2012) also discusses if the distinction is based on logical dimension binding operations or non-logical dimension binding operations. The difference amounts to this: on the one hand, if based on non-logical dimension binding operations some *x* counts as falling under *healthy* if and only if *x*’s degree of healthiness with respect to *D*₁ times the weight of *D*₁, plus *x*’s degree of healthiness with respect to *D*₂ times the weight of *D*₂, plus *x*’s degree of healthiness with respect to *D*_{*n*} times the weight of *D*_{*n*}, and so on, has to exceed the threshold for healthiness. On the other hand, if based on logical dimension binding operations some *x* counts as falling under *healthy* if and only if *x*’s degree of healthiness with respect to *D*₁ is above the threshold for healthiness and *x*’s degree of healthiness with respect to *D*₂ is above the threshold for healthiness and *x*’s degree of healthiness with respect to *D*_{*n*} is above the threshold for healthiness, and so forth. It is not important for present purposes to dwell in the discussion regarding what the distinction is based upon. I just wish to leave the two possibilities out there in the open.¹³ What interests my present purposes, though, is to inquire into the putative relation between standard relativisation and dimension binding.

As we have mentioned about the distinction between total, partial and relative adjectives, some gradable adjectives’ scales only select a maximal value, but are open when it comes to their minimal value (we called this total adjectives), and some gradable adjectives’ scales select a minimal value, but are open when it comes to their maximal value (we called this partial adjectives). The adjectives ‘healthy/’ ‘sick’ appear to behave this way:

- (F1**) ‘Betty is very sick.’
- (F1’) ‘Betty is very healthy.’
- (F1’*) ‘Betty is completely healthy.’
- (F1’’)# ‘Betty is completely sick.’¹⁴

The felicity of sentences (F1**), (F1’) and (F1’*) signal that the pair of antonyms are relative adjectives —i.e. that they allow for a maximal value or for a minimal value or for neither. Given that they are antonyms ‘sick’ allows for a maximal/minimal value in the scale iff ‘healthy’ allows for a minimal/maximal value. The other two examples show that ‘sick’ is a partial adjective, only requires (in order for it to apply) that entities fall above a minimal degree in the scale, while ‘healthy’ is a total adjective, only requires (in order for it to apply) that entities fall below a maximal degree in the scale. Furthermore,

¹³ Cf. Sassoon 2012 for arguments in favour of logical binding operations.

¹⁴ According to data from COCA the use of ‘sick’ with the modifier ‘completely’ is very rare.

examples (h-s) show that ‘healthy’ is conjunctive, while its antonym (‘sick’) is disjunctive—i.e. healthy entities are required to reach the standard for all dimensions, while sick entities are (only) required to reach the standard for at least one dimension.

With further data presented, Sassoon (2012) argues that there is a deep connection between dimension binding and scale structure. Scale structures that only allow for a maximal standard behave as conjunctive adjectives do, while their antonyms—that have scale structures that only allow for a minimal standard—behave as disjunctive adjectives. This is how the rationale behind the connection is described:

Importantly, the total/partial distinction is different from the conjunctive/disjunctive distinction. The former applies for each dimension separately, whereas the latter is rather about the way judgments of membership in all of the dimensions together determine membership in the adjective. Yet, both distinctions determine a typological classification of adjectival interpretations by means of a default force of a quantifier. (Sassoon 2012: 349)

The distinctions, although different, share an important characteristic: they occur “by means of a default force of a quantifier”. Sassoon, following Yoon (1996), believes that entities that fall under total adjectives do so iff ALL of their parts satisfy the property; as for partial adjectives, entities that satisfy the property do so iff SOME of their parts satisfy the relevant property. Since their parts are somewhat related with the dimensions relative to which they may satisfy the relevant property, it is natural to think that there is a strong connection between dimension binding and scale structure.

How strong and what sort of connection is it? The two distinctions are causally linked. I want to leave exactly how still open, but there are three options that should be considered—which Sassoon considers. One way to interpret the connection is to consider the scale structure as more fundamental than dimension binding. According to this interpretation scale structure would affect dimension binding. Thus, the standard-type (if maximal, minimal or neither) would be a predictive factor to determine the dimensional binding. It is also possible (and even plausible) to interpret it the other way around—the dimension binding as more fundamental than the standard-type. This would imply that the dimension binding would be a predictive factor for the determination of the standard-type, and not the other way around. The third option is that neither is more fundamental. The connection would need to be explained by a more fundamental feature that both total/partial and conjunctive/disjunctive share. “The analysis of conjunctive and disjunctive adjectives may be mediated by quantifying expressions over dimensions and degrees, with certain combinations of quantifiers being more difficult to use than others are” (Sassoon 2012: 352).

It is not important to go into details about what sort of explanation each option would provide and their advantage in explaining the data. It suffices to state that each option is initially plausible (not necessary equally plausible) and it is open for discussion what the appropriate one should be. Notwithstanding, the first option requires an explanation along the lines of what was previously

provided: the fact that total and partial adjectives require that every part of an entity must exemplify the relevant property for the entity to exemplify it and that some part of an entity must exemplify the relevant property for the entity to exemplify it, respectively, explains why dimensions are bound with universal force or with particular force. The second option requires that the explanation goes the other way around: to count as H, one must H in every respect (or dimension). Thus, the standard of membership of H has to be maximally above the minimum (assuming such minimum exists) of H. If such minimum exists, then it corresponds to the degree where entities are slightly above it in all but one dimension of H. Thus, if H is conjunctive, then it is total or relative. Assuming that to count as S is only needed for one to S in at least one respect. Then, the standard cannot be maximum, for otherwise S would not be disjunctive (as was just explained). Thus, if S is disjunctive, it cannot have a maximal value, thus it cannot be something other than partial or relative. For this second option, as Sassoon (2012) puts it: “the connections between dimension binding and standard type are not as tight as [in the first option]” (352).

The purpose of these sections has been to isolate features and make distinctions that are natural to think, given the fact that many evaluatives are gradables, will transpose to evaluative adjectives. We have taken a closer look at scale structure and dimension binding. When further assessing whether evaluatives should be accounted for uniformly the distinctions that were stressed here will surely play an important role in the assessment.

I have presented empirical reasons to consider evaluatives gradable adjectives, but I have not provided reasons to consider evaluatives a particular linguistic category, distinct from other gradable adjectives. In the remaining sections of this chapter I will explain how one can make a case for such claim.

2.3 Are evaluatives just gradable?

As I've mentioned, examples of evaluatives include the following adjectives: tasty, good, bad, disgusting, correct, incorrect, beautiful, ugly, despicable, lewd, funny, elegant, harmonious, pretty, flavourful, disruptive, fashionable, frank, honest, liar, and many more. The list is far from exhaustive, but it gives an idea of what the paradigmatic examples of evaluatives are. I should mention that many words that are not included in a list of the paradigmatic cases of evaluative terms or expressions, given the appropriate context, also convey evaluative content. Consider the adjective 'socialist'. When used, it literally expresses that a person or policy favours a particular view on the economy, governmental intervention or social benefits. The term's literal content is purely descriptive. However, in some contexts it not only describes, but also conveys an evaluation. Consider again the (adapted) remark by Larry Kudlow, the former Trump's Economic Adviser: “The virus is not going to sink the American economy. What is [going to], or could, sink the American economy is our [socialist] friends on the

other side of the aisle.¹⁵ Larry Kudlow is using ‘socialist’ not just to describe what he believes to be the Democrats political views in 2020, but also to negatively evaluate their political stance. Given the appropriate context, virtually any word or expression may convey evaluative content, does this mean that there is nothing special when it comes to evaluatives? Putting the query in a different way: *although evaluatives can be used to convey evaluative content, do they literally express evaluative content?* If not, there is no reason to talk about a particular linguistic class for evaluative terms, they are merely descriptive, gradable terms, that are sometimes used to convey non-descriptive information.¹⁶

The vast majority of authors believes that the evaluation is (at least) part of the evaluative terms’ literal content. Although, given the appropriate contexts many words may be used to express evaluative content, many believe that the evaluation is part of the evaluatives’ literal content (and not of other words that may be used as value-words). By this I mean “that it is part of the meaning of [an evaluative] [...] to describe an object as in some sense good, or to say that it is *pleasing*” (Sundell 2016: 794). Connected with this feature, most believe that it is part of the meaning of evaluative adjectives the relativisation to an experiencer/appraiser. Although gradable adjectives (such as ‘tall’) are also usually thought to involve the relativisation to a standard triggered by the relevant comparison class (e.g. The sentence ‘Jeffrey is tall.’ is true only if Jeffrey’s tallness is above the threshold for a standard of tallness—let us say being tall for a nine year old boy), they are not usually thought to involve the relativisation to an experiencer or appraiser. Consider Jeffrey again, his putative tallness has no connection with how Jeffrey himself or with how the asserter of the sentence experiences Jeffrey’s height (whatever that experience may be). Contrast this with the assertion of the sentence ‘George Carlin is funny.’ The putative funniness of Carlin appears to somewhat depend on how the asserter experiences humour and Carlin’s stand-up performances and this experience is related to how she evaluates them. Thus, the subjective element that seems to be present in evaluative terms is connected with the evaluative literal content that such terms convey. Usually, when philosophers talk about the evaluative content conveyed by the use of a value-word—i.e. when some object is characterised as good in some sense—,they connect what is conveyed with the relativisation to an experiencer/appraiser standard. Consider once again the Carlin-sentence. George Carlin is being characterised by the speaker (assume that the speaker is also the experiencer) as having the capability of causing a pleasurable experience. Given that pleasurable experiences are such as long as an experiencer (or an appraiser) is involved, it is quite natural to make the connection between the conveyed evaluative content and the relativisation to a standard. Here is another way to put it: it is quite natural to connect value (evaluation of some entity) and the subjective appreciation of said entity.

¹⁵ I have slightly adapted Kudlow’s remark to better fit the example, but I trust that I preserved the spirit of what he was saying.

¹⁶ Sundell (2016) proposes something along these lines. Other proposals are also compatible with the claim (e.g. Väyrynen 2013). In the next chapter I’ll say more about Sundell’s claim and other proposals that claim that evaluatives do not belong to a separate linguistic class.

Contrary to (most) descriptive terms, the truth-value of sentences containing evaluatives are considered by many to somehow depend on the relativisation to an experiencer/appraiser. Not only, but especially, linguistic data and intuitions concerning evaluative disagreements has persuaded philosophers that to assess evaluative sentences' truth-value one has to build in the relativisation to an experiencer/appraiser as a relevant factor in the evaluative expression's meaning—either built in the linguistic meaning of the evaluative expression, as a context-sensitive element, or built in as a further parameter of the circumstance of evaluation.¹⁷

In the remainder of this chapter I will explain what the linguistic datum is and assess whether it is sufficient to support the claim that evaluatives should belong to a specific linguistic class, different from the class of gradable adjectives.

2.3.1 Two assumptions about evaluatives

As I hinted at on the previous section, the debate about the appropriate semantics for evaluatives is pervaded by two assumptions.

(A1) Evaluative adjectives are semantically evaluative.

(A2) The relativisation to a standard (i.e. a standard determined by an experiencer/appraiser) is part of the adjectives' meaning.

What does it mean for adjectives to be semantically evaluative? It means that the adjective, when used, literally expresses that the object to which the predicate purportedly applies to is good/bad or that it is (dis)pleasing. For the relativisation to a standard to be encoded in the adjectives' meaning it is meant that the object is pleasing/good to an experiencer/appraiser or that it is pleasing/good according to a standard that is not contextually provided, but already encoded in the adjective's semantics. This clarifies how the two assumptions are connected. The standard or experiencer/appraiser to which it is relativised to is usually thought to be an element of the evaluation that is encoded in the meaning of the adjective. Thus, it is rather natural to think that if (A2) obtains, then (A1) does as well. Notwithstanding, the widespread belief that (A1–2) hold, Sundell in “The tasty, the bold, and the

¹⁷ I am distinguishing contextualist proposals from relativist proposals, but also proposals that add the standard of evaluation as a further parameter from proposals that include the parameter as part of a centred world parameter.

beautiful” advances the radical idea that both assumptions are false.¹⁸ What Sundell’s claim implies for the linguistic treatment of evaluatives is that there is nothing particularly special when it comes to their semantics about evaluatives. Denying (A1) entails that they are not genuinely evaluative. It is just that, as it happens with non-evaluative gradable adjectives, so called evaluative expressions may be used to convey evaluative information. But conveying such information (or not) is determined via context and there is nothing that is part of the semantic meaning that counts as evaluative or that determines the evaluative usage of the term—it is all context. Likewise, denying (A2) entails that there is no relativisation to an experiencer or appraiser encoded in the semantics of so called evaluative adjectives—it is the context that determines whether the triggered standard of comparison is determined relatively to an experiencer or appraiser. Hence, rejecting (A2) entails that the comparison class is contextually determined—i.e. it entails that so called evaluative adjectives are just like relative gradables. To argue that evaluatives are not semantically different from descriptive gradable adjectives, one is required to show that these two assumptions are unmotivated. Although not the major motivation, one can find motivation to hold that (A1–2) are the case by appealing to the linguistic behaviour of evaluatives.¹⁹ The linguistic data can be found in Liao et al 2016.

2.3.2 *The Linguistic Data*

In this section I want to address an empirical objection to Sundell’s claim that (A1–2) assumptions are both mistaken. The objection relies on the work by Liao et al (2016). The empirical data collected strongly suggests that evaluative adjectives’ comparison class (and the standard that is relative to the comparison class) is not contextually triggered but somehow encoded in their semantics.²⁰ If the data suggest this, then the data also strongly suggest that denying the assumptions is not the right way to go. That is, if the data strongly suggests the conclusion that the standard to which the adjective is relativised to is not contextually triggered, one should endorse the view that the relativisation to the standard is encoded in the adjective’s semantics and, given the fact that the relativisation to a standard is

¹⁸ Sundell (2016) advances the suggestion that the two assumptions about aesthetic adjectives are false. While the suggestion is specifically applied to aesthetic adjectives, there does not seem to be a reason not to consider applying it to evaluatives across the board and this is what I will be assuming here. Although the claim that I will be assuming is stronger than Sundell’s, assuming that (A1–2) are false across the board actually properly motivates their denial. The main motivation to reject both assumptions is parsimony:

If nearly every word in the language can be used as a value word, then for entirely independent reasons, we’ll need an account of what makes particular usages evaluative. If we need an account like that anyways, then it may be a mistake to drive a categorical, semantic wedge between the ‘evaluative’ and the ‘non-evaluative’ terms. (Sundell 2016: 799)

The parsimony motivation is effective only if the “semantic wedge between the ‘evaluative’ and ‘non-evaluative’ terms” is not present in other areas of (so called) evaluative discourse.

¹⁹ In the next chapter I will discuss the major motivation to endorse (A1–2) which relies on the phenomenon of persistent disagreement.

²⁰ The study focuses on aesthetic adjectives.

usually thought to be connected with the evaluative content that is conveyed by the use of the adjective, one should also endorse the view that evaluative adjectives are semantically evaluative. Thus, if one wants to be on board with the proposal that (A1–2) are false, then it is necessary to undermine the linguistic tests (that suggest such conclusion) or provide a different explanation for the data. I explore how one can do both.

Two tests are of particular importance here: The Felicity Question Test (FQT) and The ‘for a(n) N’ Construction Test (FCT). A quick description of what both tests consist in and purport to show. In FQT participants are asked to determine if the question ‘Is this (the object represented in a vignette with the image of a sculpture) beautiful/elegant?’ is felicitous. If the comparison class is contextually triggered, then one would expect participants to consider the question as infelicitous—or at least as substantively more infelicitous than when the same test is performed with adjectives which their comparison classes is not thought to be contextually triggered.

In FCT, Liao et al (2016) collect data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) which show that speakers do not usually use aesthetic adjectives with ‘for a(n) N’ constructions. According to them, this is evidence that aesthetic adjectives are used similarly to gradable adjectives which comparison classes are not contextually triggered.

The rationale behind the tests and the conclusion they suggest are straightforward: one expects adjectives whose standards are contextually triggered to need contextual information for their comparison classes to become salient and one expects adjectives whose standards are not contextually triggered to not appear with ‘for a(n) N’ constructions, since the information provided with the construction (the comparison class) is already encoded in the adjectives’ semantics. At least, some evaluatives seem to not behave like adjectives whose standards are contextually triggered and they seem to behave as adjectives which their standard are already semantically encoded. Hence, the data seemingly support A2.

In Liao et al 2016, FQT is used for two aesthetic adjectives ‘beautiful’ and ‘elegant’. The test makes use of the distinction between absolute gradable adjectives and relative gradable adjectives on how the standard for the adjectives is triggered. For the former it is generally thought that the standard is not triggered by a comparison class contextually provided, and for the latter it is thought that the standard is triggered by a comparison class provided by the context. This is made clear by the following examples:

(5) ‘Is this spotted?’

(6) ‘Is this long?’

Question (5) contains the absolute gradable adjective ‘spotted’. The question is not puzzling, because the standard for the adjective need not be contextually salient, and thus, it should make sense to ask if the adjective can be predicated of an object [let us say a cheetah], without further information.

Question (6), on the contrary, is puzzling. According to Liao, McNally, and Meskin (2016) this evidences that ‘long’ is a relative gradable adjective. For it is odd to ask if ‘long’ can be predicated of an object [let us say a ruler] without further contextual information—specifically about what the relevant comparison class is.

Thus, one way of testing if aesthetic adjectives are semantically alike to relative gradable adjectives is to ask if the adjective can be predicated of an object, without providing contextual information about what the comparison class is. If Sundell (2016) is right about denying the assumptions, one expects that it will be as puzzling to ask if an object is beautiful or elegant as it is to ask if it is long. However, what the test shows is that “on FQT, aesthetic adjectives [either veridictive or substantive] behave unlike relative adjectives” and like absolute adjectives. (Liao, McNally, and Meskin 2016: 5)

Further evidence that aesthetic adjectives do not behave like relative adjectives can be found in data that show that there are virtually no examples of the phrase ‘for a(n) N’ with the adjectives ‘beautiful’ and ‘elegant’.²¹ Absolute adjectives display similar behaviour, while the same phrase features frequently with relative adjectives.

(7) ‘The cheetah is spotted for a feline.’

(8) ‘Pau Gasol is tall for a basketball player.’

This difference in behaviour between absolute and relative adjectives makes sense. If ‘spotted’ requires no information to trigger the relevant standard then it is naturally odd to add that information. But for relative adjectives the information of the relevant standard is nontrivial, for it is not semantically triggered or encoded. On other respects aesthetic adjectives behave as relatives: they are compatible with ‘very’ and have similar entailment patterns (as we have seen on previous sections). According to Liao, McNally and Meskin (2016) this importantly suggests that aesthetic adjectives do not have standards that are contextually dependant, even though their standard is determined relatively to a comparison class.

Aesthetic adjectives can therefore be said to be ‘relative’ in the broad sense of the term—they have standards that are established in relation to a comparison class—but not so in the narrow sense of the term—they do not have standards that are obviously context dependent. (Liao, McNally and Meskin 2016: 12)

Liao, McNally, and Meskin’s conclusion denies the claim that aesthetic adjectives’ meaning is not relative to a semantically encoded standard. If their standard is determined relative to a comparison class and if the standard is not contextually provided, then the evaluative standard is presumably part

²¹ The same applies to ‘tasty’. See COCA.

of their literal content. This also undermines the related thesis that putative evaluative adjectives are not evaluative.²² Assuming that evaluative adjectives are relative to a standard or experiencer/appraiser, it is natural to think that such relativisation has to do with the evaluation that the use of the adjective conveys. It would be unnatural to think that the purely descriptive content is what is relativised to a standard.

Consider ‘tasty’ and consider that its meaning is relative to a standard. How are we to describe its meaning without appealing to what is pleasing for the relevant standard? It would be quite unnatural to do so. However, Sundell does not believe that the findings undermine his two claims:

In recent experimental work, Meskin and Liao question whether aesthetic adjectives are relative, rather than absolute gradables, or perhaps something in between. If their results prove persuasive, the account here might be amended in certain ways, but would not change fundamentally, so for now I’ll assume the otherwise consensus view that the terms are relative gradables. (Sundell 2016: 800, fn. 10)

Sundell (2016) claims that to predicate ‘tasty’ of an object is to describe it as being close to a target flavour. Thus, on his depiction the scale for ‘tasty’ is proximity. The adjective is flexible enough to pick out almost any target flavour, depending on the speaker’s intentions. This means that speakers may disagree about the relevant scale. This is so, because ‘tasty’ does not carry very specific descriptive content.

Even when the relevant scale is determined, speakers may disagree about the threshold (relative to the relevant scale) for tastiness. According to the view, the target flavour is determined by contextual features and is not encoded in the adjective’s literal content. That the standard is relative to the comparison class is consistent with Liao, McNally, and Meskin’s conclusion. In that regard evaluative predicates behave as relative adjectives. However, the data also suggest that evaluative predicates behave as absolute adjectives in the sense that their comparison class need not be contextually provided—thus, strongly suggesting that the relativisation to a standard is semantically encoded.

Some adjectives may require very few contextual information to trigger their standard of comparison. This may be explained by the fact that these objects do not provide much information about the object they purportedly apply to.²³ For instance, when speakers claim that a dish is tasty, they are not conveying much information about the dish—only that it approximates to the target flavour. The same happens when speakers use e.g. ‘beautiful’. Whence, arguably these adjectives do not require very few contextual information to trigger the relevant standard of comparison. This also explains the discrepancy between the felicity question test and the ‘for a(n) N’ test when it comes to evaluatives that

²² At least for some aesthetic adjectives.

²³ This feature is related to Zangwill (1995)’s distinction between verdictive and substantive, which I will address in more detail on the next chapter.

behave like absolute gradables under FQT. But this distinction in behaviour need not imply that there is a substantial semantic difference in the two categories.

One obvious concern with this line of reply is that both tests were performed with evaluatives which provide some information about the object they purportedly apply to and with evaluatives that do not—‘elegant’ and ‘beautiful’, respectively—and that the tests show that both behaved unlike relative adjectives under FQT, but like relatives under FCT. However, if the tests show that both behave similarly, then that may indicate that ‘elegant’ is less informative about the objects it applies to than one might initially think. I think there reasons to of think of this distinction between evaluatives which are informative and evaluatives which are not very informative as a difference in degree. If that were right, it would even make a stronger case for the distinction not bearing any weight on a distinction between semantically evaluative adjectives and semantically purely descriptive adjectives. The difference is a difference in terms of degrees of the sort of descriptive content associated with each category of adjectives. Problematically for this explanation to the data, however, is that FQT was also performed with absolute adjectives and the participants responses signalled an important similarity with respect to the evaluative adjectives’ behaviour. Thus, the reply needs to be supplemented with further explanation about why for absolute adjectives FQT displays the result that it does. In order to do so let us revisit how the tests were performed. In FQT participants had an image corresponding to the object that they were asked about.

Participants were shown, in random order, each object and the corresponding question ‘Is this [long/spotted/beautiful/elegant]?’ Participants were then asked to make a question felicity judgment, concerning whether it makes sense to ask the question shown. (Liao, McNally & Meskin 2016: 4–5)

Participants answered the test by being presented the referent of the term ‘this’. By giving information on the referent of the indexical term, it became part of the contextual background regarding what is the relevant sort of object that the aesthetic predicates should be applied to. Assuming that both predicates contain substantial context-invariant description, then it is not odd to discover that participants consider the question ‘Is this beautiful/elegant?’ felicitous.

This line of argument makes an additional worry pertinent. The adjective ‘tasty’ is clearly verdictive in Sundell’s sense. So, does it behave like a relative adjective? My own intuition is that it would behave as absolute gradables do in FQT—although, I grant: datum is lacking to support (or undermine) the intuition.

The meaning of ‘tasty’ according to Sundell is ‘to be [sufficiently] close to the target flavour’. Now, imagine that you are shown an ice cream and then asked to evaluate if the following question about the ice cream is felicitous ‘Is this tasty?’. The simple fact that the ice cream is shown suffices to trigger the comparison class—it makes sense to ask whether the ice cream’s flavour is close to the expected flavour for an ice cream. The participant assumes that it is on the questioners’ interest to

know if the the ice cream is tasty according to the standard taste of ice creams. This shows that ‘tasty’ as many other evaluative adjectives would behave as absolute adjectives would under the circumstances. This is to be expected for terms which convey almost no information about the object they are to be applied to and, thus, not much contextual background is needed for its comparison class to be triggered.

Here one may claim that this line of thought just seems to reinforce Liao, McNally & Meskin’s conclusion. However, consider also the relative adjective ‘long’. If participants were shown the appropriate image (e.g. a snake), they would also find the question ‘Is this long?’ felicitous, for the image clearly introduces the relevant comparison class (for a snake). Surely a comparison class being triggered or not by FQT depends on the image and, perhaps, on the amount of information necessary for an adjective’s comparison class to become salient. But this is far from suggesting that there is a semantically relevant distinction between evaluative and descriptive terms. Adjectives, even if all relative, may differ with respect to the quantity of contextual information necessary to trigger their comparison class. Hence, the only thing that FQT shows is that the amount of contextual detail needed to trigger the comparison class for ‘elegant’ and ‘beautiful’ is at least minimal, it does not show that these adjectives are absolute; i.e. their experiencer/appraiser standard of comparison is semantically encoded. The previous claim explains why—by presenting the object to which the predicate should apply—speakers find the question felicitous.

Thus, FQT does not provide decisive evidence for one to endorse the claim that the relevant comparison class for aesthetic is not contextually triggered and that aesthetic adjectives are evaluative. Undermining the test this way also undermines the test’s efficacy in suggesting a semantic distinction between absolute and relative adjectives. This may be interpreted as undermining the distinction between absolute and relative terms themselves—which is too drastic a consequence (on my view) just to explain the coherence between Sundell’s claims and the data. But this is precocious. There is yet FCT, which efficacy has not been undermined. So, even granting that it is highly doubtful that FQT is appropriate to show any categorical distinction between descriptive and evaluative gradable, there is still evidence that aesthetic adjectives are virtually not used with the phrase ‘for a(n) N’.²⁴ Which, as I have mentioned, strongly indicates that there are aesthetic adjectives’ whose standards are not contextually triggered.

If what determines the value conveyed by the use of the adjective is made salient by the context, then the expectation is that ‘for a(n) N’ would be much more frequently used than it actually is. One way of making salient a contextual feature is by spelling it out using syntactic constructions like ‘tasty for a(n) N’.²⁵ On the other hand, it would violate the relevance norm to use ‘for a(n) N’ if the standard for the adjective were already semantically encoded. So, it would be quite surprising, if the semantics of

²⁴ See COCA.

²⁵ Not only ‘for a(n) N’ construction can be used to indicate if an adjective’s comparison class is contextually triggered or not, constructions like ψ to a(n) N’ or ψ according to a(n) N’ can also be used to perform a similar test.

evaluatives did not encode the relativisation to a standard and the construction ‘for a(n) N’ were not used by speakers. So, if virtually all adjectives that are usually thought to trigger their comparison class contextually would commonly be used with the ‘for a(n) N’ construction and evaluative adjectives would not, that would clearly be problematic for the claim that (A1–2) are false. I doubt that is the case though.²⁶

What does the datum precisely show? It shows that speakers tend to consider that the relevant comparison class for an evaluative adjective used in a particular context does not usually require ‘for a(n) N’ construction. This is far from strong evidence that it is part of aesthetic adjectives’ semantics the relativisation to a standard. The datum from FCT can simply be accounted for in the same way that the datum from FQT was accounted for: evaluative adjectives may not require much contextual information for the relevant comparison to become salient. Then, it is plausible that speakers tend not to use evaluative adjectives with ‘for a(n) N’ construction, even if those adjectives are relative.

Perhaps, this means the previous objection can be reinstated. Neither test shows that the relative/absolute distinction, with regard to how comparison classes are triggered, holds. Whence the linguistic data do not support the conclusion that there is a semantic distinction between so called evaluative terms and descriptive ones. Note that this does not entail that there is no distinction between relative and absolute adjectives. It just means that these linguistic tests do not show that the distinction exists. Moreover, other tests support the belief that there is such a distinction—e.g. the compatibility with ‘very’ test and the comparative form to positive form entailment test.²⁷ The distinction does not have to do with how the comparison class is triggered; but this does not mean that the distinction between absolute and relative adjectives is lost—it only means that the tests fail to show that there is also a distinction between the two categories of gradable adjectives concerning how the comparison class is triggered. Thus, the issue that was raised does not, by itself, imply that philosophers of language should toss aside the relative/absolute distinction. Hence, nothing too drastic comes from the suggestion that FQT and FCT do not support the distinction between relative and absolute gradable adjectives with respect to how the comparison class for gradable adjectives is triggered and, hence, do not should not be used as decisive support for the claim that (A1–2) obtain.

2.4 Taking stock

Evaluative adjectives are gradable adjectives. The linguistic data is clear on that regard: evaluative adjectives appear in comparative constructions, may be multidimensional, display gradability and generally mimic the linguistic behaviour of other gradables. Given this, the investigation on the

²⁶ For instance, the adjective ‘long’—usually interpreted as a relative adjective—is not typically used with ‘for a(n) N’ constructions. I imagine more examples can be found. See COCA.

²⁷ See Liao et. al 2016: 7–10.

linguistic behaviour of gradable adjectives sheds light on how evaluatives behave and, specifically, on how their standard of comparison is triggered.

Many philosophers endorse the claim that evaluatives, although gradable, belong to a specific category of gradable adjectives—the category of evaluatives—, since they hold that (i) evaluatives are semantically evaluative (A1) and (ii) their standard of comparison which is determined by an appraiser/experiencer is built in their semantics (A2). I inquired whether there is linguistic support to hold that evaluatives are substantively different from non-evaluative gradables and concluded that there was no decisive support for the claim. Notwithstanding, this does not mean that motivation for endorsing (A1–2) cannot be found elsewhere and that the attempts to undermine those assumptions succeed. In the next chapter I will begin by investigating precisely that matter and argue that, given the existence of persistent disagreement when evaluative claims are concerned, one has good reason to endorse (A1–2) and, therefore, good reason to claim that evaluatives belong to a specific linguistic category.

3 The Case For a Class of Evaluatives

In the previous chapter I showed that proponents of the view that assumptions (A1–2)—i.e. that evaluatives are semantically evaluative and that the relativisation to an appraiser/assessor standard is semantically encoded—are false have sufficient leeway to explain away the empirical findings on the linguistic features of evaluative adjectives. But the main motivation to endorse assumptions (A1–2) has to do with the phenomenon of persistent (evaluative) disagreement—i.e. disagreement which, although the parties agree about the facts of the matter, still persist. Assuming that evaluative disagreements are about what the claims literally express, then the persistence of the disagreement can only be explained due to the fact that the disagreement is about the evaluative content and, whence, that evaluative predicates are semantically evaluative.

Thus, in order to claim that the assumptions are false one is required to come up with an alternative story about persistent disagreement. In this chapter I will explain how Sundell (2016)'s alternative account goes by appealing to metalinguistic negotiations and argue that it fails to provide the right sort of account of how evaluatives determine social interactions. I will, then, conclude that, given the arguable insufficiency of the metalinguistic negotiations framework, one has justified motivation to endorse the assumption that evaluative adjectives are semantically evaluative and, whence, belong to a specific linguistic category.

I will begin the chapter by making three conceptual distinctions that are of import to my claim.

3.1 Conceptual Distinctions

I want to start this chapter by highlighting three conceptual distinctions that will matter for the purpose of inquiring whether Sundell (2016)'s proposal has any bite to it. The first of which is between thin and thick terms; i.e. between terms that typically convey only evaluative information or which typically introduce only evaluative concepts and thick terms, which typically convey evaluative and non-evaluative information or introduce concepts that are both evaluative and non-evaluative.²⁸ Paradigmatic examples of thin terms include 'beautiful', 'tasty', '(morally) wrong'. Paradigmatic examples of thick terms include 'lewd', 'rude', 'selfish'.

²⁸ The distinction originates from Bernard Williams. This is how he characterises thick (or thicker) terms:

I have already referred to, such as treachery and promise and brutality and courage, which seem to express a union of fact and value. The way these notions are applied is determined by what the world is like (for instance, by how someone has behaved), and yet, at the same time, their application usually involves a certain valuation of the situation, of persons or actions. Moreover, they usually (though not necessarily directly) provide reasons for action. Terms of this kind certainly do not lay bare the fact-value distinction. Rather, the theorist who wants to defend the distinction has to interpret the workings of these terms, and he does so by treating them as a conjunction of a factual and an evaluative element, which can in principle be separated from one another. (Williams 1985: 129)

Notice how Williams seeming endorses a separabilist view about thick terms on this passage.

The second distinction is between verdictive and substantive terms. This second distinction relates to the thin/thick distinction and it was introduced by Zangwill (1995) for aesthetic concepts. Verdictive aesthetic predicates are those which do not provide much information about the object it purportedly apply to. Cases of verdictives include ‘beautiful’, ‘tasty’ and other adjectives. The classification as verdictive captures the idea that when one uses e.g. the term ‘beautiful’ when applying it to a human being, one is not conveying any particular information about the physical aspect of the person other than that it is pleasing to the eye. Substantive aesthetic predicates are those which do provide information about the object they purportedly apply to. Cases of substantives include ‘dainty’, ‘garish’ and other predicates of the sort. When one uses e.g. ‘garish’ when applying it to the colours of a t-shirt, one is also conveying information about the colours—that they are bright—and not only that they are displeasing to look at. Putting in a different way: substantive terms convey information about what it is about the object that makes it (dis)pleasing.

The third distinction is between high and low-pressure predicates. High-pressure predicates are those which when used as part of a sentence speakers typically intend to or expect their audience to be under a greater normative burden than when low-pressure predicates are used. Paradigmatic cases of high-pressure evaluative predicates include ‘(morally) wrong’, ‘beautiful’, among others; while paradigmatic cases of low-pressure evaluative predicates include ‘tasty’, ‘funny’, among others.

I will detail these distinctions because some are useful to open avenues I would like to explore for proponents of the view that so called evaluatives are not semantically evaluative to reply to objections that may be raised against the view they propone, and the others I will use to object to that view.

3.1.1 *The Thin/Thick Distinction*

Hume’s Law, which consists in *is does not imply ought*, entails that any valid argument that proves an evaluative statement must contain at least an evaluative premise. However, examples such as the next one (adapted from Foot 1958) seeming undermine the law: *G* causes offence by indicating lack of respect; therefore, *G* is rude. Arguably, the argument does not contain an evaluative premise and, yet, it appears perfectly valid. This is supported by the oddness of the statement ‘*G* causes offence by indicating lack of respect, but it is not the case that *G* is rude.’ Assuming that ‘rude’ is a perfectly fine example of an evaluative term, then the conclusion is evaluative and not just merely descriptive.

Counter-examples to Hume’s Law are deployed by a particular set of evaluatives. For the entailment from *is* to *ought* to presumably work, the examples need to use evaluatives that when used typically convey both descriptive and evaluative information. Evaluatives of this kind are labelled as *thick terms*, as opposed to *thin terms*—the latter fully evaluative and convey no descriptive content. Some examples that count as thick: *cruel*, *tasty*, *rude*, *lewd*, *funny*, *kind*, *courageous*, *generous*, *nasty*, *selfish*. In contrast thin terms include: *right*, *bad*, *permissible* and *ought*. The distinction captures the following idea: typically when someone uses a thin term like ‘bad’ they evaluate it negatively without being committed to any

(non-evaluative) description about the action; this is not the case for thick terms; a term like ‘generous’, when used, typically not only evaluates some action or person positively, but it also conveys non-evaluative information about said action or person—e.g. it describes the person as giving something without expecting anything in return.

Thick terms give rise to interesting challenges. I want to focus three of those: (1) “the combination question” and (2) “the location question” and (3) “the delineation question”.²⁹ The “combination question” has to do with how thick terms combine the evaluative and non-evaluative information they convey. The “location question” has to do with “where” is the evaluative information conveyed by a thick term—is it somehow semantically encoded or is it merely a feature of their use. The final challenge has to do with how thick terms differ from thin ones; is there a sharp boundary between them?

For “the combination question” two views are available on the market. The *separabilist view* and the *inseparabilist view*. The former endorses the following thesis:

Separabilist Thesis (ST). *The evaluative and non-evaluative aspects of thick terms and concepts are distinct components that can at least in principle be disentangled from one another.*³⁰

The inseparabilist view denies ST—i.e. endorse that the two aspects cannot be disentangled from one another. The challenge for those who endorse ST is to explain how are the two aspects connected and the explanation provided may resonate with the next challenge, “the location question”.

Typically separabilists believe that the evaluative content itself is thin, i.e. it is purely evaluative, and such content is also typically associated with the truth-conditional meaning. What they have to explain is the relation between the evaluative content and the non-evaluative content, given their separability.³¹ One way to do this is to argue that the non-evaluative content entails the evaluative content. This would explain the strong connection between the two aspects and how they could be disentangled. The main problem is that this *simple view*³² is vulnerable to the following argument from McDowell (1998):

(D1) If an evaluative term *E* can be “disentangled” into a non-evaluative description *D* that is co-extensive with *E* and an evaluation that gives the evaluative orientation of *E*, then it would be

²⁹ I am borrowing the labels from Väyrynen (2016).

³⁰ From Väyrynen (2016).

³¹ The added evaluative content is usually taken by separabilists to be *pro* and *con* content. However, this not need to be so and if evaluative content comes in many varieties the separabilist’s task of disentangling both contents becomes much harder (see Kirchin 2013 on this).

³² Once again borrowing from Väyrynen (2016).

possible to master the extension of *E*, and thus group together exactly the items to which competent users would apply *E*, without understanding its evaluative orientation.

(D2) It is not possible to anticipate the usage of *E* in a way required for mastering its extension without understanding the evaluative orientation of *E*.

(C) Therefore, *E* cannot be disentangled into non-evaluative description *D* that is co-extensive with *E* plus an evaluation that gives the evaluative orientation of *E*.³³

The basic idea of the argument is that if the entailment relation between non-evaluative and evaluative content is the appropriate one, and if one can disentangle the contents, then the non-evaluative description has the same extension as the thick term. But arguably there is no purely descriptive equivalent to a thick term.

It has to be agreed that it is difficult to believe that thick concepts always have purely descriptive equivalents. Consider again the concept of courageousness. What purely descriptive concept would share the same extension? Let us suppose that courageous actions are done in spite of danger and involve overcoming fear. Now, it has to be acknowledged that there are behaviours, such as the attempt by someone who can hardly swim to save a child drowning in deep waters, which correspond to this description but which fail to be courageous. Such actions are silly or foolhardy, but not courageous. (Tappolet 2004: 214)

If the connection was one of entailment, without understanding the evaluative orientation that the non-evaluative content entails, one could master its extension, which is not clearly the case. So, this *simple view* does not seem to do the trick. Separabilists need to establish a different connection between both contents.

Speakers think, as Väyrynen puts it, that e.g. “selfish actions are bad in a certain way *because* or *in virtue of* the agent giving a certain degree of priority to herself over others”, thus the connection between both contents needs to be explanatory, without the non-evaluative content entailing the evaluative content. One way to explain the connection is to appeal to the one we have just provided, the *in virtue of* connection, which is weaker than entailment, thus avoiding the argument from McDowell. For example, the meaning of a thick term like ‘selfish’ would be analysed as *x is bad in virtue of some instance of the agent giving a certain degree of priority to herself over others*. Since we are claiming that the evaluation is such because of some instance, we are not claiming that the non-evaluative content entails the evaluative content, but that because of the different contextual features from which the instance of an *agent giving a certain degree of priority to herself over others* arises the particular evaluation obtains.³⁴ This

³³ I am using the version on Väyrynen (2016).

³⁴ Cf. Tappolet (2004).

means that, although this particular instance that satisfies the description results in a negative evaluation, another instance that satisfies the same description may not result in the same evaluation.

The biggest worry with this proposal that it is unclear what is being restricted by the contextual features that the instance that satisfies the description arises from that allows for the extension of the term to be determined, and if grasping its extension can be made without appealing to a previous understanding of the thick term itself—if not, the analysis would be circular.

Another option for separabilists is the one proposed by Elstein and Hurka (2009). Their proposal locates evaluative content in truth-conditional meaning. The distinction with other proposals is that in the “first pattern” of their analysis of thick terms the non-evaluative content is partially specified in their meaning and it plays the role of specifying the good-making or bad-making non-evaluative properties of a general type.

Surely there is room between these extremes for a category of thick (or ‘thick-ish’) concepts whose descriptive component specifies good- or right-making properties to some degree but not completely, saying only that they must be of some specified general type but not selecting specific properties within that type—that is left to evaluation. (Elstein & Hurka 2009: 521)

For the “first-pattern” analysis non-evaluative content determine the area “in conceptual space” which the relevant good-making properties can be found. Thus, any use of the term that associates it with properties outside that area is a misuse. But the analysis is impervious to McDowell’s argument, because mastering the non-evaluative content is not sufficient to “select the specific properties within the type” that is determined by such content. Given that selecting is necessary to determine the extension of the term; although evaluative and non-evaluative can be disentangled, it would not be possible to master the extension of a thick term without understanding its evaluative orientation; thus, denying the first premise of the argument against separabilism.

In the “second-pattern” of the analysis the global thin evaluation is supplemented by an embedded thin evaluation within the non-evaluative description.³⁵ This “means that we cannot determine the extension of the thick concept without determining the extension of the embedded thin one, that is, without making some evaluations.” (Elstein & Hurka 2009: 526) Here is their illustration of the second pattern:

An initial analysis of ‘x is an act of integrity’ therefore runs something like ‘x is good, and x involves an agent’s sticking to a significantly good goal despite distractions and temptations, where this property makes any act that has it good,’ and where the second ‘good’ indicates an embedded evaluation. Given this analysis, we can only know what counts as integrity if we know which goals are independently good, and there can be disputes about this. (527)

³⁵ The second pattern is supposed to work for terms that denote virtues and vices.

Again, to reinforce the mantra of Elstein and Hurka's proposal the extension of the term is determined by the evaluation. The non-evaluative content is insufficient to determine the extension, because one needs to use the embedded evaluation to determine it. As they themselves put it: "Given this analysis, it is impossible to determine the extension of 'courageous' without knowing what count as good goals, a topic about which there can again be disagreements."

So, there are a couple of options for the separabilist to choose from that satisfy the requirements of providing analysis for thick terms that assume that evaluative and non-evaluative are disentangled and explain how those two aspects are related. Notice that if separabilism is true, and non-evaluative content does not entail evaluation, then the gap *is-ought* is left unscathed. Furthermore, separability views only require for explaining how evaluative and non-evaluative are tangled by using thin concepts and non-evaluation description. To sum up, a quote from Väyrynen (2016):

Separability promises to make it clear how thick terms are both evaluative and descriptive: their evaluative contents will be provided by independently intelligible paradigmatic evaluative concepts (thin concepts, or affective concepts, or good-in-a-way concepts), and their non-evaluative meanings will be inherited from distinct non-evaluative contents.

As for non-separabilists, since thick terms are irreducibly thick, the evaluative and non-evaluative content cannot be separated and their meaning involves a combination of the two, the challenge is to explain how the two contents are combined with one another with at least the same explanatory force and the same simplicity that separabilist views explain it. We need to know what we are gluing together. However, it is rather odd for the non-separabilist to say that purely non-evaluative content and evaluative content are glued together. There is no purely evaluative content in the first place. How then should we understand the idea that thick terms are irreducibly thick without talking about a combination of evaluative and non-evaluative contents? The question cannot be answered by merely claiming that there is some semantic device that irreducibly entangles everything. For instance, entailment does not work, because a term entails more things than what constitutes its meaning.³⁶

So, what are non-separabilists to do? The main idea is that thick terms have practical import, they are intrinsically relevant. So, to grasp their meaning their practical relevance is also required to be grasped. To know the predicate's extension the evaluative and non-evaluative content are irreducibly needed for determining the practical relevance of thick terms. The main issue with this simple view has to do with the disputable claim that all thick terms have practical relevance, something that the view is assuming to be the case.

The separabilist and non-separabilist answer to the "combination question" carry important consequences to how one answers the "location question", which shows that the two issues are closely related. Both views about the combination question typically locate the evaluative content as an element

³⁶ Crucially, for non-separabilists both evaluative and non-evaluative are part of the thick term's meaning.

of the truth-conditional content of thick terms. The fact that they do is important for challenging the *is-ought* gap, because only if the evaluation is an element of the truth-conditional content can the gap be bridged; if it is not, then thick terms are not a counter-example to Hume's Law.³⁷

What does it mean for evaluation to be a part of the truth-conditional content of thick terms? It means that it is at least partly what determines the term's extension. Therefore—assuming compositionality—the truth-conditions of utterances (T-utterances, for short) involving thick terms partly depend on evaluation. The claim that evaluation is part of T-utterances' semantic meaning is what characterises the semantic view about the "location question". The opposing view—let us call it pragmatic view—claims that the evaluative aspect of thick terms is not located in their semantic content, but it is triggered by pragmatic devices, e.g. conversational implicatures, or pragmatic presuppositions. To decide which view is the most plausible one should evaluate how each view explains the linguistic data available about thick terms.

The first important piece of data has to do with how global evaluations are connected with particular descriptions.

(L1)# 'Torturing an innocent person is malicious and not bad in anyway.'

(L2)# 'It was courageous of Aristides de Sousa Mendes to disobey Salazar's orders and not good in anyway.'

The infelicity of (L1–2) is easily explained by the semantic view. Both T-utterances are odd because the evaluation that is part of the thick terms' semantic content is contradicted by the last evaluation in each utterance. The oddness is the same oddness that we would have by recognizing a contradictory utterance. The pragmatic needs to say that some sort of pragmatic implicature or presupposition has failed. So, both views seem to account for this first datum rather easily.

However, some thick terms not only convey a negative or positive evaluation, but can also be used to convey both. Usual examples are with terms like *cruel*, *brutal*, and *frugal*. If the evaluation is supposed to be part of the term's semantic content, then one would naturally expect for such terms to not display such contextual variation. Nonetheless they do. Thus, the second challenge is to explain this. The pragmatic view can meet this challenge easily: since the evaluation is triggered by pragmatic devices, it is rather normal for it to display context-sensitivity—perhaps given this view we should expect even more context variation; and this could mean that the view needs some fine-tuning. Notwithstanding, the issue seems to be a lot more difficult for the semantic view to deal with. If the evaluation is part of the semantic content, then evaluation being context-sensitive seems to imply that a thick term like 'cruel' does not denote the same property for each of its (literal) uses—which is highly counter-intuitive. A more promising approach is to explain the atypical uses of seeming context-sensitive thick terms as non-literal uses. Thus, when 'cruel' is used to convey a positive evaluation it is

³⁷ Given that implication, like all logic relations, deals with truth-conditions.

being used non-literally—i.e. its use conveys what the speaker intends to and its (literal) semantic content. Another option, is to claim that the evaluation is part of the semantic content, but that its valence is denoted by a variable, allowing one to have the same semantic content (for which evaluation is part of) with context-sensitive valences.

An even more problematic challenge for the semantic view, though, has to do with the evaluative content of thick terms projecting over embedment of operators that block the truth-conditional content—which is a characteristic of implicatures and presuppositions.³⁸ Consider the following examples:

(L3)

Jane: 'Lawrence displays lewd behaviour when he's around you, Emma.'

Emma: 'Lawrence isn't lewd.'

(L4)

Lawrence: 'I think Jane believes that I'm lewd.'

Tatiana: 'You might be.'

(L5)

Florence: 'Tatiana is in love with Lawrence.'

Margaret: 'No, she isn't.'

(L6)

Joseph: 'Florence has three beautiful children.'

Greg: 'No she hasn't. She has two.'

(L7)

Laura: 'Joseph quit smoking.'

Peter: 'He might have.'

The last example (L5) is just to show that when embedded in negation the semantic content does not project. What Margaret does not entail (quite on the contrary) that Lawrence is fond of Tatiana. The same would go with under *might* or under implication—'You might be.' does not entail that she is. However, when we have T-utterances, the evaluation projects. In what way?

Consider now that Emma and Tatiana are lewd-objectors, in the sense that they believe that nothing is (negatively) correctly evaluated as being *lewd*—i.e. acts (or persons) are not bad because they display sexually overtness (or behave sexually overt). Thus, according to lewd-objectors there is no such thing that counts as lewd—assuming the semantic view. Given all this, the exchanges (L3-4) would be very odd. Lewd-objectors would still refuse to utter e.g. 'Lawrence isn't lewd.' and 'Lawrence might be lewd.' and this can be explained because evaluation or some evaluative aspect projects. This is an unusual behaviour for semantic content—as (L5) shows—but natural behaviour when it comes to

³⁸ Cf. Väyrynen (2009, 2013) and Eklund (2011, 2013).

implicatures and presuppositions—as (L6) suggests. The implicatures that Florence has no more than three children is not denied by Greg’s statement.³⁹ The same works with presuppositions. In the case of Laura and Peter’s exchange, the presupposition projects when embedded with ‘might—’i.e. it is still presupposed that Joseph is a smoker.

So, the pragmatic view explains the projection phenomenon quite easily. For the semantic view, however, the explanation is not so straightforward—semantic content should not project under embedding. One way of explaining it is to suggest that, although evaluative content is part of the truth-conditional semantics, uses of evaluatives typically trigger embedded evaluative conversational implicatures. The idea is that there is two distinct evaluative contents: one that is part of truth-conditional content and one that is typically triggered with the use of the term under embedding. This explains why lewd-objectors would not be willing to assert e.g. ‘Lawrence might be lewd.’ Because the utterance would trigger the implicature that there is the possibility that Lawrence is negatively evaluated for displaying sexually overt behaviour.⁴⁰ Another option is to appeal to the idea that evaluative content, although relevant for determining the truth-conditions of T-utterances, is semantically presupposed and not part of the at-issue content. (See Cepollaro 2015 and Cepollaro & Stojanovic 2016) One of the issues with this latter view is that it is controversial what the connection between presuppositions and truth-conditions is. For instance, the use of negation is supposed to block truth-conditional content, since we naturally think that we are rejecting said content. However, it does not do so regarding content generated from implicatures or pragmatic presuppositions. Compare the following data from Väyrynen (2013: 66) with example L3.

(N1) Whether or not Isolde is chaste, she is in no way good for her sexual restraint.

(N1*) # Whether or not Isolde is chaste, she in no way shows sexual restraint.

N1 is the appropriate way to block the evaluative content conveyed by the use of ‘chaste’; however L3 is not. Notice that the use of ‘chaste’ under the embedding *whether or not* is perfectly felicitous with its denial. Not the case for N1* though. It is infelicitous to ascribe to Isolde the property of being chaste and then denying the associated description of what being chaste is. If evaluation was part of the truth-conditional content, then N1 should be as odd as N1*.

Given these data one may think that the appropriate solution is to adopt a (fully) pragmatic view regarding the “location question”.⁴¹ However, in order to avoid prima facie incompatibility with all the data and to ensure that the connection between non-evaluative and evaluative content is strong enough

³⁹ I am assuming that the implicatures in question are generalised, and not particularised. Evaluatives typically convey evaluative content; thus, it would be odd to claim that the evaluative content their use conveys depends on particular features of the context.

⁴⁰ Cf. Kyle (2013).

⁴¹ I am assuming that Cepollaro (2015) and Cepollaro and Stojanovic (2016) are somewhat in-between semantic and pragmatic views.

to explain our intuitions regarding our daily use of thick terms, the most plausible way out for proponents of the pragmatist view is to endorse a view which claims that the evaluative content is generated via generalised conversational implicatures.

It is important to this account that a conversational explanation of some implication of an utterance needn't be specific to its particular context. Implications can become "generalized" in the sense that they are triggered by default by saying a certain type of thing. Without requiring special contextual features to arise. Since generalized implications are present in all literal utterances in normal contexts unless special contextual circumstances defeat them, a pragmatic account of the relationship between thick terms and concepts and evaluation can explain why thick terms and concepts are very intimately connected to evaluation and the evaluations to which they are connected may be easily mistaken for aspects of semantic meaning. (Väyrynen 2012: 260)

The explanation thus appeals to generalised conversational implicatures. This guarantees that the implications are triggered by the typical uses of evaluatives and simultaneously the evaluative content is not part of the truth-conditions of T-utterances, since the evaluative content is not what the main point of T-utterance, but only what is generally implicated by them. This fits well with the available data.⁴²

One important consequence of this sort of pragmatic approach regarding the "location question" is that thick terms are not semantically evaluative, which means that the evaluative content conveyed by their use and the non-evaluative content are separable—i.e. pragmatic views naturally fit well with separabilist accounts—and, furthermore, for the same reason, thick terms cannot be used as counterexamples to Hume's Law.

Since most of the data hinges on the issue of (at least some) thick terms being objectionable and (arguably) so are thin terms, the data should also support the claim that not even thin terms are semantically evaluative,⁴³ however this latter claim is highly disputable, which may undermine a pragmatic approach for thick terms as well.

Claiming that thin and thick terms are semantically alike (e.g. the claim that neither thick nor thin terms are semantically evaluative) carries important commitments regarding "the delineation question". This latter question is about whether there is a sharp boundary between thin or thick—i.e. *is the thin/thick distinction a distinction in kind or is it a distinction in terms of degree?* If thin and thick are both semantically non-evaluative, then it is natural to assume that the distinction is not in kind, but simply in degree. If there is no sharp boundary, then there are no thick or thin terms strictly speaking, but thicker (or thinner) terms. Of course, if pragmatic views about the location of evaluative content for thick terms do not apply to thin terms, then the distinction seems to be in kind and not merely a distinction of degree, because thin terms would be semantically evaluative, while thick terms would not.

⁴² See Väyrynen (2012, 2013) for more details.

⁴³ Sundell (2016) claims something of this kind about aesthetic terms, as we will see in the next section.

As the reader will notice a few sections ahead proponents of the view that the assumption that evaluatives are semantically evaluative is unfounded are going to motivate a sort of separabilist view, where it is pragmatics all the way down that is responsible for evaluatives conveying evaluative content. This view is necessarily more *extreme* than a separabilist view on thick terms, because it purportedly applies to every evaluative term, including thin ones.

3.1.2 *The verdictive/substantive distinction*

A distinction that I believe it is also worth considering, for it will play an important role in how Sundell can accommodate the most recent linguistic data on the use of evaluative adjectives—specifically, on aesthetic adjectives—is the distinction between substantive and verdictive adjectives. Three caveats before going into the verdictive/substantive distinction *per se*: (i) Zangwill is concerned with understanding the connection between substantive aesthetic judgments and verdictive ones. I will ignore that for the time being and focus on the distinction itself. (ii) Zangwill is talking about judgments, not terms. Nothing entails that the distinction crosses over to terms. However, the most natural explanation for the distinction at the level of judgment is that the distinction occurs at the level of terms. (iii) The distinction mirrors the thin/thick distinction in many ways, but, contrary, to the latter, the verdictive/substantive applies mainly to aesthetic judgments (or terms).

The distinction comes from Zangwill (1995). Here is how he puts it:

Let us call verdictive aesthetic judgements those judgements to the effect that things are beautiful or ugly, or that they have or lack aesthetic merit or value. (I group these together for the time being.) However, we also judge that things are dainty, dumpy, graceful, garish, delicate, balanced, warm, passionate, brooding, awkward and sad. Let us call these judgements substantive aesthetic judgements. (317)

Call verdictive terms those whose literal meaning involves very little information about the object it purportedly applies to or does not apply to and substantive adjectives those whose literal meaning also involves information about the object it purportedly applies or does not apply to. Hence, when agents judge something as beautiful or tasty they typically are not conveying information about an object other than that it has “aesthetic merit”—or as Sundell (2016) would claim about ‘tasty’ it approximates to the target flavour. The judgment, by itself, says very little about what properties the object has or does not have. The contrast is clear when agents judge something as garish. Garish-judgments do say something substantive about the object that has or does not have the garish-making properties—e.g. a judgment which attributes the property of *being garish* to a shirt, is substantively describing the shirt; as bright and not simply as lacking “aesthetic merit” or as lacking sufficient approximation to a target colour or colour combination the agent has in mind.

It is important to address whether there are good reasons to focus one's inquiry in verdictive judgments or whether what matters, evaluatively speaking, is substantive judgments.⁴⁴ What matters for present purposes, though, is the distinction itself and not how close it is to the thin/thick distinction that I have previously described. One may describe the distinction between thin and thick evaluative terms in a very similar vein: thin terms are those which merely ascribe “(de)merit” in some sense to an object, while thick terms are used to claim something informative about an object's make up or characteristics as well as ascribing it “(de)merit” in some sense. When one claims that Dick Cheney is dishonest, one is not merely conveying that he is morally faulty, one is also conveying information about how his character is.

Again, the reader will notice further on that, given the proximity between the thin/thick distinction, the verdictive/substantive distinction will play an important role in arguing against the view that one has no reason to assume that evaluatives are semantically evaluative.

3.1.3 High/Low Pressure distinctions

Another distinction that I would like the reader to consider is the high/low-pressure distinction. Evaluative claims differ according to the weight of the normative burdens speakers place on their interlocutors. Some terms—like ‘tasty’ or ‘funny’—,when used, do not place heavy normative burdens upon the speaker's interlocutors; while others—like ‘beautiful’ or ‘(morally) wrong’—, when used, speakers intend to place heavy normative burdens upon their interlocutors. As Sundell (2016: 796) points out this distinction has to do with predicates like ‘beautiful’ being considered more objective, while the subjectivity of predicates like ‘tasty’ and ‘funny’ lie “pretty close to the surface”. Putting it in a different way, low-pressure predicates are typically used to also partially convey how something strikes us, while high-pressure predicates are not. This results in a difference on normative commitments that the speakers tend to expect from their interlocutors when making low-pressure or high-pressure evaluative claims.⁴⁵

These distinctions “crosscut one another” (Sundell 2016: 797). There are low-pressure and high-pressure verdictives and there are low-pressure and high-pressure substantive terms. Sundell (2016: 798) rightly claims that relativist and contextualist theories perfectly fit terms which display the low-pressure verdictive combo, but once one expands them to evaluatives that are not low-pressure and verdictive they do not fit as perfectly. The reason is straightforward: both theories endorse (A1–2) assumptions. More specifically, both theories agree that evaluative predicates express that an “object is [somehow] pleasing to an experiencer” (Sundell 2016: 798). But when one applies this claim to high-pressure or substantive evaluative terms it is less clear that they express how some object appear to the subject or

⁴⁴ On the debate whether Aesthetics should focus on verdictive terms, like ‘beautiful’, ‘tasty’..., or whether it should focus on substantive terms, like ‘garish’, ‘dainty’, ... see e.g. Sibley 1959 and Zangwill 1995.

⁴⁵ On the low/high-pressure distinction see Railton (1998).

how some object is somehow pleasing, respectively. In terms of subjectivity, high-pressure evaluatives do not appear subjective, at least on the surface, as clearly as low-pressure evaluatives do. In terms of evaluation, it is unclearer, when compared to verdictive adjectives, whether substantive adjectives literally express evaluative content or not. This implies that the dialectics for undermining assumptions (A1–2) is more straightforward. If it is shown that there are no good reasons to endorse (A1–2) with respect to low-pressure verdictives, then it is easier to show that the same applies across the board to every evaluative adjective.

So, the path forward for undermining the assumptions is clear now. In the next sections, I describe how equipped with the metalinguistic negotiations framework one purportedly achieves this.

3.2 A case for a category of evaluatives

In this section I make the case that the metalinguistic negotiations framework is insufficiently equipped to account for how some value-words govern agents' interactions and, hence, supporting the claim that one has good reason to endorse the view that some value-words are semantically evaluative. To do so, I explain the metalinguistic negotiations framework and how it accounts for the persistence (and normativity) of evaluative disagreements. Then I argue that the metalinguistic negotiations do not capture the right sort of engagement agents display with (at least some) evaluative adjectives. I conclude the section by making the case that one should consider that evaluatives belong to a particular linguistic class.

3.2.1 The puzzle from disagreement

Contrary to (most) descriptive terms, the truth-value of sentences containing evaluatives are considered by many to somehow depend on the relativisation to an experiencer/appraiser. Not only, but especially, linguistic data and intuitions concerning evaluative disagreements has persuaded philosophers that to assess evaluative sentences' truth-value one has to build in the relativisation to an experiencer/appraiser as a relevant factor in the evaluative expression's meaning—either built in the linguistic meaning of the evaluative expression, as a context-sensitive element, or built in as a further parameter of the circumstance of evaluation.⁴⁶

Many believe that evaluative disagreements, regardless whether one considers that these disagreements are primarily about contradictory conative attitudes or primarily about contradictory beliefs, are such that it is possible that neither party involved in the disagreement are wrong about claiming what they do and, thus, are not rationally required to review their own views on the matter under dispute.

⁴⁶ I am distinguishing contextualist proposals from relativist proposals, but also proposals that add the standard of evaluation as a further parameter from proposals that include the parameter as part of a centred world parameter.

In order to illustrate the persuasiveness of the linguistic data and intuitions about evaluative disagreements consider the following two disagreements:

Disagreement 1

A: 'George Carlin is funny.'

B: 'No, he isn't. I find him just offensive.'

Disagreement 2

C: 'George Carlin is (was) a comedian.'

D: 'No, he isn't. He works (worked) in construction.'

Contrast the two disagreements. After considering them carefully, there is no remnant feeling that individual C and D could both (in some sense) be in the right about the matter under dispute. Carlin either was a comedian or he wasn't. Since he was, D has made a mistake when he asserted what he did about Carlin's occupation. In the case of Disagreement 1 there is at least the remnant feeling that it is (at least) possible that both individuals are (in some sense) right in evaluating George Carlin the way they do. If this feeling has enough bite to support some particular view about evaluatives is a different issue; the issue at hand simply concerns the distinctions between descriptive and evaluative disagreements.

The most fundamental contrast though is that for a disagreement like Disagreement 1 to occur speakers need not have a dispute about all the relevant (purely descriptive) facts that concern George Carlin's performances as a comedian. They may agree about all the facts and yet maintain the dispute regarding whether the performances are funny or not—this is why evaluative disagreements are *persistent*.

If the previous description is accurate, there is good evidence that evaluatives behave differently from descriptive terms and, as such, should belong to a particular linguistic class of their own. Recent work by Plunkett and Sundell has undermined the evidence that evaluatives should belong to a particular class of their own, by appealing to metalinguistic negotiations as an explanation to what is going during persistent evaluative disagreements.⁴⁷

Denying the assumptions leaves open how to explain the typical usage of so called evaluative adjectives to convey evaluative content.

With any relative gradable adjective, there are two bits of knowledge about the scale at play in our use of the term. On the one hand, there is our knowledge of the threshold. On the other hand, there is our knowledge about the object. Ordinarily, we exploit mutual knowledge of the threshold to convey information about the object: If we both know what the threshold for cost is, then I can use a word like 'expensive' to tell you something an object's price, namely that it's higher than the

⁴⁷ Cf. Plunkett & Sundell 2013 and Sundell 2011, 2016.

threshold. But there is a symmetry between the threshold and the object: Suppose that we both already know the object's price, but that I go on to inform you that the object is 'expensive'. In this case, I've communicated new information, not about the price (which we already knew), but about the threshold. I've communicated the information that the threshold is lower than the price of the object. This is the kind of usage that Barker (2002) calls a *metalinguistic* or *sharpening* usage of an expression, and this kind of usage forms the basis for the notion of a metalinguistic negotiation. (Sundell 2016: 802)

The explanation is that speakers typically use so called evaluative terms metalinguistically—they use them to sharpen thresholds, scales or the specific weight of dimensions (the latter only applies to multidimensional gradables, of course). This usage systematically occurs for gradables, because their scales and thresholds are typical underspecified.

Consider a context where Pau Gasol's height is shared knowledge among the participants and additionally it is shared knowledge that it is shared knowledge. One can only make sense of the claim that *Pau Gasol is tall* is to interpret the claim as not being about Pau Gasol's height *per se*, but about it hitting the threshold for tall (for a basketball player). But how does one go from a sharpening usage to conveying evaluative information? The answer is that speakers, when using a gradable metalinguistically, they are proposing what (usually, according to them) should be the threshold or scale for a specific a purpose.

Importantly, conveying the normative or evaluative content does not arise from the word being semantically evaluative and its usage triggering a standard determined by experiencer or appraiser standard occurs in spite of the relativisation to the standard not being encoded in the term's semantics. This paves the way for explaining the persistence of evaluative disagreements—speakers disagree about the sharpening of the term's linguistic features; whence, it is a natural consequence that these disagreements persist even if the parties involved agree about all the facts related with the dispute.

Consider the following quote from Sundell (2011):

In its most basic and general form, the puzzle is this: On the one hand, there is no disputing taste. On the other hand, there is disputing taste. The version of the puzzle I consider goes like this: Consider two speakers, Alphonse and Betty. Alphonse utters sentence (1a). Betty utters sentence (1b).

(1) (a) Eggo Waffle Cereal is delicious.

(b) Nuh uh, Eggo Waffle Cereal is not delicious.

Two intuitive ideas about dialogue (1) are in conflict with each other. On the one hand, it seems possible that neither Alphonse nor Betty is mistaken. On the other hand, it seems that Alphonse and Betty disagree. (267–8)

Sundell is describing the puzzle that has been at the forefront of the debate about evaluatives: the puzzle from persistent disagreement. In dialogue (1) Alphie and Betty disagree and intuitively their disagreement may still persist, even if they agree about all the relevant descriptive properties of Eggo Waffle Cereal. Persistent disagreements have this feature: they subsist, despite an absolute agreement about all the facts relevant to the dispute.

But, assuming that in (1) Alphie and Betty agree about all the (descriptive) properties of the Cereal, what are they disagreeing (so persistently) about. The natural answer is that they are disagreeing about value—i.e. they are disagreeing about if Eggo Waffle Cereal properties are worthy of a positive evaluation.

So, one interesting aspect of disagreements about aesthetic matters is that individuals tend to disagree even after they see eye to eye on all descriptive aspects. Another interesting aspect of the disagreement is that the evaluative content intuitively depends on a somewhat nonobjective aspect. Evaluating Eggo Waffle Cereal as delicious partially depends on some standard, on a specific palate. I do not claim that evaluating something is obviously partially subjective, but there is a strong intuition that evaluating something is not as objective as simply describing it.

Many philosophers believe that these evaluative disputes are canonical—e.g. Stephenson (2007), Kölbel (2009), Lasersohn (2005), and Gibbard (1990). By ‘canonical’ I mean what Plunkett and Sundell mean: speakers disagree because there is a conflict that arises from what they literally express by one of them using a sentence *e* and by the other using a sentence *f*. More precisely:

Definition of a Canonical Dispute: A dispute consisting in Speaker *A*’s utterance of *e* and Speaker *B*’s utterance of *f* is canonical just in case there are two objects *p* and *q* (propositions, plans, etc.) such that Speaker *A*’s utterance of *e* literally expresses *p* and Speaker *B*’s utterance of *f* literally expresses *q*, and *q* is fundamentally in conflict with *p* in the manner appropriate to objects of that type.

(By *p* entailing not-*q* in the case of propositions; by the satisfaction of *p* precluding the satisfaction of *q* in the case of desires; by *p*’s implementation precluding *q*’s implementation in the case of plans, etc.) (Plunkett & Sundell 2013: 9)⁴⁸

Spelling out the implications of considering persistent disagreements canonical: when individuals persistently disagree on evaluative matters there is some conflict that arises from the contents that sentences they use literally express, and hence so called evaluative adjectives turn out to be semantically evaluative. Specifically for Eggo Waffle case: the disagreement in (1) is an evaluative dispute that arises from the content of (1a) and (1b). The dispute is evaluative precisely because it is connected to the literal content of the adjective ‘delicious—’and (at least part of that content) is evaluative. Thus, if the persistent disagreements are canonical, then evaluatives are indeed linguistically evaluative. Hence,

⁴⁸ This specification accommodates non-cognitivist theories.

Sundell is required to deny that evaluative disagreements are canonical—he must claim that they are not about what is the value word literally expresses. Thus, part of his strategy ought to be to argue for persistent disagreements to be explained non-canonically—i.e. explain that the normativity involve in the disagreement has to do with something other than the gradable adjective’s literal meaning.

3.2.2 Metalinguistic negotiation and non-canonical disagreements

Non-canonical disagreements are not about the content literally expressed by the parties disagreeing. Thus, the challenge for anyone who wants to deny (A1–2) is to provide a non-canonical framework that explains the persistence in aesthetic disagreements—i.e. that captures the evaluative aspect of the disagreement and at the same time explains its tendency to persist despite an agreement about all the facts. Sundell (2016) argues that this phenomenon can be completely and coherently accounted for in a metalinguistic negotiation framework. Here is how Plunkett and Sundell (2013) introduce the notion:

We call a dispute [...] that employs competing metalinguistic usages of an expression, and that reflects a disagreement about the proper deployment of linguistic representations [...] a metalinguistic negotiation.

Two features serve to characterize the class of linguistic disputes that we are interested in—the class of disputes we label ‘metalinguistic negotiations’. First, metalinguistic negotiations employ a distinctive communicative mechanism—metalinguistic usage. And, second, they concern a distinctive normative question—how best to use a word relative to a context. (3)

So, a metalinguistic negotiation is a certain dispute that reflects a disagreement about how a certain expression should be used and for it to occur it is necessary that, in a context of a dispute, speakers employ different metalinguistic usages of the same (or relevantly similar) expression. Metalinguistic negotiation are genuine evaluative disagreements, but about how speakers ought to use a specific word. To show this, consider an example from Ludlow (2014):

Consider the dispute I heard on WFAN (a sports talk radio station in New York) when Sports Illustrated announced its “50 greatest athletes of the 20th Century.” Some listeners called in complaining that a horse—Secretariat—had made the list, while host Chris Russo defended the choice. Clearly this is a dispute about what should be in the extension of ‘athlete’, and the callers wanted to argue that a horse had no place here. It is not as though the dispute would be resolved if Secretariat were a little bit faster or could throw a baseball, so it seems hard to imagine that these are vagueness cases. (78)

The depicted example is seemingly a metalinguistic negotiation.⁴⁹ The matter under dispute is about the meaning of the term ‘athlete’, and not about Secretariat’s properties or even how each of the participants feels about the horse’s accomplishments. The participants probably agree on all of those issues: they agree about the horse’s accomplishments and they agree about Secretariat’s properties. Yet, they still disagree about if horses should be part of the extension of the predicate ‘athlete’. The dispute is normative, because the dispute is about what concept should the use of term express.⁵⁰

One might think that the conjunction of (2a) ‘Secretariat is an athlete’ and (2b) ‘Secretariat is not an athlete’ expresses a contradiction. However, given the metalinguistic framework according to which the disagreement is being analysed, ‘athlete’ is being used to refer to the word itself—or to its linguistic features—and not to denote a property. Since the disagreement is about what should count as part of the extension of the term ‘athlete’, resolving the dispute does not depend on any facts about Secretariat or other athletes. Hence, the persistence is explained. The dispute is genuine because the radio host and the caller are using ‘athlete’ metalinguistically—i.e. in the same way.

Speakers engage in metalinguistic negotiations for different sorts of reasons. In this particular case, it is quite possible that the caller and the radio host are negotiating the usage of the word ‘athlete’ because they have particular views on *personhood* and those views are connected with what should count as an athlete, but that need not be what the purpose of the negotiation is.⁵¹ Its straightforward purpose is to determine a threshold for what counts as athlete,⁵² but the deeper purpose is to debate our social commitments with non-human animals. Metalinguistic negotiations are of social and historic import because meanings “fill specific and important functional roles in our practices.” (Plunkett & Sundell 2013: 20) The negotiation about word-meaning does not exhaust its role on the linguistic front; how speakers use words matter—socially and historically. Some word-meanings are more crucial to human social interactions than others, that is why some words, typically called evaluatives are more prone to be used metalinguistically than others—or so can Plunkett and Sundell claim.

⁴⁹ Another example of a metalinguistic negotiation has to do with the extension of term ‘planet’. It is also described in Ludlow 2014: “More recent scientific discoveries have again called into question the proper definition of the word ‘planet’. To some extent these definitional disputes have made it into the public sphere with the question of whether Pluto should count as being in the range of ‘planet’.” (42)

⁵⁰ Plunkett and Sundell describe the dispute in a very similar way: “On this understanding of the dispute, each speaker literally expresses a true proposition given the concept they in fact express with their term. But beyond that, the speakers pragmatically advocate for the concept that they are using and in virtue of which they assert those propositions. Thus, their metalinguistic dispute reflects a genuine disagreement about how to use the word ‘athlete’. In particular, it is a debate in conceptual ethics about which among a range of competing concepts, and in particular, which of C1 or C2, is most appropriate to the conversation and should be expressed by the term ‘athlete’.” (2013: 17)

⁵¹ See Rast (Forthcoming) on this. It is unclear what could be the motivation for the dispute given the absence of more information; notwithstanding, the motivation for the dispute need not conflate with what the disagreement is or with what its purpose is about. An indication that the two should not conflate is that the metalinguistic dispute holds even if the parties share the same view on *personhood*.

⁵² If the case is supposed to be a metalinguistic negotiation, it better be that the candidate properties for an entity to count as an athlete are gradable—rationality, linguistic competence, physical ability...

The view, thus, accounts for what looks like every bit of important data. It accounts for: (i) the persistence of evaluative disagreements, (ii) the evaluative nature of those disagreement, (iii) the substantiveness of the disputes, (iv) the social and historical importance of value discourse and (v) the systemically evaluative usage of a particular set of words, in spite of there not being a class of words which are semantically evaluative.

One might argue against the metalinguistic framework by claiming that evaluative terms are semantically evaluative precisely because they have played an important functional role in our practices. At some point said role must have been determined and that feature is plausibly part of the core meaning of evaluative adjectives.⁵³ I believe Sundell would be on board with this. The only commitment he is required to take is that said functional role is triggered in spite of evaluative adjectives having non-evaluative meaning.

3.2.3 *Non-canonical disagreements and gradability*

Metalinguistic negotiations occur connected with the metalinguistic usage of terms because they are semantically underspecified with respect to their scale, with respect to the threshold and, in case they are multidimensional, with respect to the weight of each dimension, just as it is the case for other gradable adjectives.⁵⁴ Thus, with metalinguistic usages speakers can focus on different aspects—and negotiate how the adjective should be used according to the different aspects that are underspecified.

Speakers can (a) agree on the dimensions making up the baldness scale and how those dimensions are weighted in and what the threshold is along the resulting scale, and use competing ‘baldness’ claims to argue about the state of a subject’s hair. Or (b) they can agree on the dimensions of baldness and how those dimensions are weighted against each and the state of a subject’s hair, and use competing ‘baldness’ claims to argue about the threshold along the scale. Or (c) they can agree on the dimensions of baldness and the state of the subject’s hair and use competing ‘baldness’ claims to argue about the weighing of the dimensions. Or (d) they can agree that baldness has something to do with lacking head hair and agree on the state of the subject’s hair, and use competing ‘baldness’ claims to argue about which specific hair-lacking features constitute the dimensions that make up the scale in the first place.⁵⁵

⁵³ A related worry is spelled out by Rast (2016: 408): “[I]s this [the functional role of an expression not depending substantially on the concept it expresses] really plausible? To me it is not, for it seems hard to find a way in which a social practice with regards to a term may come into being without being based on a widely accepted meaning of that term, or in other words, *because* the term has that specific meaning and not another one.” Although the worry is understandable, proponents of the metalinguistic framework endorse that the social practice with regards to a term comes into being because the term has a specific descriptive meaning that is of import to our practices; it so happens that the meaning is prone to negotiation, due to the underspecification of their scale, threshold or dimension. What they need not endorse is that those same practices come into being because the term is evaluative.

⁵⁴ On previous sections we have seen that these are some of common features of gradable adjectives.

⁵⁵ Sundell is following Benbaji (2009)’s ‘bald’ analysis.

It may help to consider the following disagreement about the word ‘tasty’.

[S]uppose that Alphie and Betty own not a restaurant but a bakery and that they are discussing a batch of cupcakes sitting before them. Here are three different scenarios that can occur in such a setting.

CUPCAKE 1

(9) Alphie: These cupcakes are tasty!

(10) Betty: No, these cupcakes are not tasty. You’re thinking of the ones in the other room. These ones are made of wax.

CUPCAKE 2

(11) Alphie: These cupcakes are tasty!

(12) Betty: No, they’re passable, but not tasty. These are for our very best clients and I know we can do better.

CUPCAKE 3

(13) Alphie: These cupcakes are tasty!

(14) Betty: No, they’re passable, but not tasty. They’re perfectly sugary and fluffy, but boring. Let’s add a subtle hint of smokiness. (Sundell 2016: 810)

In scenario CUPCAKE 1 Alphie and Betty disagree on a purely descriptive fact of the world—if the cupcakes have the property of tasting like cupcakes. One expects their disagreement to be solved, once Alphie understands that the cupcakes he is referring to do not have the tasty-making properties. In the scenarios CUPCAKE 2 and CUPCAKE 3 Alphie and Betty disagreement is evaluative and, as such, it is possible that the disagreements will subsist even after they agree about all the relevant descriptive facts.

In CUPCAKE 2 Alphie and Betty disagree on the relevant threshold of tastiness they should apply in order to please their costumers. Notice that they share the same goal—sell cupcakes. In order to reach that goal they also agree that they should make tasty cupcakes; however they disagree about how tasty they should be. Betty believes that their present flavour is still insufficient for them to be tasty for the fulfilment of their goal. The normative aspect in the disagreement is triggered by the particular interests that those involved share. The flavour that both bakers should aim at is determined by the goal they have set.

In CUPCAKE 3 the disagreement is described as being a disagreement concerning how they should proceed in order to achieve the goal they have set. Thus, they agree on the goal, they agree on what they should aim at to achieve said goal, but they disagree on how to aim at what they should aim at to achieve their goal.

Betty and Alphie in CUPCAKE 2, according to Sundell, are disagreeing about what the appropriate threshold is: “Because they know what the cupcakes taste like, and they agree on what the

target taste is like, their dispute in CUPCAKE 2 takes the form of a metalinguistic negotiation about whether these cupcakes are close enough to that flavor to merit the label ‘tasty.’” (2016, p. 811)

CUPCAKE 3, on the other hand, is described as a disagreement about the appropriate scale of tastiness according to the context. The appropriate scale will depend on their interest of selling cupcakes, and more specifically on how future clients prefer their cupcakes, to what taste should it approximate to: “Alphie has in mind a traditional understanding of the tastymaking features of a cupcake, but Betty is not satisfied with that proposal for a scale. Perhaps because she [...] recognizes that the usual scale along which cupcakes are measured is not suitable for this set of circumstances” (2016: 811).

The Cupcake examples are clear about what one should expect where metalinguistic negotiations are concerned. According to Sundell, ‘tasty’ is semantically underspecified along its scale—the relevant threshold may be the focus of the negotiation (CUPCAKE 2); the scale itself (what the target flavour should be) may be the focus of the negotiation (CUPCAKE 3). These negotiations occur the way they do because Alphie and Betty share a common goal. Suppose that it is not so. Alphie may be—without Betty’s knowledge—trying to undermine the success of their bakery (suppose that Alphie has been hired by their competitors to sabotage their business). Considering again CUPCAKE 2 and CUPCAKE 3. No, they would be talking past each other. In CUPCAKE 2 Betty would be talking about what should be the relevant threshold (given her goal of selling the cupcakes) and Alphie would be talking about what the threshold should be (given his goal of undermining Betty’s plans).

In CUPCAKE 3 Betty and Alphie would be considering different goals according to each they are determining different relevant scales—hence, they would not be genuinely engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation, or genuinely disagreeing.⁵⁶ Consider another example from Sundell 2016—the Sharp Example.

So consider two chefs, Alphie and Betty, discussing the matter of whether their knives are ‘sharp’. Alphie and Betty have just opened a restaurant together, one with a terrifically eclectic menu. Alphie has until now worked at a delicatessen while Betty has spent years apprenticing at a high-end sushi restaurant. As they test out their equipment, Alphie and Betty take turns trying out one of the new knives. Alphie utters the expression in (7), and Betty replies with the expression in (8).

(7) This knife is sharp.

(8) No, it’s not sharp.

Betty might go on to suggest that the knife be used for rough cuts of meat, but that it not be used for their finer cuts or for fish, which it could bruise. Alphie, if he chose to dig in his heels, might

⁵⁶ Assuming that speakers are required to have a common goal or interest to genuinely engage in a metalinguistic negotiation, one questions if the Secretariat case is really a metalinguistic negotiation.

observe that at the delicatessen, even the finest cuts of meat were easily sliced with a knife this fine.

(803)

Once again, Alphonse and Betty share a common goal: to make their new restaurant a commercial success. An apparent minor issue like the sharpness of the new knives in the restaurant may be of paramount importance to the restaurant's success. They both can engage in a metalinguistic negotiation regarding the predicate 'sharp' exactly because they share this common goal and also because the use of the predicate is connected with them achieving their common goal—keep in mind this is possible because the predicate is semantically underspecified across its scale. They are negotiating what the appropriate threshold for sharpness should be, given the context of the dispute.

Assume Alphonse and Betty do not share the relevant common goals that would lead them to be genuinely engaging in a metalinguistic negotiation about the appropriate threshold for sharpness—although they still claim (7) and (8) and appear to be disagreeing about the word 'sharp'. Assume that Alphonse and Betty have totally different views on what their goal is; specifically they do not agree about what restaurant they should open—and that triggers the exchange: Alphonse believes their restaurant should be a burger house, while Betty thinks their restaurant should be a high-end sushi bar. Of course, they could disagree about how sharp their new knives should be, but they are not negotiating about the appropriate sharpness for the success of the restaurant. They have different views on what the restaurant is supposed to be; thus, they cannot negotiate about the appropriate threshold of sharpness for their restaurant's success. They seem to be talking past each other; Alphonse thinks that the knives should be at least X sharp (for a burger house) and Betty thinks that the knives should at least $X+n$ sharp (for a high-end sushi place). If this is right, then they are not genuinely disagreeing about the meaning of 'sharp'. Alphonse and Betty do not think a different threshold for sharpness should apply for a burger house and a different threshold for sharpness should apply for a sushi restaurant. It follows that for Alphonse and Betty to metalinguistically negotiate the meaning of 'sharp', the meaning of the word needs to be relevantly connected with their shared goals and interests.

In the case I am depicting the disagreement would have nothing to do with the appropriate meaning of the word 'sharp'. Alphonse and Betty's disagreement is normative, nonetheless; it is about what restaurant they should open for them to be successful. A common goal is shared: they both desire their restaurant to be successful. It is unproblematic for Sundell that the disagreement is evaluative, although (arguably) no metalinguistic negotiation occurs, because the disagreement is non-canonical, it is not about what 'sharp' expresses. This is beyond my point, what I would like to stress is that the metalinguistic usage of a term is connected with particular interests and goals that the agent has and that the disagreement is triggered by the shared goals of those involved. The negotiation subsists only until the relevant shared purpose—which triggers the disagreement—is in place.

3.2.4 Disagreeing for the right reasons

Although Marques (2017) argues that the linguistic data in Liao, McNally, and Meskin (2016) strongly indicate that Sundell (2016) theses are false,⁵⁷ I have shown that the available data can be coherently explained by Sundell. In spite of this, Sundell has not decisively shown that there is no independent motivation to hold that aesthetic adjectives are evaluative and that they are relative to a standard some way encoded in their semantics. Putting this another way: one still needs to assess if metalinguistic negotiation is sufficient to capture what evaluative persistent disagreements are about.

Normative disputes may be motivated by different sorts of reasons. May be motivated by merely practical reasons (e.g. Sundell's CUPCAKE and Sharp examples), for moral reasons (e.g. consider that the Secretariat example was motivated by different conception of personhood), for aesthetic reasons (e.g. consider an example where two individuals are disputing about how the formal features of a painting elicit aesthetic feeling for purely artistic reasons), and many other sorts of reasons. One does not wish (only) to capture persistent evaluative disputes that are motivated by merely practical reasons, one wishes to capture persistent evaluative disputes that are motivated by the *right reasons*—reasons that have to do with value. One reason for this is that our engagement with discourse about value does not stop once procedural or prudential reasons are settled.

Consider a prime-minister that is motivated by the following procedural reasons to claim that codfish is tasty: she is abroad, visiting the country with the biggest consumption of codfish *per capita*; she is the prime-minister of a country that is the major exporter of codfish and she wants her country's economy to do well this year. Hence, she publicly claims that codfish is tasty. She is doing her part to help her country's economy. The question is not that her reasons are (morally) illicit to perform an evaluative claim; her reasons, for all we know, are perfectly licit—she only wishes for the betterment of the lives of her fellow compatriots and she is being honest about codfish's tastiness. The question is that once she returns home one expects—again, assuming she was honest when she claimed that codfish was tasty—to maintain her claim and to act accordingly to her view about the codfish's tastiness, even after the practical reasons that motivated her claim are no longer in play. The case indicates that evaluative claims involve a commitment to what was claimed that goes beyond eventual procedural reasons that may have motivate it. Thus, it strongly suggests that, when it comes to claims about value (and disagreement involving such claims), there has to be more at play than just merely practical reasons. It is those reasons—the reasons that are not merely practical—that are the *right reasons* to engage in evaluative disputes.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ "All context-sensitivity would be that of regular relative gradable adjectives. But Liao et al. (2016)'s results indicate a) that aesthetic adjectives' context-sensitivity depends on aesthetic standards, and b) that the selection of an aesthetic standard is not determined by the immediate conversational context." (Marques 2017: 47)

⁵⁸ I am borrowing Teresa Marques's terminology here. See Marques 2017: 47–8.

Some of the core distinctive roles that evaluative discourse is presumed to play, besides its cognitive role, are that it normally expresses speakers' conative attitudes, that it is (normally) motivational, and that it serves a connection building role.

[...] These distinctive features require, in my view, a comprehensive explanation of how value discourse serves to communicate values, and stronger metanormative commitments than Sundell seems willing to undertake. (Marques 2017: 47–8)

Whatever the framework accounting for evaluative disagreement, the explanation of the phenomenon needs to not only concern its persistence but also its lingering motivation after the relevant practical matters have settled. That is what Marques (2017) intends to convey with what speakers express via evaluative discourse serving “a connection building role”. So, one expects that the framework is capable of accounting for persistent evaluative disagreements for reasons that persist, even when procedural reasons are no longer in play.

Thus far nothing has been said about metalinguistic negotiations being able to account for persistent evaluative disagreement for the *right reasons*. I have simply argued that explaining persistent disagreement does not suffice; one should account also for the disagreement occurring for reasons that are not merely practical. Next, I explain why metalinguistic negotiations fail to capture evaluative disagreements for reasons that go beyond the merely practical. In order to do so I will revisit the paradigmatic cases of metalinguistic negotiation and how they give rise to evaluative disagreements proper (not merely normative disagreements about word-use).

3.2.5 *What is missing from the negotiation*

Metalinguistic negotiations explain the persistence of disagreements where speakers are engaged in dispute about word-use. Those disagreements persist because the disagreement is not about (non-linguistic or linguistic) facts, but what the linguistic facts should be. Whence, metalinguistic negotiations are a specific class of normative disagreement. The normativeness of the disagreement arises from the negotiation being about how we should use words.

Consider the Secretariat example once again—which apparently involves a metalinguistic negotiation. Imagine that a listener has called the radio show because she believes that applying the predicate ‘athlete’ to Secretariat contradicts her conception of *personhood*. A metalinguistic dispute ensues. The radio host believes that ‘athlete’ should include non-human animals. Notice that different conceptions of *personhood* may have triggered the negotiation, notwithstanding, the goal of the negotiation (assuming that it is about the use of the word ‘athlete’) is not about determining what is the correct conception of personhood, but about determining how human social interactions and considerations about athletes should be governed; whether they should include non-human animals or not. This connects metalinguistic negotiations with motivational states.

To make this more explicit, consider another example: UN and the Bush Administration disagree about if waterboarding should be characterised as torture. For the Bush Administration, American interests at the time dictated that waterboarding should not be considered torture, for it was—according to the administration—an effective method to get crucial information to avoid potential terrorist attacks. Since American interests and the UN role did not converge on this matter, the two parties disagree on how they should use the word ‘torture’. The American Administration at the time and the UN have diverging interests and goals. Nonetheless, the dispute is triggered because it is a fundamental moral issue what should be included in the extension of the predicate ‘torture’. The parties engaging in the negotiation are engaging in the negotiation of a normative issue about how the word ‘torture’ should be used, but they are also engaging in a negotiation about morality, for what counts as *torture* is importantly connected with what agents find inadmissible in western liberal societies. What one finds (in)admissible largely determines how one acts; hence, metalinguistic negotiation seems to get the appropriate connection between metalinguistic usages and disputes and conative attitudes.

As I have stated the dispute between the UN and the Bush/Cheney Administration is not just about word-use, it is also moral. But if Sundell is on the right track and there is nothing evaluative in the semantic of the word ‘torture’ how can the dispute turn out to be moral too, i.e. about what is impermissible? The dispute is moral to the extent that our use of the word ‘torture’ has moral import. Said moral import, if one wants to take the denial of (A1) seriously, cannot be a result of the term’s putative normative meaning, its import has to be solely explained by appealing to its metalinguistic usage. Thus, the explanation would have to go something like this: *‘torture’ word-use matters morally because its descriptive meaning is appropriately connected with present social fabric and interactions.* It is because social interactions have developed in a particular way that whatever act is considered torture is considered impermissible and this results from there being an appropriate link between the descriptive meaning of the term (which in some regard can be negotiated) and the present social structures. This link is accidental and fairly loose and it is unclear—at least to me—what are the specific characteristics of social structures that need to be in place for such link to arise. Moreover, the link between ‘torture’ word-use and morality can break apart if different social structures are in place. This means that negotiating ‘torture’ word-use in other historical contexts where torture is largely practiced and socially accepted does not lead to moral considerations. The dispute about ‘torture’ metalinguistic usage in those historical context would still be normative—for it would be about how one should use ‘torture’—but negotiating e.g. what actions one should apply the word to would not lead to a negotiation about which actions are impermissible.

This may seem plausible about the word ‘torture’, which is a thick term, but what about paradigmatic examples of thin terms? For instance, the negotiation of the usage of the moral thin term ‘wrong’ seems to attach to the different social structures much more firmly. Imagine the following disagreement between Cheney and Kofi Annan—now deploying the metalinguistic use of the word ‘wrong’, instead of ‘torture’:

Annan: Mr. Vice President, you need to understand that waterboarding is wrong.

Cheney: No, I don't, because waterboarding isn't wrong.

The depiction of the disagreement between Annan and Cheney under the metalinguistic negotiation framework is that they are negotiating the usage of 'wrong', whether or not it should apply to waterboarding. What is particular about this negotiation is not that it also leads to moral considerations about waterboarding and, whence, that it involves a moral disagreement. Its particularity is that, whatever the social makeup, the normative negotiation about the use of 'wrong' leads to a moral disagreement. Arguably, this is so because moral thin terms (or verdictive terms) attach to social structures differently, more tightly, than moral thick terms (or substantive terms) do. This can be easily explained if we assume (A1) obtains: it is their purely evaluative meaning that explains that 'wrong' attaches to social practices more firmly than for instance 'torture' does.

I am not claiming that evaluative persistent disagreements are not, at least for the most part, metalinguistic negotiations. What I am claiming is that, even conceding that most evaluative disagreements are about word-usage, that cannot be the whole story; specifically, when it comes to negotiating the usage of thin terms, for the link between the metalinguistic negotiation of these terms and its evaluative considerations—including the conative attitudes associated with those considerations—is not as loose as Sundell's proposal implies.

Note that one has a very similar outcome when one goes from moral disagreements to aesthetic disagreements. Consider the following example:

Dick is a thief, he mostly steals famous artwork. He is about to steal a Rubens from a private collector—'Julia' is the collector's name. Julia has surprised Dick and caught him in the act. Dick successfully restrains Julia and is prepared to leave with the painting he came to steal. But, as he is about to leave, he notices a small painting on the wall for the first time. The painting, although from an unknown painter and without value (at least when compared with the Rubens), has resonated with Dick and, whence, he utters:

Dick: That painting is so beautiful.

Julia, although surprised by the thief's reaction, quickly replies:

Julia: That one?! No, it's not. But if you like it so much, why don't you steal it instead and leave that one behind?

[Dick does precisely that.]

The dispute is about the threshold for 'beautiful'. Julia and Dick disagree on whether the threshold should be such that it includes the painting by an unknown painter, and which elicit a powerful

aesthetic experience with Dick. Julia believes that the threshold should not include the said painting, while Dick believes it should. The dispute is also aesthetic in the sense that they are disagreeing about what sort of object should elicit a particular experience, emotion or sentiment. Again, as it happens with regard to disputes about the applicability of the predicate ‘wrong’ (in a moral sense), it is virtually universal that disputes about the extension of the predicate ‘beautiful’ trigger an evaluative dispute about what is considered pleasing. Whatever the particular social make up and interactions involved, those disputes turn out to be aesthetic—and not merely a dispute about word-usage. This strongly indicates that it is the evaluative meaning of the adjective that triggers the evaluative dispute and not contextual particularities.

The objection may be summarised in the following way: disputes that involve thin terms—i.e. terms whose content is typically considered fully non-descriptive—invariably trigger disagreements for the right reasons; for reasons that are either moral, aesthetic... This is a distinctive feature when one compares it with the behaviour of at least some thick terms—those whose content is typically considered to be partially descriptive and partially non-descriptive. That distinctive behaviour is an additional explanatory burden which *exclusively* metalinguistic negotiation frameworks are unable to account for.⁵⁹

Perhaps the criticism is unfair and Sundell may still claim that assumptions (A1–2) do not hold and do the needed explanatory work. It is worth considering whether the distinction between verdictive and substantive adjectives (or between thin and thick terms) would also be of help here. Remember, verdictive adjectives are those whose meaning tells one very little about the object they purportedly apply to. For instance, saying that a dish is tasty tells very little about the dish. Substantive adjectives are those whose meaning tells one more about the object that it applies to. Can one account for the difference between how thin and verdictive adjectives conveyed evaluative content latches onto reality by appealing to characteristics of said adjectives without assuming that their meaning is evaluative? The account would have to be something along the following line: verdictive adjectives are less informative about the object they apply to and, as such, their meaning is flexible enough to maintain the needed stability across diverse social settings to explain why they always trigger evaluative (moral, aesthetic, etc.) considerations. The account would work if all that was in need of explaining was the stable triggering of considerations *simpliciter*. What this strategy fails to account for is the stable triggering of evaluative considerations.

The distinction between low and high-pressure adjectives is of no help here either. That distinction may concern the standard of comparison that is triggered—whether it is subjective—, but the concern is not about whether the standard of comparison is in-built in the evaluatives’ semantics, it is about whether they express evaluative content when agents use them and act on them.

⁵⁹ With ‘exclusively’ I have in mind metalinguistic negotiation frameworks which deny (A1–2).

3.3 Taking stock

The case I am making for a class of evaluatives is fairly straightforward, and follows much of the shared criticism against the view that metalinguistic negotiations do all the required explanatory work while accounting speakers' usage of evaluative terms and interactions about evaluative matters—such as evaluative disagreements. Metalinguistic negotiation cannot be the whole story. Evaluatives latch in a distinctive way onto the diverse human social structures. Descriptives, even when used evaluatively, do not display the same behaviour. The use of 'beautiful', 'tasty', 'funny', and so on, invariably triggers aesthetic considerations; the use of thin moral adjectives like 'wrong', 'ought', and so on, invariably triggers moral considerations. This evaluative invariability can only be explain if one assumes (A1).

Granted, I have not made a case for (A2); but I need not do so, if my claim is simply that evaluatives belong to a linguistic class of their own, i.e. that they differ from other gradable with respect to their meaning and behaviour; specifically, how they latch onto social interactions, then making a case for either (A1) or (A2) suffices.

Given that evaluatives are entitled to their own linguistic class, given their particular behaviour and semantics, this justifies the need to account for the behaviour of these terms. From hereon I will be inquiring whether the elements of the class of evaluatives lend themselves to an uniform and monist account or a pluralist one. To do I will first explore the theories on the market to account for the particular behaviour of these terms.

4 Semantic views

In this chapter I distinguish and characterise how the different families of semantic theories available on the market differ when it comes to assessing sentences used at a given context. I will begin with the invariantist variety in the next section. I will also take the opportunity to link the main conclusion of the previous chapter with my assessment on how invariantist theories fare when it comes to evaluative discourse. In the other sections I focus on variantist theories. I will be using the same labelling as MacFarlane's: indexical contextualism, non-indexical contextualism and truth relativism.

I end the chapter by linking the theories to evaluative discourse, particularly by pointing out how evidence for or against each can be found in linguistic data from evaluative discourse. I will be specifically concerned with the phenomenon of faultless disagreement and retraction of evaluative assertions.

4.1 Invariantism

The first group of semantic theories I would like to focus on are the ones that fall under the invariantist umbrella when it comes to evaluative terms. The central claim of invariantist theories is that, when used literally, evaluative terms are not use-sensitive nor assessment-sensitive. Simply put, evaluative terms do not vary their extension or meaning relative to context of use, nor does their extension or correct usage vary depending on the context of assessment from which their usage is being assessed from. Consider the following situations.

A: Julia, while watching Carlin's *You Are All Diseased* states that *George Carlin is really funny*.

B: Julia, while visiting the *Luigi dei Francesi* church, states that *The "Calling of Saint Matthew" is incredibly beautiful*.

According to invariantists, 'George Carlin is really funny.' and 'The "Calling of Saint Matthew" is incredibly beautiful.', when used in the contexts described above, are true, as used in either A or B, if and only if George Carlin (in *You Are All Diseased*) is really funny and The "Calling of Saint Matthew" is incredibly beautiful. The extension or meaning of the adjectives 'funny' and 'beautiful' do not vary depending on the context in which they are used. They denote the same objects and have the same intension regardless of the context in which they are used. The same goes for the context of assessment from which the sentences are assessed. Their purported relativisation to assessment or use yields no interesting result.

The main objection against invariantists that has been put forward by variantists appeals to the possibility of faultless evaluative disagreements. According to variantists it is possible that either party involved in an evaluative disagreement is not mistaken about holding their beliefs on the matter. If

evaluative disagreements are canonical and those disagreements can be faultless, then invariantism about evaluative claims is false. In order to explain why this is the case consider the following exchange:

Julia: 'George Carlin is really funny.'

Fausto: 'No, he's not.'

Assume for argument sake that the exchange above is a canonical evaluative disagreement and it is possible that it is faultless. The invariantist does not have the resources to capture that possibility. According to the view, Julia's utterance is true if and only if George Carlin has the property of *being funny*. There is no relativisation to appeal to. Hence, if Fausto's utterance is true, Julia's is false. Consequently, at least one of them has made a mistaken claim about George Carlin's purported comical qualities. No faultless disagreement. Thus, if it is possible that canonical evaluative disagreements are faultless, then invariantism is false.

One of the most promising ways to block the objections is to argue that the evaluative disagreements that can be faultless are non-canonical—i.e. are not about what is being literally expressed. Appealing to metalinguistic negotiations and the metalinguistic usage of evaluative terms is a natural fit for the invariantist. Of course, the strategy is successful only if metalinguistic negotiations manage to explain away all the purported cases, or at the very least the most compelling cases, of faultless disagreements about evaluative claims.

In the previous chapter I have argued that evaluative terms are literally evaluative, for metalinguistic usage cannot be the whole story regarding how agents interact when it comes to some evaluative matters. This conclusion undermines the extent to which metalinguistic negotiations can play a helpful role for the invariantist. They may yet be used to block the argument from disagreement. But some evaluative disagreements will involve the literal use of a value-word. For those particular cases, the invariantist is required to provide an argument against the possibility that those cases are faultless disagreements. Whence, the argument from disagreement strikes again.

For these reasons I find invariantist theories in a worse position than their competitors in accounting for evaluative discourse and related phenomena. In the next sections I focus on those rival theories.

4.2 Variantism

Variantist theories can be classified as targeting content and as targeting circumstances of evaluation (to use Kaplanian parlance). By this I mean that variantist theories may contend that some sentences or expressions in a specific language are context-sensitive in a way that said sensitivity affects content—indexical contextualism—or (directly) affects truth-value or assessment. The latter variety includes two families of theories, one where propositions are use-sensitive, and that sensitivity as to do with the

circumstance of evaluation for a given sentence in a language including an additional standard (or parameters)—non-indexical contextualism—and one other family of theories which proposes that, sentences are assessment sensitive, i.e. besides context of use and circumstance of evaluation, the truth of the expressed content depends on the context of assessment from which the content is being assessed from—truth relativism.⁶⁰ Although, on the non-indexical contextualist the additional standard is determined via context of use, whence the use sensitivity, the context of assessment is not. Thus, the direct relativisation of truth is a shared feature among non-indexical contextualism and truth relativism, however, while the parameters according to which truth is assessed from the non-indexical contextualist’s perspective is determined by the context of use, for the truth relativist the parameters from which to assess the truth value are not determined by the context of use.⁶¹ This carries important practical consequences. Indexical and non-indexical contextualists alike will attribute the same extension to sentences used in a given context, truth relativists will not. In order to portray this distinction consider the following examples.

A: Julia, while watching Carlin’s *You Are All Diseased*, states that *George Carlin is really funny*.

B: Julia, while visiting the *Luigi dei Francesi* church, states that *The “Calling of Saint Matthew” is incredibly beautiful*.

On an indexicalist interpretation, ‘George Carlin is really funny.’ and ‘The “Calling of Saint Matthew” is incredibly beautiful.’, when used in the contexts described above, are true, as used in either A or B, if and only if George Carlin is really funny [to Julia] and ‘The “Calling of Saint Matthew” is incredibly beautiful [to Julia]. On a non-indexicalist interpretation the outcome would be the same, albeit achieved in a different manner. For the non-indexicalist the ‘George Carlin is really funny.’ and ‘The “Calling of Saint Matthew” is incredibly beautiful.’, when used in the contexts described above, are true, as used in either A or B, if and only if George Carlin is really funny according to Julia’s humour standard and ‘The “Calling of Saint Matthew” is incredibly beautiful according to Julia’s aesthetic standard. Since the relevant standard is determined by contextual features indexicalists and non-indexicalists do not differ when it comes to the extension of truth. Moreover, and following MacFarlane (2014: 89) the non-indexicalist “would give every use of a proposition an absolute truth value”, as the indexicalist would.

This an initial distinction among the variantist candidates out there. In the following sections I get into a more detailed characterisation on how one can sort them out and which evidence one could expect in their favour, specifically tied to evaluative retractions and evaluative disagreements.

⁶⁰ I am labelling any variety where the relativisation of truth is not dependent on features of the context of use ‘truth relativism’. This includes e.g. Egan (2014), MacFarlane (2014)’s view.

⁶¹ This is the main reason for the “non-indexical contextualism” label. See MacFarlane (2014: 88–9) on this.

4.2.1 Indexical contextualism

Contextualists about evaluative terms endorse the view that sentences containing evaluative terms are use-sensitive—i.e. that variations in context of use fully account (directly or indirectly) for variations in truth-value. Indexical contextualists, specifically, also endorse the view that evaluative expressions or evaluative words like indexicals. Indexicals are terms which their content or reference cannot be determined without speakers using them (in a given context). Appealing to a Kaplanian framework, indexicals have a character or literal meaning such that it contains a blank argument which is only saturated by the salient contextual feature(s). Contexts of use are n -tuples containing n -parameters, which include: speaker, time of use, world of use... Under this framework, an indexical is assigned a character which is a function from context of use to reference or denotation. Its reference (or denotation), then, contributes in a compositional manner to the sentence's content, which in turn is a function from circumstances of evaluation to truth-value. The circumstance of evaluation is a coordinate that includes the world of the context of use and the time of the context of use. Hence, a sentence like 'Today is Fausto's birthday,' which contains the indexical term 'today', expressing different propositions (or contents) depending on the context of use and is true or false depending on the day of its illocution (as well as the world in which it was used). Thus, if a speaker uses the sentence in March 24, she is expressing that March 24 is the day Fausto was born, but if the speaker uses the sentence in February 2, she is expressing that February 2 is the day Fausto was born. Assuming just for simplicity sake that the world in which both sentences were used is the set of true propositions @ and that the proposition that Fausto was born in March 24 is part of @, then the sentence 'Today is Fausto's birthday.' is true when used in March 24 and false when used in February.

One may, thus, characterise indexical contextualism about evaluative discourse as claiming that evaluative predicates are indexical terms. This entails that sentences like 'George Carlin is funny.' contain an indexical term, in this example, 'funny'. The character of the term 'funny' would be *funny [to S]*, where S stands for the user of the sentence. Hence, the denotation of the predicate 'funny' can only be determined via context of use; which in turn will contribute compositionally to the sentence's content by adding the subjective or perspectival property *being funny to S*. The sentence will be true if and only if George Carlin is funny to S is true at the time it was used and relative to the world in which was used.

An important consequence of the application of indexical contextualism to evaluative discourse is that 'George Carlin is funny.' uttered by Julia and the same sentence uttered by Fausto express different contents, given that 'funny', when Julia utters it and when Fausto utters it, denotes different properties. On Julia's case, it denotes the property of *being funny to Julia*, while, when Fausto utters it, it denotes the property of *being funny to Fausto*. This consequence will display its importance when the theory accounts for persistent evaluative disagreements.

4.2.2 *Non-indexical contextualism*

Non-indexical contextualism is here described as a contextualist variety because the manner in which a sentence's extension is determined wholly relies on use and use sensitivity. We can see how this is the case when non-indexicalists explain how truth relativisation occurs.

Arguably, some adjectives are relative to a standard; i.e. they either denote a property that is true of some object depending on the relevant standard. As an illustration, consider the adjective 'tall' and the sentence 'Fausto is tall.' This sentence is standard sensitive. In order to evaluate the sentence, the salient contextual features determine the class of comparison; in this case, it may determine that the relevant class of comparison is basketball players football players, adults, adolescents, children, toddlers... The point here is that the class of comparison is salient in the context of use, which in turn triggers the relevant standard according to which one assesses the sentence's truth-value. The standard is triggered via context of use, whence the use sensitivity.

Assume that the context in which the sentence is used is that Fausto's mother is telling her friend that her son is tall for an eleven year old child. Given that the class of comparison is eleven year old children, the standard according to which one counts as tall will be something close to 165 cm. Let us further assume that Fausto is 170 cm tall. Hence, it follows that Fausto is tall, according to the standard. Now, if the sentence was exchanged in a context where it was clear that Fausto's mother was talking about adults, then the standard is higher and Fausto would not count as tall; the sentence would be false. 'Tall' denotes the same property, regardless the context in which the word was used and the sentence expresses the same content, regardless what the comparison class turns out to be. The variation is with respect to whether the predicates applies truly of Fausto.

On a non-indexical contextualist framework the truth-value of a sentence is relative to an additional standard, besides the standard factors—context of use and circumstance of evaluation. As previously stated, in Kaplan's actual semantics circumstances contain a world and a time parameter. A circumstance-sensitive proposition can be world-sensitive or time-sensitive. In the non-indexicalist framework proponents of the view proposes an expansion of the coordinates that are part of the circumstance of evaluation by including additional coordinates; which will vary depending on the area of evaluative discourse. Thus, there will be three kinds of circumstance-sensitivity: world-sensitivity, time-sensitivity and "standard-sensitivity". Non-indexicalists argue that all three are relevantly present when it comes to evaluative discourse.

Consider once again the sentence 'George Carlin is funny.' According to non-indexical contextualist semantics, this is not an indexical sentence—it expresses the same proposition in every contexts of use. Nonetheless it can vary in truth-value according to variations in the circumstances of evaluation. The usual way semanticists interpret circumstance-sensitivity is by considering that the truth-value of a proposition varies from possible world to possible world: in w_1 George Carlin is very funny, but in w_2 he is a dull and unfunny person. The circumstance-sensitivity that the non-indexicalist

has in mind goes beyond this. Even once the possible world (and time) is fixed, the truth-value of the proposition expressed by sentence yet varies with a standard of evaluation (the standard of humour—a humour-time pair). “[Now], we can introduce a class of operators that are analogous to Kaplan’s modal and temporal operators in that they shift the standard of [humour or] taste parameter in the circumstance of evaluation, just as modal and tense operators shift the world and time parameter respectively.” (Kölbel 2009).

Kölbel (2009) suggests the use of the FOR operator to represent the value standard. A standard-shifting operator [FOR] is formed by using the expression FOR on a singular term t referring to a person. Such operator can also be used on a sentence p : [FOR] t , p . Thus, p expresses a proposition that is standard-sensitive and when the operator [FOR], t is prefixed to the sentence, p no longer expresses a standard-sensitive proposition: [FOR] t , p is true in a circumstance $\{w, s\}$ if and only if p is true in $\{w, s(h)\}$ [where $s(h)$ is t ’s standard of humour]. Thus, one might correctly say that the operator [FOR] is analogous to modal and temporal operators. When a modal or a temporal operator is prefixed to a sentence p , say \Diamond , the sentence no longer expresses a world-sensitive proposition: $\Diamond p$ is true in a circumstance $\{w, i\}$ if and only if p is true in $\{w_x, i\}$, where w_x is a possible world accessible from w and i the time. This is, arguably, another reason to consider non-indexicalist contextualist not relativist in a proper sense, for—as previously quoted—it “would give any proposition an absolute truth value” (MacFarlane 2014: 89).

4.2.3 *Truth Relativism*

The other variantist alternative is interested in the sort of truth relativisation that is indelible. To achieve this, sentences are no longer (just) use-sensitive, but assessment-sensitive. With ‘assessment-sensitive’ I mean that the parameters according to which one assesses whether a proposition is true is not determined by the context of use. This may require an additional context or additional parameters, independent from the context of use from which semanticists assess whether a proposition is true. MacFarlane (2014) proposes that theorists take on board the notion of context of assessment. Contexts of assessment and contexts of use are alike in many ways. The main distinction is that while the context of use is composed of speaker, time of utterance, location of utterance, world of utterance, among other factors, the context of assessment includes assessor, time of assessment, location of assessment and world of assessment, among other things. Neither of these parameters are determined by the sentence’s uses, but by its assessments—and assessments may occur at a different time, at a different location, performed by a different agent and at a different world than the context of use.

The distinction between use-sensitivity and assessment-sensitivity has practical consequences. For a sentence expressing p , when used at a given context, use-sensitive variantist theories will invariably attribute the same truth-value, regardless whether one endorses a content-sensitivity or a standard-

sensitivity approach. However, assessment-sensitive theories may attribute a different truth-value, depending on features of the context of assessment.

While for non-indexical contextualism a sentence expressing p is true, when used at context C , if and only if p is true at w (the world of context C) and at time t (the time at which the sentence was used in context C) and according to standard $S(g)$, where g is the speaker in context C , for truth relativism a sentence expressing p is true, when used at context C , if and only if p is true at w and at time t and according to the context of assessment A , where A includes such features as the world of assessment, the assessor, the time of assessment, the location of assessment.

In order to better understand the practical consequences of the distinction, when it comes to truth-value attributions consider yet again the sentence ‘George Carlin is funny’, uttered by Julia when she was 18, while watching the special “You’re all diseased”. Under a contextualist guise, to put it simply, the sentence is true as long as the predicate ‘funny to Julia’ is truthfully applied to George Carlin or the sentence is true as long as the predicate ‘funny’ correctly applies to George Carlin according to Julia’s standard of humour at the time she uttered the sentence. Quite differently, under relativism, the sentence is true as long as the predicate ‘funny’ correctly applies to George Carlin as judged by an assessor. This is an oversimplification, but it clearly shows that, use-sensitivity and assessment-sensitivity display different practical results when it comes to the extension (and anti-extension) of the predicate ‘true’.

4.3 Data to be explained

Thus far I have clarified the distinctions between the main rival families of semantic theories that are candidate theories for applying to a particular language. Now I would like to pause on how is one to go about and choose between them. What are they supposed to describe? What could count as explanatory shortcomings or advantages? What predictions may one consider relevant when assessing their accuracy? The following quote helps getting at a satisfactory answer to these questions.

A language, in the sense studied by formal semanticists and logicians, can be represented as a function, a function that assigns meanings to repeatable types of some sort. Let’s say that a language L has a domain $S(L)$ (the sentences of L) and a range of meanings $M(L)$ (the meanings to be assigned to members of $S(L)$). To each sentence s in $S(L)$, L assigns a meaning $L(s)$ which is a member of $M(L)$. Languages in this sense are abstract objects that can be studied by a priori means. What we know about these languages we know by stipulation or pure reasoning. But what is the relevance of these abstract objects, functions, studied by semanticists, to the sphere of human linguistic communication? Can a language, understood as a function from a domain of sentences into a range of meanings, in any sense be “the language used by some population of language users”? What is it for a possible language to be the actual language of some population? Once we have an answer to this question, we can investigate whether a particular language (as described by

some semantic theory) is a language used by some group, in particular whether a language described by a relativistic semantics is used by anyone. (Kölbel 2009: 376–7)

The quote above talks about the relation between semantic theories and actual languages to which the semantic theories are supposed to apply to. One thing is a language “as a function” from sentences to meanings, another is how should one assess whether a language taken that way describes an actual language. One way to understand how this relation comes about is to find out whether the conditional “a population uses a language L if the conditions under which their utterances of sentences of L count as correct coincide with the conditions under which the propositions assigned by L to these sentences are true” obtains.⁶² This implies that different views on what the actual language relation that users stand to the language they use partly depends on how a language should assign propositions to sentences in context.

Take the following example from Kölbel⁶³:

A: “I could eat an ox.” [uttered seriously at t1 by Takeru Kobayashi, a competitive eater]

B: “I could eat an ox.” [uttered hyperbolically at t2 by a very hungry MK]

If we approach candidate languages as specifiable functions that assign propositions to sentences in contexts of use, where contexts of use are a finite list of parameters—speaker, time, place, audience—then only A expresses a true proposition, given that Takeru Kobayashi (TK) at t₁ could (literally) eat an ox. However, B expresses a false proposition, given that MK, although very hungry, at t₂, could not eat an ox. On the other hand, if we approach candidate languages as difficult to specify functions (if specifiable at all) that assign propositions to context of use, where contexts of use consist in the concrete situations in which sentences can be uttered, then both A and B express true propositions. Since the contexts of use involve the relevant information about TK and MK, A expresses that TK could eat an ox and B expresses that MK is very hungry—and both expressed propositions are true.

Proponents of this latter approach will consider this datum as evidence that the former approach misdescribes how the “population in question” uses the language—for users would consider A and B correct. Since the former interprets B as expressing a false proposition, its predictions conflict with how language is used. So, its proponents need to say something about this datum. They will say that there is a difference between the semantic content of an utterance and what is communicated by it. Whence, for B to be correct it is sufficient that MK is very hungry—MK does not have literally be able to eat an ox. On this regard “[t]he semantic conditions for the truth of a sentence in a context need to coincide with the conditions of correctness of the literal content of an utterance, not the

⁶² Kölbel 2009: 377.

⁶³ Kölbel 2009: 378.

communicated content.”⁶⁴ Proponents of this view may also point out to the rival approach’s own difficulties, and it is under dispute what the best semantic approach is.

The other aspect to take into account when assessing whether actual speakers use a language (in the semanticist and logician sense of the term) involves taking into account not just how propositions are assigned to sentences in context, but also how sentences are counted as correct. Hence, how any utterance of a sentence of language in a context *c* counts as correct among its users allows one to generate predictions about the conditions under which utterances of a sentence of a given language count as correct (or incorrect) among its users. These predictions are testable and can be used as evidence for or against semantic approaches.

When applying these theories to evaluative discourse in the English language, and choosing between them which best accounts for how English users engage in evaluative talk, it does not suffice to spell out what count as different predictions. It is equally important to identify where the distinctive predictions can be best tested. I will focus on two phenomena that are used to test candidate semantic theories for evaluative discourse: evaluative disagreement and evaluative retractions. The focus on these two phenomena will be the point of the two next chapters. Nonetheless, before getting into the next chapters, I will end this section by spelling out what each candidate theory predicts about evaluative disagreements and retractions and how those predictions may be tested.

Evaluative disagreement. Evaluative disagreements seem particular. Philosophers have argued that evaluative disagreements may be persistent—i.e. parties disagreeing may agree about all the matters of fact relevant to what is at issue with the disagreement, but nonetheless the disagreement subsists. This is not generally present when it comes to descriptive disagreements.⁶⁵ Two parties arguing about whether bullfighting is wrong may agree on all the facts about bullfighting, even that it causes suffering to the bull, but still disagree. Contrast this with a disagreement about whether Fado is a Portuguese musical genre. It is hardly conceivable the two parties disagreeing about that proposition while agreeing about all the facts related with Fado (and Portugal).

Invariantist theories predict that evaluative disagreements display no interesting particularity that makes them substantially different from disagreements in other areas of discourse. There are two options according to an invariantist picture: (i) when disagreeing about evaluative matters, agents hold incompatible beliefs and at least one of them is wrong about the matter under dispute, even though the dispute may be persistent or (ii) some evaluative disagreements do not concern what is being literally expressed because evaluative predicates are being used metalinguistically. I’ve explored how the latter

⁶⁴ Kölbel 2009: 379.

⁶⁵ Perhaps with the exception of disagreements involving vague (descriptive) terms, depending how one characterises those disagreements. See Wright 1994.

option may look like in the previous section. The former option should provide an explanation as to why many evaluative disagreements are persistent. Recall that this is explained by appealing to metalinguistic negotiations. Parties involved in persistent evaluative disagreements are disagreeing about how a certain concept or word ought to be used, considering their shared goals and interests.

Variantist theories predict that some evaluative disagreements may be faultless—i.e. two persons genuinely disagree about some matter of fact but none is at fault. While contextualists (indexicalists and non-indexicalists alike) capture this possibility by arguing that evaluative predicates are use-sensitive, truth relativists capture this possibility by arguing that evaluative predicates are assessment-sensitive.

When opting for invariantist or variantist theories, the first important distinction on what counts as evidence for a theory has to do with whether there are cases of faultless disagreements. Variantists appeal to the intuition that there are such cases, or, at the very least, that it is a possibility there are such cases.⁶⁶

Among variantists there is dispute about how one should characterise the evidence for faultless disagreements. Some indexicalists argue that, although appearing genuine, faultless disagreements involve parties talking past each other (in some sense). Non-indexicalists and relativists alike argue that this is the wrong way to account for the phenomenon, given shared intuitions that these disagreements are not merely faultless, but also genuine. However even non-indexicalists and relativists will disagree about how to best characterise faultless disagreements, as I will explore in the next chapter.

Retraction. MacFarlane (2014: 108) has characterised retraction as the speech act of *taking back* another speech act. The illocutionary effects of retracting is to remove the illocutionary commitments that the agent committed to when performing the targeted speech act. Typically when one performs a retraction of a speech act, it is thought that one is admitting fault. But this need not be the case. An agent can retract for many reasons: e.g. because evidence that was unavailable when the agent performed the targeted speech act has come to light, because in a particular social setting it would be rude to stand by the targeted speech act. Applying this to the retraction of assertions, one may take back an assertion even though no norm for assertion was infringed by the assertion targeted for retraction.

Relativists argue that it may be the case that agents are obligated to retract a previous speech act—i.e. retractions that, if not performed at time *t*, imply that the agent violates a constitutive norm, and is, in that sense, at fault for not retracting their speech act—even when the agent is not at fault for having performed the original speech act. And, important for our purposes when it comes to evaluative discourse, this feature is overtly manifested when retracting evaluative assertions.

⁶⁶ The appeal to metalinguistic negotiations seems the best option to block the argument, while accepting that evaluative disagreements may involve faultless disagreements. However, this necessarily implies the acceptance of the problematic claim that evaluative terms are not semantically evaluative. See section 3 on this.

Contextualists (indexicalist and non-indexicalists alike) disagree with relativists on this regard. They hold that an agent ought to retract only if the targeted speech act for retraction has violated a norm. Thus, use-sensitive theories and assessment-sensitive theories predict incompatible empirical results.

One may argue that variantist semantic theories are not descriptive but normative and, hence, that they do not predict distinct empirical results. As I have explained in chapter 1 and in this section, I am assuming that the main criterion in deciding whether semantic theories apply to a natural language S is to assess if they adequately describe speakers' behaviour when using S. I take this to be common ground in the discussion.

4.4 Taking stock

In this chapter I have showed how different semantic theories differ and how their theoretical differences amount to diverging empirical predictions. Given these different predictions—specifically, when related to disagreement and retraction in evaluative discourse—one can assess which is the best candidate for a particular region of the English language, evaluative discourse. I am not exactly going to assess that important question here, because I believe there is a prior question to investigate, which depending on its answer, may strongly suggest that there is no best candidate theory for evaluative discourse. If that is the conclusion, then, one has no reason to reject a semantic pluralist approach to evaluative discourse.⁶⁷

The next two chapters will focus on the two phenomena I have briefly pointed to in this chapter: disagreement and retraction in evaluative discourse. The purpose is to inquire whether these phenomena can be said to behave uniformly across the areas of evaluative discourse I have been focusing on: moral discourse, discourse on matters of personal taste and aesthetic discourse. If the conclusion is that when agents disagreeing and retracting cannot be described uniformly across different areas of evaluative discourse, then we have no positive reason to believe that there is a postsemantic theory which is in the best position to explain agents' linguistic interactions when evaluative discourse is concerned. As far as we know, a postsemantic pluralist or regionalist approach may be the most reasonable alternatives.

⁶⁷ With 'pluralist' I am including what is called *Pluralism* (proper) and *Moderate Pluralism* (or *Regionalism*).

5 Disagreement

The philosophical literature at the turn of the century has started focusing on the phenomena of disagreement. Not only from an epistemic perspective, on the epistemic importance of disagreements, but also on how the phenomenon is best characterised—i.e. on what counts as disagreeing. In this chapter, I start by presenting a quick taxonomic overview on disagreement to then dive into the specific phenomenon of faultless disagreement, the primary focus of the debate on evaluative disagreements.

Disagreements are an important part of our social interactions. We disagree not just to manifest conflicting beliefs or attitudes but also to encourage our interlocutors to review their own views and attitudes concerning the matter under disagreement. It is mainly via disagreements that our beliefs and attitudes are influenced and influence others.

One first distinction that is worth pointing out is the distinction between *disagreement in act* and *disagreement in state*. Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009) discuss this distinction in length. When two persons are involved in a discussion about whether Trump is responsible for the January 6 Insurrection this exemplifies a disagreement in act. When two persons are not discussing—i.e. engaging in a dispute—, but nevertheless hold two incompatible beliefs this exemplifies a disagreement in state. Examples of disagreements in state do not require that those disagreeing exist. For instance, Hegel and Marx might disagree about whether the appropriate philosophical dialectic system ought to be idealist or materialist, but due to their death, they certainly are incapable of disagreeing in act with each other. The philosophically interesting notion of disagreement is the disagreement in state notion; and what is of philosophical interest is to determine the conditions under which disagreements of this kind may occur.

One obvious way to describe the case of disagreement in state is that two parties disagree when they hold incompatible beliefs. This seems pretty straightforward: Hegel disagrees with Marx because the former held the belief that Dialectic Idealism is the proper philosophical system and such belief is incompatible with Marx's belief that Dialectic Materialism is the correct philosophical system. Both beliefs are incompatible because neither Hegel or Marx could have held both beliefs without incurring in a contradiction (which is not the sort of contradiction Hegelians and Marxians find harmless and explanatory of historical changes); putting it in a slightly different way, the beliefs are incompatible because both cannot be true.

Other disagreements in state do not involve incompatible beliefs but other attitude as well, even conative or non-doxastic attitudes. Parties may disagree because they have noncotenable beliefs, plans, desires... or other attitudes that cannot be coherently adopted by each other. MacFarlane (2014) puts it this way:

In one sense, I disagree with someone's attitude if I could not coherently adopt that same attitude (an attitude with the same content and force) without changing my mind—that is, without dropping some of

my current attitudes. In other words, I disagree with attitudes that are not *cotenable* with my current attitudes. (MacFarlane 2014: 121)

Two parties may disagree in this sense if each cannot coherently adopt the other party's corresponding attitude. Cases of this sort of disagreement include not only when parties hold incompatible beliefs, but also include broader cases. Consider the following illustration (also inspired from MacFarlane 2014):

Fausto: Santa doesn't exist.

Julia: I think you're right, but my classmates believe Santa is real, I think I need to investigate this matter further.

Here, although Fausto and Julia's beliefs are not strictly incompatible, their attitudes towards the proposition *Santa exists* (or *Santa is real*) are not cotenable, in the sense that Fausto and Julia cannot hold both attitudes at the same time without risking incoherence: Julia is on the fence (or only slightly over it) on the matter, while Fausto is not—he has a higher credence.

Another relevant kind of disagreement is disagreement due to preclusion of joint satisfaction. Two parties disagree at time t in this sense if and only if one party has an attitude or is in a state at time t which cannot be jointly satisfied with the other's party attitude or state at time t .⁶⁸

Since in the noncotenable sense, disagreements depend on parties holding incompatible attitudes completely due to the targeted content, and in the preclusion of joint satisfaction sense, disagreements depend also on the particular context they occur in, disagreements due to preclusion of joint satisfaction do not imply noncotenability (and vice-versa). Here is an illustration:

Julia and Fausto live together and both have woken up with a really strong desire for a slice of pizza. Unfortunately for one of them there is only one slice left over from yesterday's dinner. Julia's desire that *I eat a slice of pizza* and Fausto's desire that *I eat a slice of pizza* cannot be jointly satisfied.

Julia and Fausto desires are not incompatible, given that either of them can coherently hold both attitudes at the same time. Julia may desire that she has a slice of pizza and that Fausto has a slice of pizza. The same goes for Fausto. He may desire that he, himself, eats a slice of pizza and that Julia has a slice of pizza. Nevertheless, Julia and Fausto disagree, given that both desires cannot be jointly satisfied, because there is only one last slice of pizza left. Important in this illustration is that the joint satisfaction is precluded by the contingent fact that there is only one slice of pizza remaining, which

⁶⁸ Here is how Stevenson puts it: "This occurs when Mr. A has a favorable attitude to something, when Mr. B has an unfavorable or less favorable attitude to it, and when neither is content to let the other's attitude remain unchanged." (1963: 1)

highlights the difference between the two kinds of disagreement, preclusion of joint satisfaction is partly triggered due to contextual features.

As the attentive reader surely has noticed, the characterisation of preclusion of joint satisfaction disagreement precludes doxastic attitudes or states. Doxastic attitudes are not satisfiable, only desire-like or conative attitudes are. So, in order to include doxastic attitudes in disagreements of a similar sort, one should not talk about satisfaction but accuracy instead.

Accuracy is a technical notion. It involves how one assesses an attitude or speech act. An attitude of speech act is accurate in c_i , as assessed from c_{ii} , if and only if its content is true (as used was used in context c_i) and as assessed from context c_{ii} .⁶⁹ Hence, the kind of corresponding disagreements involving doxastic attitudes are due to preclusion of joint accuracy; when assessed from a particular context, the contents of each beliefs cannot both be true. Two parties disagree in this sense when one party holds a doxastic attitude or state which accuracy is precluded by the other party holding a doxastic attitude or state. As with their non-doxastic counterpart, preclusion of joint accuracy partly depends on features of the context on which parties disagree and not merely on the content of their doxastic states/attitudes. Similarly, preclusion of joint accuracy does not imply noncotenability (and vice-versa). Another illustration where noncotenability and preclusion of joint accuracy come apart, this time involving centred contents.⁷⁰

Biden believes that *I am the U. S. President* in January 20th 2021 and Trump believes that *I am the U. S. President* in November 5th 2020.

The two can be said to hold beliefs that, although accurate and cotenable,—either of them can have each attitude towards the centred content at the different times—, the beliefs cannot be jointly accurate, for neither belief can be equally accurate, with respect to the particular time each party holds their belief. The contents of Biden’s and Trump’s beliefs cannot be both accurate in January 20th and cannot be both accurate in November 5th.

Another kind of disagreement that is discussed in MacFarlane (2014) is what he calls “disagreement of joint reflexive accuracy”. This kind of disagreement differs from the previous kind in the sense that it requires interpreting the notion of ‘accuracy’ itself in relative terms. Here is how MacFarlane (2014) puts it:

Preclusion of joint reflexive accuracy. The accuracy of my attitudes (as assessed from my context) precludes the accuracy of your attitude or speech act (as assessed from your context). (p. 130)

⁶⁹ I’m following MacFarlane (2014) on this.

⁷⁰ Centred contents are true/not true relative to a parameter i , in addition to the usual possible world (w) and time (t) parameters—where i stands for the relevant individual.

Thus, if the disagreement is deployed by using an assessment-sensitive predicate, its natural interpretation involves considering the accuracy of each belief relative to a context of assessment. Consider, for purely illustrative purposes, that ‘tasty’ is such a predicate. Furthermore, consider that Fausto and Julia are disagreeing about the putative tastiness of sashimi. Julia does not find it tasty, while Fausto does. One possible interpretation of the disagreement is that Julia’s belief, while assessed from her context, is accurate, while assessed from Fausto’s context, is inaccurate. Hence, both contexts of assessment preclude the joint accuracy of Julia’s and of Fausto’s beliefs—i.e. according to Julia’s assessment both beliefs cannot be jointly accurate and according to Fausto’s assessment both beliefs cannot be jointly accurate.

Thus far, I have only described disagreements that are canonical, genuine and substantive. However, there are plenty of examples of merely verbal disagreements or disagreements where speakers are talking past each other. For instance, it is possible that agents appear to be disagreeing but are in fact claiming cotenable contents or jointly accurate beliefs (or attitudes).

Consider, again for merely illustrative purposes, that the predicate ‘tasty’ should be analysed as ‘tasty [for/to ___]’, where the empty argument is filled in by the experiencer, which is given by the context of use. Thus, when Julia and Fausto disagree about whether sushi is tasty, they are not genuinely disagreeing about whether sushi is tasty (simpliciter), because the contents of their beliefs are jointly accurate and perfectly compatible. The content of Julia’s belief is *sushi is not tasty [to Julia]*, while the content of Fausto’s belief is *sushi is tasty [to Fausto]*. Hence, although Fausto and Julia seem to be disagreeing, they are actually talking past each other.

Consider another example: Fausto and Julia disagree about whether tomato is a fruit. Fausto believes it is, while Julia believes it is a vegetable. However, what is triggering the disagreement is that Fausto interprets the word ‘fruit’ as depicting a botanic category, while Julia interprets the word ‘fruit’ as denoting a culinary category. Notice that, once it is cleared up what each of them intends to convey by their use of ‘fruit’, the disagreement is no longer present. Once the terminology is cleared up, they may well come to the agreement that tomato is a fruit in the botanic sense, but not in the culinary sense.

The two previous examples depict merely verbal disagreements. That is, disagreements that are the result of some sort of terminological miscommunication and, which, once that miscommunication has been cleared up (or if that miscommunication were to be cleared up), the disagreement dispels. However, not all verbal disagreements are *merely* verbal. As we have already seen in the third chapter some verbal disagreements, in the sense that they are about the words being used (or their meaning), can be genuine disagreement and not merely cases of speakers *talking past each other*. Some disagreements may be about what *ought to* be the meaning of a word. Those disagreements are not easily dispelled—even after the agents agree on what the words mean, which signals that they are in fact

genuine, and not merely verbal. Moreover, these disagreements are substantive, also in a practical sense. They matter, because, as we have seen before, how we use words matter.

Interpreting the kind(s) of disagreement that evaluative disagreements fall under and, more importantly for our purposes, the kind(s) of disagreement that faultless evaluative disagreements fall under will depend on the reader's favourite semantic brand for evaluative discourse.

For instance, under a non-indexical contextualist guise evaluative disagreements will be interpreted as preclusion of joint accuracy. According to indexical contextualism (at least *prima facie*), speakers involved in evaluative disagreements are talking past each other or their disagreement is genuine if one interprets it as somewhat attitudinal. Invariantists, on the other hand, will concur with non-indexical contextualists that evaluative disagreements are instantiations of preclusion of joint accuracy. The difference will have to do with how each theorist considers the at issue content relevant for the disagreement.

5.1 Persistent disagreements

Consider the following two exchanges.

Exchange T

Fausto: 'This sushi is so tasty. I could eat it everyday!'

Julia: 'I don't share your enthusiasm. It isn't tasty.'

Exchange R

Fausto: 'This is a sushi restaurant.'

Julia: 'You're wrong. Can't you see it's a Thai restaurant? Look at the menu!'

Here is the prime intuition about exchanges **R** and **T**, while the latter may depict a persistent disagreement the former does not. By persistent disagreement I mean a disagreement in which those involved in it agree on all the relevant and related descriptive facts for the disagreement but yet the disagreement remains unsolved.

The intuition can be rephrased thus: on one hand, in exchange **R**, Julia and Fausto's disagreement will be dispelled once they agree on all the related facts with the matter under dispute, namely about what is the content of the restaurant's menu. On the other hand, in exchange **T**, Julia and Fausto may come to agree about all the related descriptive facts about the sushi that they are having and, nonetheless, it is possible that their disagreement will subsist and it is not irrational for either of them to hold their ground when it comes to whether the sushi they are having is tasty in face of their agreement on descriptive facts.

One may put this distinction in epistemic terms. If Fausto and Julia shared the same beliefs about the menu, it would be irrational for them to maintain their disagreement in exchange **R**. However, the same does not hold when it comes to exchange **T**. The disagreement's root is not that one of the two lacks the proper evidence or that they do not share the same epistemic situation. It would be rational for their disagreement to subsist, even if they were in similar epistemic situations. This points to another feature of **R**-like disagreements that is intimately connected with their persistence: they appear to be unresolvable. The sensation of unresolvability is due to no additional evidence put forth solving the dispute, which relates to the epistemic characterisation of the persistence.

Notice that it follows from this that neither agent is at fault, in an epistemic sense, to hold the beliefs they hold. The explanation for this is rather straightforward: neither agent violates any epistemic norm for holding to their original beliefs in face of new evidence, because—again—even if their epistemic were improvable and were to improve they would be perfectly fine in maintaining their original position on the matter under dispute. It is this step, from persistent disagreement to no epistemic fault of the disagreeers, that allows the segue from persistent disagreements to faultless disagreements.

As depicted by the previous exchanges, persistence is a pervasive feature of evaluative disagreements. This does not imply that disagreements about non-evaluative matters cannot be persistent too. Merely verbal disagreements may persist, even though agents agree on all relevant matters. The particularity of merely verbal disagreements is that they are dispelled, once the terminological miscommunication among disagreeers is cleared up. As I will point out further on, disagreements involving vague predicates may also subsist, even though disagreeers agree on all the relevant descriptive matters. Persistence also appears to be a pervasive feature of disagreements involving borderline cases of vague predicates. Consider the following exchange:

Exchange V

(Assume Chris is a borderline-case of baldness.)

Fausto: 'Chris is bald.'

Julia: 'You're wrong. He's not bald.'

Fausto and Julia may agree about the amount of hair on Chris' head and yet their disagreement subsists.⁷¹ As in the case of evaluative disagreements, the disagreement is not about the quantity of hair on Chris' head. That is why their agreement on how much hair populates Chris' head does not determine that it would be rational for them to conciliate and dissolve their dispute. This evidences that persistent disagreements are not an exclusive feature of evaluative disagreements.

⁷¹ It may be the case that their disagreement subsists because they disagree on where the threshold for baldness is located among the scale. But that is not necessary for the disagreement to persist. They may agree that there is no sharp boundary or specific threshold for baldness but claim different things about borderline cases for a given vague predicate such as 'bald'.

Nonetheless, many scholars have argued or assumed that persistent disagreements, even when the relevant evaluative adjective appears in the comparative form, are specific to evaluative disagreements. If this is right, then this would evidence that evaluative disagreements are not persistent for the same reason disagreements involving vague predicates are.

In a few sections I will undermine this assumption and show that vague predicates may also trigger persistent disagreements when the vague predicate appears in the comparative form. But before I do so, I will now link persistent disagreements and faultless disagreements and shed light on what is faultless about them and how semantic theories attempt to account for the phenomenon.

5.1.2 From persistence to faultlessness

There is a straightforward path from persistent disagreements to faultless disagreements. As was mentioned in the previous section, persistent disagreements may be defined as genuine disagreements where, even if the parties would agree about all the relevant descriptive facts, they would still subsist, and it would be rational for each party to hold to their position. This signals that none of those involved in the disagreement are *epistemically* at fault—i.e. given the available evidence none of the disagreeers are to blame for sticking with their original position.⁷² Thus, there is clearly a sense according to which persistent disagreements involve faultlessness.

Persistent disagreements are necessarily faultless in some sense, because, in some sense, none of the disagreeers are blameworthy for holding to their position in face of additional evidence. Arguably, the phenomenon of faultless disagreement is more pervasive in evaluative talk as a result of the pervasiveness of persistent disagreements in that area of discourse. This is unsurprising given that evaluative disagreements do not hinge on related descriptive matters. It is perfectly reasonable to consider a case of evaluative disagreement where disagreeers agree about all the evidence brought forth and how to interpret it and the disagreement still subsisting. Consider the disagreement below as an illustration:

Julia: *Lampreia à bordalesa* is tastier than grilled salmon.

Fausto: No, it isn't. How can you say that!

Fausto is baffled by Julia's opinion regarding the tastiness of the two fishes. But they agree on all the relevant features of each fish. The flavour of *Lampreia à bordalesa* is much more complex, fatter and gamier, the fish's texture is also (typically and if cooked correctly) slightly tougher than the salmon's. It just so happens that according to Julia the features make it so that *Lampreia à bordalesa* is tastier than grilled salmon, while according to Fausto the same features make it so that grilled salmon is tastier.

⁷² This is what MacFarlane (2014: 133) calls faultless_w disagreement, where each party is epistemically warranted to hold the view they hold.

Notice that it is perfectly possible that all the available evidence relevant to the matter at issue about which they disagree is accepted by both and yet both Julia and Fausto appear epistemically warranted to hold the position they hold. Hence, the disagreement can be said to be faultless—and this straightforwardly follows from the persistence of the disagreement (given how the notion of persistent disagreement I am using).

However, this epistemic notion of disagreement is fairly cheap, in the sense that any semantic view is capable of accounting for it, even invariantists. Thus, this is surely not the relevant sense of faultless disagreement that variantists employ to motivate their view. In the next section I explore other notions of faultlessness.

5.1.2 *Faultlessness*

If variantists would like to motivate their views by accounting for the phenomenon of faultless disagreement, then the epistemic notion of faultless that straightforwardly follows from persistence, a common and pervasive feature of evaluative disagreements, cannot be all there is to faultless disagreements. Invariantist views have no difficulty accounting for it. It would not be a concession on their part to accept that, although it is rational for both parties disagreeing to hold on to their beliefs in face of new evidence, it is not the case that both parties are holding true beliefs. Going back to the previous example, both Julia and Fausto are justified, and may continue to be justified in holding the views they hold—despite the evidence brought forth—, but at least one of them is wrong about their assessment of which fish dish is tastier.

Keep in mind that the theories which I am focusing on are about truth. The appeal to the fact that the same set of evidence may be interpreted as warranting incompatible beliefs, depending on the adopted standard, does not seem to favour any of the theories. However, as MacFarlane (2014: 134) puts it “(...) it could be that (...) [variantism] is needed to explain how the considerations the disagreeing parties take to warrant their claims could possibly do so”. The idea is that, although incompatible beliefs may both be warranted, one still needs to explain how the same evidence could warrant conflicting beliefs. Invariantists need to say something about this. Perhaps both are warranted because both beliefs are accurate. This is another sense of faultlessness.⁷³ Under this notion, faultless disagreements are genuine disagreements where both parties hold incompatible, but accurate beliefs. If this is the way to go, then the invariantist would be committed to belief accuracy being relative to each disagreeers’ taste. This is a no go for the invariantist, but perfectly consistent with variantist views.

Another avenue is to explain that incompatible beliefs can be both warranted by the same evidence by claiming that both are complying with the norms for belief or assertion. Call this notion normative faultlessness. (cf. MacFarlane 2014: 133) Putting it in a different way, Fausto following the norms for belief leads him to form the warranted belief that *grilled salmon is tastier than Lampreaia à*

⁷³ MacFarlane (2014: 133) calls faultless disagreement, where each party’s belief is accurate.

bordalesa and Julia following the norms leads her to form the warranted belief that *Lampreia à bordalesa is tastier than grilled salmon*. This is also not an option for invariantists, given that the alethic norms governing belief and assertion come out absolute under their view. However, variantist views predict that this notion of faultless is possible.

Thus, the argument from faultlessness can be connected with the pervasive persistence of evaluative disagreements, though such connection is indirect. From persistence we get the epistemic notion of faultlessness, where (epistemic) faultless disagreements are those where both parties are warranted to hold to their beliefs. This notion of faultlessness can be accounted for by any of the rival semantic theories. The challenge, then, is how to explain that both parties are warranted to hold onto their original beliefs on the basis of their personal tastes. Depending on the favoured explanation a more substantial notion of faultlessness—either normative faultlessness or belief-accuracy faultlessness—may be implied. These two notions cannot be accounted for by invariantist views, which, as a result undermines these views.

A more direct and more common way of going about it is simply to argue against invariantist views by showing that those views preclude the possibility of faultless disagreements (in the normative or belief-accuracy sense). Since faultless disagreements of that kind are possible, invariantism is not the appropriate semantic picture for evaluative talk.⁷⁴

Next I will be explaining in more detail how variantist views purport to account for faultless disagreements in the normative and belief-accuracy sense in evaluative discourse. This will also allow me to shed more light on why invariantist views fail to account for them.

5.1.3 Accounting for faultless disagreements in evaluative discourse

Here is a direct argument against invariantism from faultless disagreement which uses the normative notion of faultlessness—heavily adapted from Kölbel 2004. The following three claims are inconsistent.

- (T) The following is a norm governing belief or entailed by a norm governing belief: you must not believe in false propositions.⁷⁵
- (F) Faultless disagreement in evaluative discourse is possible.
- (I) In every (substantive) disagreements about evaluative matters at least one party believes a false proposition.

If (I) follows from invariantist views, then invariantists need to deny (T) or (F). I am taking (T) to be non-negotiable. Assuming that there are norms for belief this is entailed by such norms or itself a

⁷⁴ See an example of this strategy in Kölbel 2004.

⁷⁵ An analogous norm can be said to govern assertions.

norm governing it. (I) can also be formulated as a principle to accommodate views that deny that norms govern beliefs (or assertions).⁷⁶ Thus, it remains (F) has a target for the invariantist. But according to some denying (F) clashes with our shared intuition when it comes to many evaluative disagreements that they could be faultless.

An alternative to avoid such clash is attempting to explain faultlessness in a different way—e.g. for instance by appealing to the epistemic notion of faultlessness and deploying it as an explanation for the intuition supporting (F). This, as I have mentioned in the previous section, runs the risk of leaving unexplained why would agents take the parties involved in the disagreement both warranted when faced with the same evidence.

Another alternative is via the appeal to metalinguistic negotiations. Faultless disagreements in evaluative discourse are non-canonical and, when faultless disagreements occur the parties disagreeing are involved in conceptual ethics, i.e. negotiating word meaning. This is consistent with an invariantist view about evaluative predicates, for, when it comes to evaluative faultless disagreements, agents are, under this picture, using the predicates metalinguistically and not with their standard meaning. In previous chapters I have argued that this picture cannot be generalised for every evaluative predicate and, whence, for every faultless disagreement on evaluative matters (specifically those involving thin terms).

A final avenue is directly denying that invariantism entails (I)—if one assumes additional compelling claims.

According to invariantism the sentence ‘*Lampreia à bordalesa* is tastier than grilled salmon.’ expresses the same proposition when uttered by Julia and when uttered by Fausto. While Julia holds it to be true, Fausto believes it is false. The beliefs cannot be both accurate under invariantism because they are noncotenable and not centred contents according to the view. Hence, at least one of the parties involved is infringing (I).

One way of going about blocking (I) while preserving invariantism is to claim that Fausto and Julia are talking past each other and not really disagreeing (and that this occurs with purported faultless disagreements in evaluative discourse. This directly blocks (I), for, from the claim, it follows that faultless disagreements are not genuine or substantive. Notice, however, that this denies (F) too: faultless disagreements are assumed to be genuine and the intuition supporting (F) is that they are genuine and not merely verbal. Thus, blocking (I) this way does not vindicate (F). Moreover, what is supposed to be the view that informs that disagreeers, when faultlessly disagreeing about evaluative matters, are talking past each other? One would have to claim something along the lines of evaluative predicates, such as ‘tasty’, denoting multiple different dyadic properties. But with such claim invariantism collapses into a variantist view, specifically, into indexical contextualism.

⁷⁶ For instance by replacing (I) with the principle (I*) *it is a mistake to believe false propositions.*

A more promising option, in my view, is appealing to the possibility of faultless disagreements in other areas of discourse. The possibility of faultless disagreements is a common feature among disagreements involving vague predicates. Consider the following disagreement involving ‘tall’:

Julia: I’m tall. (128 cm Portuguese 7 year old girl)

Fausto: No, you’re not.

Assume that Julia is a borderline case for the comparison class in question. She and Fausto agree about all the relevant features that she has, namely her height, but they disagree about whether she counts as tall.

‘Tall’ is a vague predicate. Depending on your favoured view on vagueness the disagreement is such that it will be faultless, in some sense of faultlessness. If one endorses epistemicism the faultlessness is epistemic, both are warranted to not revise their beliefs on whether Julia is tall, although at least one of them is making a false claim. However, epistemicism has the virtue of explaining why both appear to be warranted to hold the view they hold, due to ignorance, given human cognitive limitation. If one takes vagueness to be a case of hyper-ambiguity and that statements are true only if they are true under every disambiguation or under every precisification, then it is not the case that Julia is tall nor the case that Julia is not tall; but nonetheless both Julia and Fausto seem to be getting something right, that under specification T Julia is tall and under specification T^{+1} Julia is not tall. Or one may take that being the case that p at a precisification suffices for p to be true (and $\text{not-}p$ being the case at a precisification suffices for p to be false—which entails that statements about borderline cases of vagueness are both true and false). Under this picture both Julia and Fausto would be holding accurate beliefs. If one takes vague predicates to be indexical-like, then both Julia and Fausto are claiming something that is true, although they are deploying different concepts of tallness. In this latter case it is hard to grasp in what sense they are genuinely disagreeing. As a result, it is hard to grasp in what sense (F) is vindicated—or even if invariantism is preserved.

Regardless of which view about vagueness is favoured (as long as one does not favour a contextualist view), it is possible that disagreements involving vague predicates and borderline cases are faultless and, hence, they seem to share an important feature with evaluative disagreements. The invariantist may claim that, as it is the case for faultless disagreements involving vague predicates, faultless evaluative disagreements are triggered due to evaluative predicates’ hyper-ambiguity or due to agents’ ignorance about evaluative matters. If one can expand the faultless phenomenon related with vagueness to evaluative talk, then the invariantist has good prospects in terms of accounting for (F) while holding to (I) and to (T).

What seems like a decisive blow to this prospect, though, is that faultless disagreement where the vague adjective occurs in the comparative form appear to not be possible, while the same does not

occur with respect to evaluative adjectives.⁷⁷ Consider an iteration of the same disagreement about whether Julia is tall, now with ‘tall’ occurring in the comparative form.

Julia: I’m taller than Pau Gasol.

Fausto: No, you’re not.

Along the same scale Julia and Fausto cannot both have uttered true statements or are warranted to hold to their beliefs in the face of new evidence. After discovering Pau Gasol’s height, it would be irrational for Julia to hold to her belief that she is taller than Gasol. It does not seem to be possible that the disagreement is faultless. This is rather obvious given that on any disambiguation it comes out true that Pau Gasol is above the height scale. The disagreement is about where Julia and Gasol fall relative to each other in the height scale and not about whether one of them counts as tall.

However, faultless disagreements are possible even when evaluative adjectives appear in the comparative form, as the reader has certainly noticed with the example of the disagreement about whether *Lampreia à bordalesa* is tastier than grilled salmon. If this feature is specific to evaluative disagreements, then something has gone amiss from the invariantist explanation. The appeal to hyper-ambiguity or ignorance loses its force, because these purported features of vague predicates do not explain the possible faultless disagreements when evaluative adjectives appear in the comparative form.

What about variantist views? Are they equipped to account for (F)? One would think so. However, the indexical contextualist does not easily vindicate (F). According to indexicalists evaluative predicates are indexicals or indexical like: a predicate like ‘tasty’ has the *experiencer* or a taste standard determined by the experiencer as its argument. Hence, an evaluative predicate *T* is analysed as T_{Sx} where the variable is filled in by the experiencer. This means that evaluative predicates, when used in different contexts of utterance, denote different properties. As a result, assuming compositionality, the utterance of ‘*Lampreia à bordalesa* is tastier than grilled salmon.’ may express different propositions when uttered by Julia and when uttered by Fausto. When Julia utters the sentence the adjective ‘tasty’ (in the comparative property) may denote the property of being tastier (according to Julia’s taste standards) and when the adjective is used by Fausto it denotes the property of being tastier (according to Fausto’s taste standards). Nothing in the view precludes the possibility that the standards of tastes are relevantly similar even when different contexts of use are involved (or even when used by different agents) nor that the same individual at different times may be employing different standards of taste. But how does the view capture (F)? Consider again the *Lampreia à bordalesa* example.

Julia: *Lampreia à bordalesa* is tastier than grilled salmon.

Fausto: No, it isn’t. How can you say that!

⁷⁷ In the next section I will deny that this is a specific feature of evaluative disagreements.

If Julia and Fausto are disagreeing and, given the conversational context, they denote the same property with the use of the word ‘tastier’, then it is sort of mysterious how (F) is to be captured. For according to the view, in that case, both contents would be incompatible, thus, precluding the possibility of both beliefs being accurate.⁷⁸ The natural way to capture the possibility that they are both getting something right is if they denote different properties with their use of ‘tastier’. But if that is the case, it is not straightforward in which sense they are disagreeing. Both contents are cotenable. Both beliefs are jointly accurate. They seem to be talking past each other.

Notice that the exchange below is not a disagreement:

Julia: I am eating dinner.

Fausto: Not me. I’m not eating dinner.

The pronoun ‘I’ when uttered by Julia refers to her and when uttered by Fausto refers to him. Hence, either of them can rationally hold the belief that Julia is eating dinner and Fausto is not eating dinner. But they would be disagreeing if Fausto was signalling his desire to eat dinner and, because Julia was eating dinner, he had nothing left to dine. In that case their desire to eat dinner could not be jointly satisfied. Hence, going back to the exchange on *Lampreia à bordalesa* and grilled salmon, Julia and Fausto may be attempting to coordinate on what their attitudes are towards both dishes regarding which is tastier. (Marques & García-Carpintero 2014) Or, alternatively, that both share the presupposition that they have common evaluative standards. (López de Sa 2008) Hence, the disagreement may not be about the content of their beliefs or about the beliefs they hold, but about their non-doxastic attitudes and how these may be coordinated.⁷⁹ The idea is capturing on the one hand the substantiveness of the disagreement and on the other hand that both are right about their belief concerning the comparison between the two dishes.

The non-indexical contextualist accepts that the content of Fausto and Julia’s belief is incompatible. This is so because ‘tastier’ is non indexical-like, but standard-sensitive. The predicate denotes the same property regardless the context of use, but whether the pair $\langle \textit{lampreia à bordalesa}, \textit{grilled salmon} \rangle$ is in that relation is partly determined by the standard of taste in the context in which the utterance was performed. Thus, Fausto and Julia’s beliefs cannot both be jointly accurate according to Julia’s standard of taste and their beliefs cannot both be jointly accurate according to Fausto’s standard of taste. Hence, their disagreement is substantive, although the view predicts that both of them may be right about which dish is tastier (according to their own standard of taste). That the view actually achieves this is not without contention. For instance, Stojanovic (2007) argues that competent

⁷⁸ Notice that indexicalists accept that ‘*Lampreia à bordalesa* is tastier than grilled salmon’ as used in context c if and only if *Lampreia à bordalesa* is tastier than grilled salmon with respect to the standard of taste s (which is the standard of taste in c). Hence, if the standard of taste is shared among the disagreeers, either Julia or Fausto is making a mistake.

⁷⁹ Or their disagreement could be described as Fausto rejecting Julia’s move of attempting to establish that A is tastier than B as part of the conversational common ground. See e.g. Legaspe 2016.

English speakers, like Julia and Fausto, know that what they expressed may take different values depending on the standard of taste.⁸⁰ Hence, they know that their beliefs are jointly inaccurate only when their standards of taste are such that the same content would be evaluated as having different values. Thus:

[I]f each party intends the asserted content to be evaluated at himself or herself, and if this is mutually clear between them, then they will realize that there is no clash in truth value between their claims (when evaluated as they intend them to be), and that their “disagreement” is thus nothing more than a divergence in preferences. (Stojanovic 2007: 697)

Which undermines the idea that genuine substantive disagreement is being captured by non-indexical contextualists. If this argument has any bite to it, at the very least, non-indexicalists are in no better shape than indexicalists in vindicating (F).

Relativists seem equally prone to this objection.⁸¹ The depiction of faultless disagreements involve non-cotenable beliefs being assessed both as true from different contexts (of assessment). Even under a relativist picture their “disagreement” would come down to a divergence in preferences, or in assessments. As a reply to this objection relativists may claim the following:

Perhaps the point is to bring about agreement by leading our interlocutors into relevantly different contexts of assessment. If you say “skiing is fun” and I contradict you, it is not because I think that the proposition you asserted is false as assessed by you in your current situation, with the affective attitudes you now have, but because I hope to change these attitudes. Perhaps, then, the point of using controversy inducing assessment-sensitive vocabulary is to foster coordination of contexts. We have an interest in sharing standards of taste, senses of humor, and epistemic states with those around us. The reasons are different in each case. In the case of humor, we want people to appreciate our jokes, and we want them to tell jokes we appreciate. In the case of epistemic states, it is manifestly in our interest to share a picture of the world, and to learn from others when they know things that we do not. (MacFarlane 2007: 30)

But this just means, as we have previously seen that relativists and contextualists alike need to say more about the disagreement to accommodate the intuition that evaluative disagreements are substantive, as well as possibly faultless, that there is some coordination going on when evaluative disagreements occur. This may suffice to claim that variantist theories have better prospects of vindicating (F) than

⁸⁰ Assuming “Semantic Competence (SC): Speakers of English are semantically competent with predicates of taste: they master their meaning and truth conditions.” (Stojanovic 2007: 696), competent English speakers master the meaning and truth conditions of evaluative terms.

⁸¹ Even if the view is not prone to objections which rely on the idea that the difference between indexicalist and non-indexicalist contextualists comes down to a notational variation, on whether the standard should be interpreted as an implicit argument constituent of the proposition expressed or as additional parameter of the circumstance of evaluation (per Kaplanian parlance).

invariantist theories, but it leaves variantist theories on equal par with each other when it comes to accounting for evaluative disagreements and vindicating (F).

5.2 *There is more that divides: the case for a non-uniform approach to evaluative disagreements*

After briefly describing the many senses the notion of “faultless disagreement” may assume and the difficulties related with properly capturing the intuition that they are possible when evaluative disagreements are concerned, in this section I aim at undermining two claims that are paramount to motivating views to account for evaluative disagreements across the different areas of evaluative of discourse. Undermining one of the claims entails that one has no reason to expect a uniform account of evaluative disagreements (across the areas of evaluative discourse). Undermining the other claim entails that one has no reason to believe evaluative disagreements specifically motivate a particular semantic view to account for them and that they have a uniform feature that is specific to them.

Many scholars explicitly or implicitly endorse the following two claims:

Uniformity Claim 1 (UC1). Evaluative disagreements should be accounted for uniformly (across the different areas of evaluative discourse).

Specificity Claim 1 (SC). Evaluative disagreements share the specific feature of being triggered even if the evaluative adjective occurs in the comparative form.

The main motivation for UC1 relies on the putative fact that evaluative disagreements (and only them) trigger faultlessness intuitions. The phenomenon of faultlessness disagreement is supposed to be common among areas of evaluative discourse and specific to those areas. This does not imply that only when evaluative adjectives are used in a disagreement faultlessness intuitions are triggered, for other words may be used to convey evaluative content and, thus, occur in evaluative disagreements. Notwithstanding, the behaviour of evaluative disagreements, particularly if they share a common and specific feature (e.g. triggering intuitions of faultlessness), may reveal something important about how one should account for evaluative predicates’ semantics.

Prima facie problematic for UC1 proponents is that non-evaluative disagreements may also trigger that intuition, specifically when the use of scalar adjectives is involved. Thus, faultlessness is not a particular feature of evaluative disagreements. Nonetheless, many scholars are convinced that only evaluative disagreements trigger intuitions of faultlessness in the comparative form—i.e. when agents use adjectives in the comparative form only evaluative adjectives (and other words being used evaluatively) trigger faultlessness intuitions—SC. Importantly, they argue that this feature is common across the different areas of evaluative discourse. Assuming—for the moment—that said feature is common and specific to evaluative discourse, this gives one a strong reason to hold that there is

something substantively uniformity and specificity about evaluative disagreements; and that suggests there are semantic features specific and shared among evaluative predicates.

My aim in the following sections is to undermine the motivation for UC1 and SC and show that there is no feature evaluative disagreements (almost) universally share across areas of evaluative discourse that is particular to those disagreements. To do so I show that non-evaluative disagreements may trigger faultlessness intuitions even when occurring in the comparative form. This, accompanied by other linguistic data, strongly suggests that evaluative disagreements should not be treated uniformly or as evidencing a specific feature of evaluative predicates. I finish the section by pointing to what larger lessons one should take from UC1 and SC not holding regarding the semantics of evaluative predicates.

5.2.1 *What unites evaluative disagreements: faultlessness*

Evaluative predicates share important features. An important feature is that they give rise to faultless disagreements. Notwithstanding, this is not a particular feature that only they share. Many other gradable predicates—which include non-evaluative predicates such as ‘long’, ‘tall’, ‘healthy’, etc.—also share this feature. Consider the following dialogue between L and Q about whether R counts as being tall.

L₁: R is tall.

Q₁: No, she isn't.

L₂: She is 172 cm. That is tall.

Q₂: 172 cm isn't tall.

The dialogue is about whether R should count as tall given her height. L₂ is signalling that the disagreement is about whether or not 172 cm is the appropriate cut-off for tallness. Assuming that R is a borderline case, there is “no objective way to adjudicate” the dispute (Stojanovic 2019:).⁸² Hence, the intuition that neither L nor Q are to blame for holding the view they hold regarding R's putative tallness.

Consider that there is no matter of fact about whether R is tall or, if there is, it is unknowable whether she is tall. Then, the intuition that a disagreement where the exchange is limited to L₁ and Q₁ generates the intuition that neither party is at fault too. This does not require that there is a negotiation of what the appropriate cut-off ought to be. The intuition of faultless is triggered by there being no sharp-boundaries or by the location of said boundaries being unknowable. As Wright (1994: 144) states that “vagueness just consists in the fact that, under certain circumstances, cognitively lucid, fully informed and properly functioning subjects may faultlessly differ about it”.

⁸² The explanation for this will depend on the reader's favoured view on vagueness.

Regardless of what the disagreement is about, whether it is a metalinguistic dispute or whether it is a dispute about R's eventual tallness, statements with non-evaluative gradable predicates can also trigger the intuition of faultless disagreements. This feature is shared with evaluative predicates—such as 'tasty', 'wrong' and 'beautiful'. Consider the following disagreements.

L_t: The dish is perfectly balanced. It is really tasty.

Q_t: No, it's not. It is too acidic. It doesn't taste well at all.

L_w: Bullfighting causes unnecessary animal suffering. It's just wrong.

Q_w: No it isn't. It is a form of art and entertaining.

L_b: The abstract painting we saw yesterday was quite beautiful.

Q_b: No, it wasn't. It was just a confusing mush of colours.

For each case of disagreement the intuition is that both agents involved in the dispute can be blameless with respect to the view he/she holds. This is what moves the intuition that they can be faultless. But the intuition is not particularly different from the intuition regarding disagreements about non-evaluative matters where borderline cases are concerned. In the latter case the intuition of faultlessness is also driven by the fact that neither agent involved in the dispute is to blame for holding the view he/she holds.

An important caveat. A natural way to interpret the L₁–Q₂ exchange is to describe it as those involved in the dispute negotiating what the standard for tallness ought to be—i.e. engaging in a metalinguistic negotiation. If interpreted that way, the disagreement is evaluative, in the sense that it is about how facts (linguistic facts) ought to be and not about what they are. If all faultless disagreements involve non-evaluative scalar adjectives are of this sort, then faultlessness maintains its exclusive link with evaluative disagreements. Notwithstanding, agents may disagree about what the cut-off point for tallness ought to be—that may well motivate some of the dispute, but need not motivate them all—and yet the matter under dispute be whether or not the object meets the standard for tallness. Hence, said dispute is not merely about how facts ought to be, but about what they are; and agents are blameless for holding the view they hold on the non-evaluative matter. Take for instance a disagreement about whether a person is tall. The agents involved in the disagreement agree that the person is a borderline case for tallness, but they disagree about if this specific borderline case counts as tall or not. The disagreement may be faultless, since neither agent is blameworthy or wrong about holding their own view on the matter.

Given this, there is no lesson to be taken away that evaluative disagreements are special from the intuition that they may be faultless. Reinforcing the same point: that is a feature shared with some non-evaluative disagreements and, thus, there is no evidence that faultlessness is a particular feature of

evaluative disputes. As far as one knows, for evaluative predicates, similar linguistic mechanisms (particular to vague predicates) may be at play when triggering faultlessness.

This has motivated scholars—e.g. Glanzberg (2007), Saebo (2009), Kennedy (2013), Bylinina (2014), Marques (2016), Solt (2016) and McNally and Stojanovic (2017)—to focus on disagreements where the evaluative predicate is used in the comparative form. The reason is straightforward: in the case of non-evaluative gradable predicates, the disagreements can be faultless because among the scale there is a penumbral area where it is unknowable where the sharp boundary between the predicates extension and anti-extension lies or where there is such a sharp boundary to begin with. When in the comparative form we are comparing two values among the scale and the lack of a sharp boundary or the unknowability of its location becomes irrelevant. Thus, the expectation that a faultless disagreement could ensue when using non-evaluative vague predicates arguably vanishes. Consider the following disagreements where the relevant adjectives are used in the comparative form to reinforce the point.

L_t*: This dish is perfectly balanced. It is tastier than the previous one.

Q_t*: No, it's not. It is too acidic. The previous one was tastier.

L_w*: Bullfighting is morally worse than abortion.

Q_w*: No it isn't. Abortion is worse.

L_b*: The abstract painting we saw yesterday is more beautiful than the one we saw the day before.

Q_b*: I disagree. I preferred the one we saw the day before.

L₁*: R is taller than S.

Q₁*: No, she isn't.

The L₁*–Q₁* exchange depicts an example where once a non-evaluative adjective—in this case ‘tall’—is used in the comparative form the intuition of faultlessness dispels. Either L or Q made a mistake and, as a result, at least one of them is blameworthy. To determine which one made a mistake the task is fairly easy: one only needs to measure R's and S's heights and determine which of the two is higher.

In contrast, when evaluative predicates are used in the comparative form, the intuition that it is possible that neither of those involved in the disagreement have made a mistake subsists. This evidences two claims: (i) faultless disagreements when it comes to evaluative matters (i.e. where evaluative adjectives are involved) are triggered differently than when it comes to non-evaluative matters (i.e. where non-evaluative scalar adjectives are involved) and (ii) a common and specific feature shared among evaluative adjectives is that they can trigger faultless disagreement intuitions even when used in the comparative form. The latter claim supports approaching evaluative disagreements uniformly and as a specific phenomenon; i.e. regardless of the area of evaluative discourse, evaluative disagreements

should be accounted for as comprising of the same phenomenon. Putting it in a slightly different way still, there is no distinction that justifies treating moral disagreements, aesthetic disagreements or disagreements about matters of personal taste theoretically differently. As for claim (i) it gives support to the idea that evaluative predicates should be treated differently—theoretically speaking—from non-evaluative scalar predicates, given their distinct linguistic behaviour.

In the following sections I aim to undermine claim (ii) and, more specifically, undermine the claim that the phenomenon of faultless evaluative disagreement lends itself to be theoretically treated as a unified whole (UC1). Some arguments that evaluative disagreements should not be analysed uniformly are already present in the literature. Those arguments appeal to interesting differences regarding the linguistic behaviour between moral predicates and predicates of personal taste. In the next section I will shortly revisit those linguistic dissimilarities and explain how those undermine a uniform account of evaluative disagreement.

5.2.2 The case for a non-uniform approach about evaluative disagreement

Linguistic evidence points to differences between how agents interact by engaging in disagreements about matters of personal taste and by engaging in disagreements about other evaluative matters, namely about moral matters. For instance, Stojanovic (2019) has pointed out that predicates of personal taste and moral predicates display different behavioural linguistic patterns.⁸³ The evidence is of two sorts: (1) it appeals to felicity tests regarding the usage of moral predicates and of predicates of personal taste under the attitude verb ‘find’ and with the phrases ‘to X’ or ‘for X’ and (2) it appeals to empirical tests that purportedly support the claim that while predicates of personal taste are experience-sensitive, moral predicates are not.

Before going into the first set of evidence, it is important to say something about the role of the attitude verb ‘find’ and the phrases ‘to X’ or ‘for X’ and why the behaviour of adjectives under those phrases matters in the assessment of evaluative disagreements.

The role of the verb ‘find’, particularly in ‘X find(s)’ constructions, is to introduce (or shift) the experiencer parameter.⁸⁴ Thus, for experiencer-sensitive adjectives one expects them to be felicitous under such constructions, while the same does not occur for predicates which lack experiencer-sensitivity.

It is important to make a couple caveats at this point. ‘X find(s)’ constructions forces an experiencer-insensitive adjective to include an experiencer argument, even if it is not lexically encoded and, hence, even experiencer-insensitive adjectives occur felicitously under the construction. But—crucially—this forces an important modification: the adjective conveys experiential information about

⁸³ See also Solt 2018 for empirical findings on different varieties of multidimensionality and how they relate to differences in objective, subjective and mixed gradable adjectives.

⁸⁴ See Saebø 2009, Bylinina 2014, Kennedy 2016 and Umbach 2016 on this.

how an object, event... strikes an experiencer. Consider the utterance of ‘I find R tall.’ To felicitously interpret the utterance the experiencer-insensitive adjective ‘tall’ needs to be interpreted as describing the speaker’s experience of R or of R’s presence.⁸⁵ This is shown by the fact that the following dialogue is felicitous:

L_{1**}: I find R tall.

Q_{1**}: I understand that you find her tall, but she isn’t tall; she’s pretty short actually.

Notably, Q_{1**} is not denying what is stated in L_{1**}, which supports the claim that ‘tall’ is being used *experientially* on its first two occurrences in the dialogue and that it is being used *dimensionally* on its last occurrence. Hence, although felicitously occurring under the ‘X find(s)’ construction is insufficient to determine whether an adjective is experiencer-(in)sensitive, one can still determine that an adjective is experience-insensitive if the only felicitous way to interpret its use under the ‘X find(s)’ construction requires interpreting it not in its usual sense.

Another caveat. Other attitude verbs, such as ‘believe’, ‘think’ ..., do not introduce (or shift) the experiencer argument. Their role is different. While ‘find’ is what Kennedy (2013) calls a “radical judge-shifter” (262), the other verbs introduce truth-conditional content. This is revealed by the disparity regarding the felicity of the following two claims.

L_{1***}: # I find myself (to be) tall.

L_{1***}: I believe/think I’m tall.

According to Saebo (2009) and Kennedy (2013) this shows that ‘find’ exclusively selects for an experiencer-sensitive (or subjective-sensitive) adjective, while ‘believe’ and ‘think’ do not. The reason for L_{1***} to be infelicitous has to do with the introduction of the speaker as the experiencer-parameter for her own tallness not making any difference in meaning—using ‘find’ in this case is vacuous. (Kennedy 2013: 262)

The ‘to X’ and ‘for X’ phrases are also used to detect experiencer-sensitivity. These phrases are used to introduce or shift the experiencer-parameter and, as expected, are thought to be infelicitous with dimensional (or experiencer-insensitive) adjectives. But, again, felicity test with these constructions are not clear cut. One important reason is that ‘to X’ and ‘for X’ are sometimes used as appositives (meaning something like ‘in X’s opinion’ or ‘according to X’). So, one needs to be careful about whether the phrase is used as an argument or it is being used as an adjunct in the example (Bylina 2014). When used as an adjunct is it perfectly felicitous to use ‘to X’ or ‘for X’ with dimensional adjectives.

⁸⁵ See McNally and Stojanovic 2017.

A further complication is that some adjectives require either ‘for’ or ‘to’, but not both. Thus, felicity tests should include both construction for determining whether the predicate is experiencer-(in)sensitive.

The felicity tests with ‘find’ and ‘for/to X’ constructions are used to determine whether a given predicate is experiencer-sensitive or not. This is important for inquiring about evaluative disagreement because the intuition that some evaluative disagreements can be faultless is linked with a particular kind of subjectivity, experiential subjectivity. This is supposed to be the common and specific mechanism which triggers the intuition that some evaluative disagreements can be faultless—at least when the evaluative adjective is used in the comparative form.⁸⁶ Thus, if triggering faultless disagreements, while in the comparative, is a common and specific feature of evaluative adjectives and if this is linked with a particular sort of subjectivity that can be tested with ‘find’ and ‘for/to X’ constructions, the expectation is that—regardless the paradigmatic evaluative predicate—assertions containing such constructions are felicitous.

A further complication with felicity tests has to do with ‘felicitous’ being itself a gradable adjective. Since felicity comes in degrees, felicity tests are not all or nothing tests. A particular construction when used with an evaluative adjective may appear more felicitous than when used with another adjective, but, given its gradability, one needs to thread carefully when coming up with definite conclusions about the nature of the adjective solely on the basis of felicity tests.⁸⁷

With all these caveats in place let us get to the examples.

L_{tf} : Peter just ate the whole dish. He finds it really tasty.

L_{wf} : ? Peter finds bullfighting to be morally wrong.

L_{1f} : # Peter finds R to be tall.

Utterances of sentences involving moral predicates under ‘X find(s)’ constructions, such as L_{wf} sound infelicitous, or at the very least less infelicitous than the same constructions with predicates of personal taste—such as L_{tf} . Thus, this felicity test indicates that, although predicates of personal taste are experiencer-sensitive, moral predicates are not.

More data in favour of this difference among evaluative predicates, can be found when one tests the felicity of utterances of sentences with ‘to/for X’ constructions.

L_{tf}^2 : The dish is tasty to/for Peter.

L_{wf}^2 : ? Bullfighting is morally wrong to/for Peter.

L_{1f}^2 : # Peter is tall to/for Julia.

⁸⁶ See e.g. Kennedy (2013, 2016) on this.

⁸⁷ Another problem which may be raised is that felicity tests rely on individual pre-theoretic linguistic intuitions which may vary drastically from person to person.

Granted L_{wf}^2 does not sound as bad as L_{1f}^2 , but it still sounds infelicitous. There is nothing wrong with L_{1f}^2 . This further indicates that experiencer or judge-sensitivity is not a shared feature among evaluative predicates and that it actually depends on the area of evaluative discourse one is engaged in. Thus, the mechanism that was put forth to explain the intuition that evaluative disagreements can be faultless while evaluative adjectives appear in the comparative form cannot be generalised to every area of evaluative discourse.

Again, ‘to/for X’ constructions are typically used to introduce an experiencer argument. The fact that L_{wf}^2 and L_{1f}^2 are infelicitous uses with said construction indicates that the predicates ‘morally wrong’ and ‘tall’ are not experiencer-sensitive; i.e. they do not allow for experiencer-shifts. Two alternative explanations for the lack of experiencer-sensitivity for these predicates are available it is either the case that (i) experiencer-insensitive predicates are objective or it is the case that (ii) experiencer-insensitive predicates only allow for an experiencer, namely the speaker. Whatever the explanation, though, one is forced to accept that experience-insensitive predicates and experiencer-sensitive predicates behave differently, indicating that the mechanisms through which the intuition of faultlessness in many evaluative disagreements is deployed are not the same for each case.

Corpus data reinforces this idea. Uses of each of the two constructions with predicates of personal taste abound, while uses of the same constructions with moral predicates are scarce—if any.⁸⁸ The data strongly suggest that agents interpret predicates of personal taste as experiencer-sensitive, while interpreting moral predicates as experiencer-insensitive.

What is the relevance of the data mentioned thus far for evaluative disagreements? The data undermine the assumption that one should present a uniform diagnosis for evaluative disagreements, regardless the area of evaluative discourse. The fact that evaluative disagreements can be faultless does not properly motivate UC1, because that is not a distinctive feature of evaluative disagreements; non-evaluative disagreements can be faultless too. However, despite these differences and the lack of a specific feature unifying evaluative disagreements, proponents of UC1 have looked elsewhere for a unifying feature when it comes to evaluative disagreement: faultless disagreements can occur when evaluative adjectives are in the comparative form.

5.2.3 Despite the differences

In the previous section, linguistic data was presented in order to evidence that evaluatives are not a uniform whole and, even if that evaluative disagreements where evaluative adjectives appear in the positive form can be faultless, that is not a feature specific to those disagreements and, hence, it cannot be interpreted as a feature that uniformly unifies evaluative disagreements, given that faultlessness may be due to their gradability and not their evaluative content.

⁸⁸ See COCA—the Corpus of Contemporary American English (<https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>).

This has turned the focus toward disagreements where the adjectives appear in the comparative form. The reason for this can be put in the following way: if the issue is that non-evaluative disagreements may be faultless due to an object counting as a borderline case among a particular scale, then, regardless that object counting as a borderline case, that object is either above, in the same point or below in comparison to the point on the scale of a different object. Hence, if faultless disagreements may occur when the adjectives appear in the comparative form, then that is not due to where objects fall on the scale or due to vagueness. To exemplify, consider L_{1*} – Q_{1*} :

L_{1*} : R is taller than S.

Q_{1*} : No, she isn't.

Assume again that R is a borderline case, regardless though, in relation to S she is either taller, smaller or of equal height. If differences in height are so minute between R and S, then R does not count as taller than S. Whatever the case, when occurring in the comparative form the adjective 'tall' does not trigger faultless disagreement.

However, when we consider evaluative disagreements in the comparative form faultless disagreements may occur. Consider again the following examples:

L_{t*} : This dish is perfectly balanced. It is tastier than the previous one.

Q_{t*} : No, it's not. It is too acidic. The previous one was tastier.

L_{w*} : Bullfighting is morally worse than abortion.

Q_{w*} : No it isn't. Abortion is worse.

L_{b*} : The abstract painting we saw yesterday is more beautiful than the one we saw the day before.

Q_{b*} : I disagree. I preferred the one we saw the day before.

In the examples the evaluative adjectives appear in the comparative form. Notwithstanding, the intuition that the disagreements may be faultless subsists. The contrast between non-evaluative disagreements and evaluative disagreements is evident when considering disagreements in the comparative form. Evaluative disagreements may be faultless, while non-evaluative lack that feature. This means that evaluative disagreements share a common and specific feature: they may generate faultless disagreements even while in the comparative form. This is a feature specific to evaluative disagreements, given that non-evaluative disagreements do not trigger faultlessness intuitions.

Thus, even considering the linguistic differences among evaluative adjectives that were mentioned in the previous section, proponents of UC1 may appeal to disagreements in the comparative form to motivate their position. They may claim that this gives one reason to uniformly account for evaluative

disagreements, given that they share some specificity about them. In the next section I argue that faultless disagreements in the comparative form do not motivate UC1, because SC is false.

5.2.4 *Multidimensionality and disagreement in the comparative form*

Consider once again L_1^* – Q_1^* :

L_1^* : R is taller than S.

Q_1^* : No, she isn't.

Previously, I stated that the faultlessness intuition is dispelled when non-evaluative scalar adjectives appear in the comparative form, because, borderline case or not, objects will appear in a particular order along the predicate's scale. A consequence of this is that the disagreement is easily settled by measuring R and S.⁸⁹ The same does not occur when evaluative disagreements are concerned, which may be appealed to motivate UC1.

I believe that, even when some non-evaluative scalar adjectives appear in the comparative form, they may yet give rise to faultless disagreements. In this section I aim at providing reasons for that claim.

The majority of scalar adjectives are multidimensional. A multidimensional predicate being true of an object depends, among other things, on the object's value along more than one dimension in the scale. As mentioned in previous chapters, this may be cashed out in different ways and the details are not important for present purposes. Some scalar predicates require that the object's value exceeds the threshold for every dimension (conjunctive adjectives) and some require that the object's value exceeds the threshold for at least a dimension (disjunctive adjectives). The truth conditions of sentences containing multidimensional adjectives are dependent on the consideration of multiple dimensions. Consider examples with 'unhealthy', a paradigmatic case of a disjunctive multidimensional adjective. The utterance of 'Trump is unhealthy.' is true iff $U(t)$, for at least a dimension d_n , such that d_1 belongs to \mathbf{D}_u , the set of dimensions $\{d_1, d_2, \dots, d_n, \dots\}$ for U. What about utterances of sentences in which the multidimensional adjective in the comparative form? Consider, for instance, the utterance of 'Trump is unhealthier than Biden.', the utterance is true iff $U(t,b)$, for at least a dimension d_x , such that d_x belongs to \mathbf{D}_u , the set of dimensions $\{d_1, d_2, \dots, d_x, \dots\}$ for U. Now consider the other way around, the utterance of 'Biden is unhealthier than Trump.' is true iff $U(b,t)$, for at least a dimension d_n , such that d_n belongs to \mathbf{D}_u , the set of dimensions $\{d_1, d_2, \dots, d_n, \dots\}$ for U. It follows that the truth-value of the utterance of the sentence 'Trump is unhealthier than Biden.' varies according to what the relevant

⁸⁹ The task can be made harder. Measurement devices—even if their precision is very high—fail to capture very minute differences in height. In such case neither L nor Q appear to be blameworthy, for it is unknowable whether R is taller than S. However, these minute differences in height are well within what one would consider the margin for error. Thus, R would not be taller than S; hence, L_t would be at fault. See Williamson 1994 on this.

dimension is to assess it. Then, is it not possible that some disagreements involving multidimensional adjectives can trigger faultless intuitions? The answer has to be affirmative. Consider the following disagreements involving the proposition that *Trump is unhealthier than Biden*.

L_u: Trump is unhealthier than Biden.

Q_u: No, he isn't. Biden is healthier, he has a higher blood pressure.

L_u: Sure, but Trump has a higher cholesterol level.

L_u*: Trump is unhealthier than Biden.

Q_u*: No, he isn't.

L_u*: Look, Biden's cholesterol level is very similar to Trump's, but Trump's blood pressure is higher.

Q_u*: No. I still think you're wrong. The difference in terms of blood pressure between them is really minute.

L_u** : Trump cholesterol level is higher than Biden's.

Q_u** : Well, sure, but Biden's blood pressure is higher.

L_u** : Not enough for not being the case that Trump is unhealthier than Biden.

Q_u** : I disagree; Biden is healthier.

The first disagreement may be interpreted as a disagreement about what the relevant dimension ought to be when comparing Trump's and Biden's health.⁹⁰ I think there is a good argument to be made that the disagreement is a paradigmatic case of metalinguistic negotiation.⁹¹ Assuming the diagnosis is on the right track, then 'unhealthier' is being used metalinguistically and not literally. A concern arises from the fact that faultlessness is being triggered through a metalinguistic usage of the adjective and, hence, the disagreement would be evaluative in the sense that L and Q are debating about what the relevant dimension for 'unhealthy' ought to be (given the situation). Thus, this only shows that non-evaluative scalar adjectives can be used, when occurring under metalinguistic usage, to engage in evaluative disagreement, which may be faultless. It does not show that non-evaluative disagreements, when appearing in the comparative form, may be faultless, because the example is not an example of a non-evaluative dispute.

In the second disagreement, the agents are not disputing about what the relevant dimensions ought to be, they agree about that, but they disagree whether the differences for each dimensional scale are significant enough to truthfully claim that Trump is unhealthier than Biden. The dispute is

⁹⁰ The dispute could also be analysed as a dispute about which of the dimension is more relevant in determining who is unhealthier, depending on how one prefers to cash out how dimensionality and scale interact with one another.

⁹¹ See Ch. 3 on this.

motivated by the minute distances between the two along each dimensional scale. Said differences are arguably within the margin for error. The disagreement may be described as being about what the margin for error in this particular case ought to be. This, again, makes the disagreement evaluative and, hence, arguably does not undermine the claim that only evaluative disagreements share the feature of triggering faultlessness intuitions when the relevant adjectives appear in the comparative form.

The last exchange may be interpreted as follows: $Q_{u^{**}}$ contests that Trump is unhealthier than Biden on the basis that Biden's blood pressure is higher than Trump's. They disagree on how to calculate each dimensional scale when considering how an object counts as unhealthy and that motivates the disagreement. Thus, a plausible interpretation of what is going on is that the three exchanges are metalinguistic negotiations and, hence, SC is vindicated—i.e. there is shared feature specific to evaluative disagreements.⁹²

Regardless, I believe one may correctly interpret the occurrence of 'unhealthier' as a literal use of the adjective and not a metalinguistic one. The agents need not be undergoing a negotiation on how to calculate where each U.S. President falls on the *unhealthier* scale or what the margin for error ought to be. They disagree on it and the disputes triggers faultless intuitions, without necessarily being interpreted metalinguistically and, hence, as an evaluative dispute. Further argument needed to be made linking the intuition that these exchanges may be faultless and the metalinguistic usage of 'unhealthier'.⁹³

Moreover, if every non-evaluative dispute in the comparative form which may trigger faultless intuitions is only correctly interpreted as a metalinguistic negotiation, then it is unclear why the same would not occur with respect to disagreements deployed by the use of evaluative adjectives in the comparative form which trigger faultless intuitions; given that evaluative adjectives are typically multidimensional too.⁹⁴ If taken that route, then triggering faultlessness intuitions in the comparative form would indeed be a feature only shared among evaluative disagreements, but the route taken would render UC1 inconsequential, since SC would be false. The motivation for the claim has to do with how faultlessness relates to evaluative disagreements and how it provides strong evidence about particular features of evaluative adjectives and, hence, that evaluative predicates are to be treated differently from non-evaluative ones. If the phenomenon is triggered commonly among multidimensional scalar

⁹² A similar objection could be raised about non-evaluative disagreements in the positive form. It is arguable that those disputes are also metalinguistic, in that case, about where the cut-off ought to be. If that were the case, then faultlessness does not motivate a specific semantic treatment for evaluative predicates (cf. Barker 2002).

⁹³ Soria-Ruiz (2021) interestingly suggests three tests which indicate whether one is in the presence of evaluative disagreements: (1) metalinguistic claims are felicitously embedded under 'consider'; (2) in a metalinguistic negotiation speakers may reply using a metalinguistic comparative (with the form 'adjective 1 more than adjective 2') literally; (3) in metalinguistic negotiations the question under dispute is metalinguistic question. Some evaluative disagreements do not display these feature. This indicates that some evaluative disagreements are not metalinguistic negotiations. I believe disagreements with multidimensional vague predicates in the comparative form also lack these features (at least some), suggesting they are not metalinguistic negotiations.

⁹⁴ See Section 2.2.4 on this.

predicates, then endorsing UC1 amounts to no interesting conclusion regarding the behaviour of evaluatives.

In previous sections,⁹⁵ I have argued that evaluatives are not merely scalar adjectives, for their evaluative content is stably evaluative across possible social settings, when compared to non-evaluative adjectives used as value-words. Notwithstanding, this is consistent with the claim that what triggers faultless intuitions when it comes to evaluative disagreement are negotiations about linguistic features of the relevant adjectives—i.e. evaluative disagreements triggering faultless intuitions are being used metalinguistically, even if they literally express evaluative content.

At the very least there remains the possibility that non-evaluative disagreements, even those where the relevant adjective appears in the comparative form, trigger faultlessness intuitions. If that is a real possibility, then UC1 advocates require further argument showing that possibility is not actual. Until such argument is provided, there is no strong justification to hold UC1, since seeming non-evaluative disagreements (even those on which adjectives occur in the comparative form) may trigger faultlessness intuitions due to their multidimensionality, for the implication is that SC is false.

5.2.5 *The semantic aftermath*

This section has two goals: (a) to further explain how the motivation for UC1 is undermined by the denial of SC; and (b) explicating the larger lessons for semantic accounts of evaluative predicates, assuming UC1 and SC do not hold. I will start by tackling (a). Stojanovic (2019) has made a compelling case in favour of undermining UC1 by appealing to a myriad of linguistic data which strongly suggest that personal taste predicates are experiencer-sensitive and moral predicates are not. Arguably, this indicates that disagreements on matters of personal taste and moral disagreements should not be treated uniformly. I have rehashed these data in previous sections. At this juncture, I have pointed out that UC1 proponents may appeal to a seeming specific and shared feature among evaluative disagreements: that they may trigger faultlessness intuitions even when the relevant adjective appears in the comparative form. This feature has to be specific to evaluative adjectives and about adjectives used as value words, if there is to be something about evaluative disagreements which justifies their uniform and special treatment. I have argued that scalar multidimensional adjectives may be used non-evaluatively in the comparative form and trigger faultless disagreements too. This implies that faultless disagreements in the comparative form is not a specific feature of evaluative terms and evaluative disagreements. This, coupled with the further data mentioned in previous sections, shows that UC1 is unmotivated.

Tackling (b). There is no reason to believe that there is a unifying feature specific to evaluative disagreements that could salvage the idea that, despite the differences, evaluative disagreement is a uniform phenomenon. With this settled and coupled with the awareness that some semantic theories

⁹⁵ See Ch. 3.

are (at least partly) motivated by the possibility that faultlessness is a feature of evaluative disagreements, it does not follow that a particular theory will fit well regardless the area of evaluative discourse. For instance, if there is indeed independent reason to believe that the possibility of faultlessness is not a feature shared among all the areas of evaluative discourse, then different theories will likely apply. Alternatively, it may well be the case that the non-uniformity and non-specificity of evaluative disagreement suggest that one should not look at the purported faultless disagreements when deciding which theory applies to evaluative discourse or to a specific area of evaluative discourse. (See Palmira 2015)

Here, I leave the question open. Part of the aim is a more modest one: undermine the claim that faultless evaluative disagreement is a uniform phenomenon, by showing that there is no specific feature that unifies it, and given the linguistic evidence that e.g. moral predicates and predicates of personal taste display different features, endorsing UC1 is an unwarranted position.

Perhaps more surprisingly, I have also argued for the claim that there is no linguistic evidence that there is a faultlessness related phenomenon—such as faultless disagreements occurring even when the adjective appears in the comparative form—specific to evaluative disagreement. Such conclusion, in my view, undermines the idea that evaluative disagreements should motivate specific views on evaluatives—given that the same phenomenon can be found in non-evaluative disagreements.

5.3 Taking stock

The possibility of faultless disagreements has been at the forefront of the debate to motivate variantist views accounting for evaluative discourse. I have explored how evaluative disagreements relate to the different notions of faultlessness and described how the different semantic theories attempt to vindicate the possibility of faultless disagreements. In the last section I have undermined the idea that there is a specific or uniform feature common among evaluative disagreements across areas of evaluative discourse. The consequences of undermining these two claims is fundamentally that there is no reason to believe that a specific view should be motivated by appealing to faultless disagreements in evaluative talk.

In the next chapter the aim is somewhat similar. I aim to undermine the idea that there is a uniform feature of retraction in evaluative discourse. Before doing so I explore avenues to characterise retraction and, to do so, I start by making a brief digression on speech act theory.

6 Retraction

Retraction of evaluative claims has been used as a motivation for truth relativism applied to evaluative terms. Retraction is the act of *taking back* another act. Applied to evaluative claims, evaluative retraction is the act of *taking back* an assertion with evaluative content.

Evaluative retraction is a phenomenon which has been the paramount to the most recent debate about the appropriate semantic treatment of evaluative predicates. Some truth relativists have motivated their view by appealing to obligatory retractions not necessarily involving admission that something went wrong with the speech act that ought to be targeted for retraction.⁹⁶ The idea is that only truth relativists have the resources to account for this intuition, that obligatory retractions may not require that the targeted speech act for retraction was somehow faultily performed. This is possible because contexts of use and contexts of assessment are not the same. Since assessors may evaluate the correctness of an assertion φ when performed in context of use u from context of assessment a and a is not the context where φ was performed, φ may have not violated any norm or may have been correctly performed while from the context where the agent is considering retraction φ ought to be retracted, because its content is not true, when assessed from a .

Contextualist views (indexical and non-indexical) do not have this resource. Thus, if those views are on the right track when it comes to evaluative predicates it cannot be the case that there is such a thing as obligatory retractions of assertions whose performance did not violate any norm. Why do they preclude the possibility that there can be mandatory retractions of correct assertions? Because, according to contextualism, the standards relative to which assertions are assessed are determined by the context of use, the context of the performance of the speech act in question. Hence, if the assertion is correct, according to the standards determined by the context in which it was performed, then the assertion cannot be assessed as incorrect when considering retraction. Whether there can be mandatory retractions of correct evaluative assertions is renders a testable prediction to aid one deciding whether to opt for relativism or contextualism. While the former predicts that there are mandatory retraction of correct evaluative assertions, the latter predicts that is not the case.

Although I will be focusing on assertion, I intend in the next section to make a brief digression on speech act theory, so that one is prepared to explore what retraction amounts to, as a speech act, regardless of the speech act (or act) it targets. I will then spell out how one should take a constitutive retraction norm of some speech acts.

Later on, I focus on the retraction of evaluative assertions and conclude by arguing that, just as it happens with evaluative disagreements, the phenomenon of retracting assertions across areas of evaluative discourse is non-uniform.

⁹⁶ E.g. MacFarlane (2014)

6.1 Brief Digression on Speech Act Theory

This brief excursion on speech act theory is intended to provide a guide as to how one should categorise the speech act of retraction and how one should understand the notion of retraction as a constitutive norm of asserting.

Retracting is a kind of undoing which targets other speech acts. Its effects amount to some sort of undoing of the commitments one undertook when performing the targeted speech act. This is done usually by signaling with a performative sentence that one is retracting it or taking it back. Since the act of retracting (and the same applies to other undoings) is deciding going against a course of actions and the commitments triggered by that course of action (the performance of the targeted speech act and its illocutionary effects), then it is natural to categorise retraction as an exercitive. Thus, I find it useful that we explore that category and how exercitives are distinctive from other speech act categories next.

6.1.1 Exercitives

According to Austin, “[a]n exercitive is the giving of a decision in favour of or against a certain course of action, or advocacy of it.” (Austin 1962: 154) Certain exercitives target other illocutionary acts. The illocutionary act of calling off involves the decision of going against a previously set course of action. Similarly the illocutionary act of undoing a previous act involves the decision of going against a previously set course of action and the commitments that said course of action dictates. This means that withdrawing a previous act falls into the class of exercitives.

Going against a certain course of action does not mean that the actions that set the specific course are deleted. Those acts were performed and, assuming that the past is closed, they cannot literally be undone. Notwithstanding, the effects of the act that are still in force can be cancelled.

Consider Alice, she is about to get married, but wants to call off her wedding. She informs her fiancé of her decision: ‘I don’t want to get married right now.’ By doing so, she uncommits herself with the course of action that would lead to her marriage happening in the very near future. The latter was the course of action set by her replying ‘I will.’ when her fiancé asked her if she would marry him. Alice is not deleting the previous acceptance of her fiancé’s proposal. She is cancelling the course of action that was previously set, and setting a new one, where no commitment to marry her fiancé in the near future is not in place.

There are striking similarities between the illocutionary act of *calling off* and the illocutionary act of undoing other acts. Of course, some similarities are due to the fact that both illocutionary acts belong to the same class of illocutionary acts. Undoing other illocutionary acts goes against the particular course of action that arouse from the targeted act. As it happens in the case of the calling off, at least some of the effects of the illocutionary act in force are cancelled from the undoing

onwards. The difference between the two exercitives may simply reside on the calling off targets decisions (or policies), while the undoing targets illocutionary acts. The calling off of a wedding is an obvious example of a calling off that one does not count as an undoing. However, I do not believe the distinction concerns what each type of illocutionary act the exercitive targets. Undoing can also target decisions. Consider the case of retracting a scientific article; it is the publication (or the decision to publish) that is being undone, not the possible illocutionary acts contained in the retracted article.⁹⁷ So, the distinction must lie somewhere else.

Calling off targets possible events that are planned to happen (and would have happened if not for the calling off). Undoing targets acts that have already happened. Hence, calling off is future oriented and undoing is past oriented. Calling off the wedding is not an undoing because the wedding is yet to happen, if everything goes as planned. Retracting an article (i.e. its publication) is not calling it off because the article has already been published.

Consider again Julia, who, after more thorough consideration, decides to go on with her planned wedding. She, then, informs her fiancé that she changed her mind and wants to maintain what she had previously agreed to with him. To do so, she signals her undoing of the wedding's calling off: 'I take back what I said about not wanting to get married right now. It was just nerves (...)' Julia is withdrawing her calling off. The withdrawing is not deciding on a new course of action, but opting for a previously set course of action—that will conduce to her wedding in the very near future. Hence, there is a clear sense according to which what was previously set is restored via the undoing.

The performance of executives, particularly undoings of other illocutionary acts, is not a counterexample to the claim that the past is closed. That is, undoing the act does not change the past. The withdrawn illocutionary act was performed, and that cannot be removed. This is the crucial difference with calling off. What was called off did not happen. Notwithstanding, with the undoing something changed too. Julia's commitment to marrying in the very near future was restored. Obviously, nothing in the past changed. Julia performed the calling off when she did and was committed to whatever commitments arouse from the performance of that illocutionary act. The changes that the undoing of the act caused did not reset the clock to the instant before the targeted act was performed. The right metaphor for undoing is the stopping of the clock. From then on, Julia's illocutionary act is no longer in effect. The effects of her undone act are no longer in force. It is a different clock that is now keeping track of time.

As a member of the class of exercitives, *undoings* "are a decision that something is to be so" (Austin 1962: 154), namely the decision that the targeted act loses some or all of its illocutionary effects. For the undoing to generate its intended purpose, the targeted illocutionary act needs to be in

⁹⁷ Although undoings can target acts other than illocutionary acts, I am specifically concerned with the undoing of illocutionary acts and, thus, will not explore .

force. Hence, the undoing of an illocutionary act A at t_1 implies that, immediately before t_1 , the illocutionary effects of A are in play.⁹⁸

The distinction between undos and other exercitives (such as calling off) is related to the former implying that the targeted is, until its undoing, in effect. The undoing deletes the illocutionary effects of the illocution. On the other hand, to call off something implies that the targeted event is supposed to occur but it is yet to do so. The calling off deletes the speaker's commitment with the occurrence of the event it targets. A distinctive feature of undos, when compared with other exercitives, is that they modify or cancel what was previously done. For instance, it would be absurd to call off an already published article.

6.1.2 Performatives

When one undoes the illocutionary act one previously performed, usually the sentence uttered that signals the undoing is what since Austin has been called *performative sentence*. This means that illocutionary acts that fall under the class of undos are usually done via performatives or performative utterances. In such regard, I think it is quite helpful to the understanding of undos to explore the characteristics of performatives.

As Austin noted, some utterances of meaningful words are not just saying so, they are a particular kind of doing so: "To name a ship is to say (in the appropriate circumstances) the words 'I name, &c.'. When I say, before the registrar or altar, &c., 'I do', I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it." (Austin 1962: 6) To this particular kind of doing so achieved by the speaker uttering the sentence that she is doing so Austin calls performatives. Performative sentences contain a performative verb and are usually in the first person.⁹⁹ Some examples: 'I pronounce you husband and wife.', 'I name you Julia.', 'I declare you guilty as charged.', 'I order you to be silent.', 'I take back what I said.' Performative utterances are utterances of performative sentences which, by saying so, the speaker is doing so. Sometimes utterances of performative sentences are not themselves performative. Uttering 'I order you to retreat.' while you are dreaming is not a performative utterance—you are not really ordering anyone to do anything, even though it is an utterance of a performative sentence. This means that saying that one is doing so and so does not entail that one is doing so and so and vice-versa.

Another reason for the connection completely breaking apart has to do with some utterances of performative sentences not fulfilling their preparatory conditions and, whence, misfiring. If you have not performed anything, saying that you take it back is not a(n) (un)doing. To do a performative

⁹⁸ As we will see the annulling does not undo illocutionary effects, *per se*—for speech acts targeted for annulment have misfired. However, it undoes some effects arisen from the performance of the targeted speech act—usually, perlocutionary effects. Hence, it is not a counterexample to this general claim.

⁹⁹ Not all performative sentences need to be in the first person. For instance, the speaker may retract what another speaker has previously said with a performative.

utterance more than uttering a performative sentence is required. Depending on the type of performative, frequently the type of performative will depend on the performative verb, other conditions need to be upheld. Consider a Sergeant uttering ‘I order you to stand down.’ to a General. Although, he uttered the performative sentence, he failed to order the General to stand down (in normal circumstances). The reason is fairly straightforward: she lacked the authority to do so. Hence, she did not perform a speech act with the utterance. Further conditions besides the speaker’s authority to do what she is saying may be required. Even location conditions may be required to be upheld. Consider a judge in the middle of traffic uttering ‘I declare you are guilty of murder.’ to the driver of the car next to her. Her utterance is not performative because, for it to not misfire, the proper legal procedure in a court of law is required.

The connection between utterances of performative sentences and performative utterances breaks apart (in a sense) in both directions. The previous examples show that utterances of performative sentences do not necessarily involve performative utterances, but there are also examples of purported performative utterances that do not require the utterance of performative sentences with the performative verb that typically signals the kind of doing that the speaker is performing with her utterance. Consider the utterance of the sentence ‘I will do it for you.’¹⁰⁰ In the majority of contexts the speaker is performing a promise by uttering the sentence. Nonetheless, the sentence does not contain the performative verb ‘promise’ that is usually associated with the act of promising. Hence, although there is a close connection between saying so and performatives, the connection “it is not as close as one might be inclined to think” (Searle 1970: 68).

The conditions that the performative implies that are satisfied are the performative’s preparatory conditions; that is, the conditions that need to be in place for the performative to generate its illocutionary effects. When someone utters ‘I pronounce you husband and wife.’, one of the many implications of the performative utterance is that the person pronouncing the marriage of a couple is the authorised to marry the couple. Other propositions may be implied: e.g. that neither the husband nor the wife are married at the time. If these conditions are not upheld at the moment of the utterance of the performative sentence, then no performative utterance occurred (i.e. no speech act was performed by the utterance). Obviously, the utterance, even though no illocutionary act was performed, may have generated perlocutionary effects. For instance: the utterance caused the belief in the audience that the couple is married. Notwithstanding, the utterance generated no illocutionary effects—the couple is not married. Hence, performatives which misfire (i.e. whose preparatory conditions are not upheld at the moment of the utterance) can only be perlocutionary acts, not illocutionary *per se*.

For most performatives, part of their preparatory conditions involves what we may call *speaker-authority conditions*; i.e., something along the lines of the speaker having the authority to perform the illocutionary act the utterance of the performative is purportedly performing. Speaker-authority partly

¹⁰⁰ The example is from Searle (1970: 68).

(but importantly) depends on the social or institutional recognition that the speaker is entitled to perform the illocutionary act she is purportedly performing. For some illocutionary acts the recognition of the speaker-authority is nothing more than default. In these cases, the entitlement to perform the illocutionary act comes with assuming the role of speaker. In other cases, the recognition of the speaker's authority involves complex institutional recognition. Only speakers with the proper recognition can do *p* by declaring that they are doing it—e.g. judges, when carrying out a sentence by saying it; police officers, when arresting someone by saying it; etc.

A common trend that applies to whatever performative utterance is that default speaker-authority is an entitlement that can be removed. The removal of said authority is frequently connected with the speaker's non-compliance with the illocutionary commitments she undertakes. For instance, the authority to make a promise defaultly accompanies your role as a speaker. However, if your promises are systematically insincere, then persons that are aware of this may no longer recognise you as a promiser. The absence of recognition of your authority as a promiser is typically depicted by addressees not taking your promise seriously. The lack of recognition blocks the relevant perlocutionary effects of you promising—e.g. the addressees believing that you will fulfil what you promised—and the illocutionary effects of the utterance. Whence, the lack of authority prevents you from doing as you intended.

I believe the penalty of losing one's authority as the doer of a particular illocutionary act is a far graver penalty than what one might be at first inclined to believe. Lacking the authority to do something with words is a form of enforced muteness. To mute someone is an extreme measure and, whence, should not be taken lightly. The harshness of the penalty for systematically not complying with one's illocutionary commitments reveals the importance of the commitments and their fulfilment.¹⁰¹ I will say more about the importance of the commitments and how it connects with the importance of retracting previous illocutionary acts further. For now, I wish to investigate the ways of undoing other illocutionary acts. Much of the discussion is inspired by Caponetto (2018).

6.1.3 Other Undoings

Caponetto (2018) has identified the most common illocutionary acts that undo other illocutionary acts.

This paper sets out to identify and examine the most common strategies to make one's illocutionary acts undone. In particular, it is an examination of three 'undoing strategies—'namely, the Annulment Strategy, the Retraction Strategy, and the Amendment Strategy. (Caponetto 2018: 2399–400)

¹⁰¹ The harshness of the penalty is connected with the importance that speech and what we do with speech has in our daily interactions.

She distinguishes three “strategies” to undo other illocutionary acts. The first is what Austin (1962) has called annulment. Annuling an illocutionary act is recognising, through the performance of the annulment, that the targeted illocutionary act is void, i.e. that it misfired.

Illocutionary acts misfire when their preparatory conditions were not met. For instance, the illocutionary act of marrying a couple performed by ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife.’ misfires if the speaker lacks the authority to perform marriages. An illocutionary act misfiring means that the act was in fact not performed, regardless of whether the audience believes that the illocutionary act was performed and regardless of whether the speaker was sincere. Hence, for “the Annulment Strategy” to be felicitous it is necessary that the targeted illocutionary act misfired—i.e. the performance targeted illocutionary act must have failed to satisfy its preparatory conditions. It almost goes without saying that another felicity condition for annulling A at time t_1 is that in the interval of time between the performance of the illocutionary act A and t_1 A was not already annulled. These are the two general felicity conditions for annulling which Caponetto (2018) identifies.¹⁰²

At this juncture, a couple of things are noteworthy of mentioning. First: it is misleading to suggest that one ought to amend the latter felicity condition to *to felicitously annul A at time t_1 it is necessary that A was not previously undone (annulled, amended or retracted) during the interval of time between A 's performance and t_1* . The condition's amendment is misleading because, for an illocutionary act to be felicitously subjected to amending or retracting it is necessary that the illocutionary act was felicitously performed, which requires that it did not misfire. Since it requires no misfiring of the illocutionary act, the amending of the condition conflicts with the first general felicity condition for amending—i.e. that the targeted illocutionary act misfired. Hence, one should require that the targeted act was not previously annulled and not add under undoing strategies into the felicity condition.

Second note: briefly entertain the idea that the general felicity conditions that Caponetto (2018) suggests for annulling are insufficient; that there is a further condition missing. Assume that the targeted illocutionary act was *perlocutionary ineffective*. For some reason it did not generate any relevant effects in the audience's doxastic states. To make it a bit more vivid, consider again the example of the misfired attempt to marry a couple performed by someone who did not have the authority to do so. Imagine that it was also known at the time that the person attempting to marry the couple had no authority to do so. This is unbeknownst to the speaker and to the person that later on annuls the illocutionary act. At this point the concern is whether in the situation thus described the annulling is infelicitous. It is certainly spurious in the sense that it does not relevantly alter the perlocutionary effects of the targeted act. Notwithstanding, it is not the purpose of the undoing strategies to nullify (or amend) the perlocutionary effects of a speech act, that is a side-effect. Undoing strategies are

¹⁰² “General felicity conditions of annulment: a speech act A performed by a speaker S at a time t may be annulled at a later time t_n only if

- i. A was infelicitously performed at t ;
- ii. A was not already annulled at any time between t and t_n ” (Caponetto 2018: 2407)

supposed to nullify or alter the illocutionary commitments generated by the act, not necessary the perlocutionary effects that the act generates. Since the illocutionary commitments do not depend on the act generating the intended perlocutionary effects, the former can be annulled in spite of the intended perlocutionary effects not being generated, the annulment is not relevantly ineffective. Which means that nothing in the situation previously described suggests that the annulment was infelicitous. Hence, the case against the sufficiency of Caponetto (2018)'s general felicity conditions for annulling fails to gain track.

Specifically for annulment, the undoing strategy involves the recognition via the performance of the annulment that the targeted illocutionary act was null and, as such, it should not have bound individuals to any commitments. Annulling *makes it aright*. Unbinds individuals from the commitments that the illocutionary act had no right to generate in the first place. The unbinding is successful by stating and recognising that the targeted act was void. This feature is what fundamentally distinguishes annulling from other undoings.

Most of the annulments are institutional. Hence, in most cases, the annuller's authority is institutionally determined. This is a peculiarity of this strategy of undoing. The other undoing strategies are less institutional in such regard. The reason for this is that annullers must have the authority to unbind unrightfully bindings of commitments, while other undoers must have the authority to unbind rightful bindings of commitments. The former is typically determined institutionally, because it involves appealing to the normative conditions for binding commitments. The latter is typically determined by the speaker, for it does not demand appealing to the normative conditions for binding commitments—the speaker is assuming that they are binding. Hence, one of the felicity conditions for the other undoing strategies is that the speaker of the act targeted for undoing or a third party authorised to undo on behalf of the speaker undoes the targeted illocutionary act. The authority for the other undoing strategies revolves around the speaker. This is a relevantly distinction between retracting and amending and the strategy of annulling.

Consider another undoing strategy: retracting. To retract an illocutionary act is to withdraw the previous illocutionary commitments undertaken via the performance of the targeted act. In order to withdraw previous illocutionary commitments the illocutionary act cannot have misfired. Misfired illocutionary acts do not generate illocutionary commitments. Attempting to remove merely putative commitments can be nothing more than a mere attempt. Retracting presupposes that the putative commitments that the retracting is withdrawing are commitments to which the speaker or addressees are bound to. Misfired illocutionary acts do not generate commitments for the speaker or addressees. A promise that misfires does not bind the speaker to fulfilling what she promised, it generates no commitment. Thus, there is nothing that the retraction withdraws. In such cases, the retraction is infelicitous. Hence, a condition for a retraction's felicity is that the targeted illocutionary act did not misfire.

Another important condition, although a rather obvious one, is that one cannot felicitously retract an illocutionary act that has not yet been performed. There is no *pre-emptive retraction*. The reason: an illocutionary act that has not yet been performed has not generated any commitments to withdraw. If a retraction were to happen under that condition, it would be ineffective: the retraction would not withdraw any commitment at the moment of its performance and, even worse, when the targeted illocutionary act is finally felicitously performed the latter, in spite of the attempt to pre-emptively retract it, it still generates binding commitments.

One can sum up the felicity conditions for retraction in the following way: (i) the targeted illocutionary act was felicitously performed, (ii) the retraction is performed by the speaker of the targeted illocutionary act or by a third party authorised by the speaker of the illocutionary act to retract on her behalf and (iii) the retraction is performed after the performance of the targeted illocutionary act.¹⁰³

Another frequently suggested necessary condition for a felicitous retraction is that the targeted act was not previously retracted.¹⁰⁴ Again, it seems obvious that for a felicitous retraction the targeted illocutionary act must not have been previously felicitously retracted. If an illocutionary act was retracted—i.e. if the commitments the act generated were withdrawn –, then it is odd to re-retract the act; there is nothing left to withdraw. Thus, it is very compelling to conclude that (felicitous) retractions only target unretracted acts. However, the previous reasons are insufficient to fully support the claim that the unretracting condition is relevantly analogous to the misfiring condition. For the conclusion to go through it must be the case that a second putative retraction of an illocutionary act cannot withdraw different commitments than those that were already withdrawn by the previous retraction. The latter is a substantive claim, for it is not trivial that retraction withdraws all the commitments that the target act generates and it is not a trivial claim either that two putative retractions of the same illocutionary act cannot target different commitments that said act generated. Since these claim are non-trivial, they are worth considering.

Note that for the claim that to retract an already retracted act is infelicitous to be true it suffices that felicitous retractions withdraw every commitment generated by the illocutionary act they target. To determine this claim's plausibility is to explain which effects retractions are supposed to trigger. I find the claim that retraction withdraws every illocutionary commitment implausible. For instance, there is nothing wrong with retracting assertion whose content is true, a speaker may be justifiably compelled to retract due to the lack of relevance of what she asserted to the conversation or due to the fact that

¹⁰³ These are basically the conditions Caponetto has suggested. See Caponetto (2018: 2410–1). Condition (iii)'s role is to ensure that “pre-emptive retractions” misfire. Let me add something about why it misfires—an agent does not (defaultly) have authority over an act she has not yet performed. Speech acts misfiring typically depicts scenarios where the agent attempts to perform the speech act fail due to the agent's lack of authority to perform it.

¹⁰⁴ MacFarlane's Retraction Norm for Assertion only applies to previously unretracted assertions. Arguably, the motivation for this constraint is due to MacFarlane's endorsement of the claim that one cannot felicitously retract a previously retracted assertion. See MacFarlane (2014: 108).

her assertion, given the context in which it was performed, was rude. The idea here is to connect the speaker's motivation to retract (and perhaps other contextual features) with the illocutionary commitments that retraction targets. I will say more about this matter later on. For now, let us leave the matter open and tentatively accept that conditions (i)–(iii) are jointly sufficient for a felicitous retraction.

The third and final undoing strategy to consider is the amending strategy. Caponetto describes it as an adjustment in the strength of the commitments generated by the targeted illocutionary act. This entails a couple of important things for the characterisation of amending. First, illocutionary acts can only be amended to illocutionary acts which belong to the same family; i.e. an assertive can only be amended to another assertive, a directive can only be amended to a directive, an exercitive can only be amended to an exercitive. Second, the commitments are not withdrawn, but adjusted, hopefully, in accordance with the conversational flow. These characteristics distinguish the strategy of amending from the strategy of retracting. Since amending involves adjusting the illocutionary commitments originally generated by the amended illocutionary act, for it to be felicitous it is necessary that the targeted act was felicitous. Since amending necessarily involves the attempt to strengthen or weaken the original act's normative commitments, it is necessary that a supplementary illocutionary act is performed which results in the strengthening/weakening of the original act. Caponetto believes that this ought to be added to the general felicity conditions for amending.¹⁰⁵ However, if that were the case, should we not add an analogous condition for retraction? One cannot retract if no other act, besides the original one, is not performed either. The idea is that the illocutionary act of amending necessarily involves some other primary illocutionary act. For instance, to amend a request to a plea, necessarily involves pleading. There is nothing analogous for retracting. If the typical retracting phrase is 'I take it back', then what the speaker is doing with utterance of such phrase is simply retracting and no supplementary illocutionary is required.

Similar to retraction, the authority to perform the amending revolves around the speaker who performed the targeted act. About this Caponetto affirms something stronger that I believe to be false:

Unlike the other undoing mechanisms, the Amendment Strategy can be deployed only by the original speaker [...]. If I assert that it is going to rain tomorrow, you can challenge my assertion and eventually make me amend it, but you cannot amend it on my behalf (nor can any third party).
(Caponetto 2018: 2413)

The example that supports Caponetto's claim on the previous quote is not the most compelling against it. The most complicated cases for her claim involve not the party who somewhat challenges the speaker's original act, but a third party who jumps into the conversation and adapts the original act in

¹⁰⁵ "General felicity conditions of amendment: a speech act *A* performed by a speaker *S* at a time *t* may be amended at a later time *t_n* only if:

i. *A* was felicitously performed at *t*;

ii. At *t_n*, *S* makes a supplementary utterance that weakens/strengthens the normative burden of *A*."

(Caponetto 2018: 2413)

accordance to the conversation's flow. The question, hence, is whether the third party is merely performing an additional illocutionary act and not amending the original act or amending the original act while performing the supplementary illocutionary act. Consider the following illuminating example:

Father: 'Could you please wash your teeth, honey?'

Father: 'Did you heard me? Go wash your teeth!'

The daughter ignores her father's initial request and, as a result, he supplements the original illocutionary act by ordering her to wash her teeth.

My intuition is that the father is not merely performing an additional illocutionary act, he is strengthening the father's original request to an order to get his daughter to comply with the original act.

The other parent could have also supplemented the original illocutionary act. Typically, parents are tacitly authorised to speak on each other's behalf when it comes to their children, this includes strengthening/weakening each other's illocutionary acts. Frequently a speaker is performing an illocutionary act on behalf of others. Consider a spokesperson for a company or for a politician. Surely she can amend a previous illocutionary act performed by the person she is representing. There is nothing that limits her authority to retracting when it comes to undoing an act of her representee. Even considering that the performance of a supplementary illocutionary act is required for amending I find no reason for claiming that such act cannot be performed by a third party on behalf of the speaker of the targeted act.

Hence, the jointly sufficient conditions for a felicitous amendment should be the following: (i) the targeted illocutionary act was felicitously performed, (ii) the amendment is performed by the speaker of the targeted illocutionary act or by a third party authorised by the speaker of the illocutionary act to amend on her behalf, (iii) the amendment is performed after the performance of the targeted illocutionary act and (iv) a supplementary illocutionary act which weakens/strengthens the normative commitments of the targeted act is felicitously performed.

This covers the general felicity conditions for the undoing strategies which were focused on. Two caveats before moving on: first, I am not assuming that these strategies cover all the undoing strategies available. Other strategies may be available. There is no unique strategy to unbind oneself from commitments or modify them. Nonetheless, annulling, retracting and amending are representative of what can be undone with words: speakers can undo illocutionary acts that were not really performed, speakers can withdraw illocutionary commitments and speakers can tweak illocutionary commitments. Second, at this point I left a few questions open regarding retraction. I want to address those in the following sections and solely focus on that strategy of undoing illocutionary acts.

6.1.4 Constitutive and regulatory norms

Before getting into retraction I find it helpful to focus on the distinction between constitutive norms and regulatory norms for speech act.

Constitutive norms of speech acts are those norms which, if not in place or assumed to be in place, one would not be performing the speech act in question. This does not imply that those norms cannot be violated when the agent is performing the speech act. Infringing on the speech act's constitutive norms does not imply that the speech act was not performed. For instance, assuming that assertion is constituted by the following norm: assert p only if p is true, then if an agent assert p and p is not true she is performing an assertion, still. Repeatedly not complying with the norm may result in the agent being taken by others as an unreliable asserter, but she is nonetheless involved in the practice of asserting. If the non-compliance is systematic it is possible that the outcome is much more serious and the agent is impeded from participating in the practice of asserting, because the agent's systematic non-compliance may be such that she is repeatedly attempting to perform the speech act as if the constitutive norm is not in place. Thus, the set of constitutive norms of ϕ -ing governs the practice of ϕ -ing. It is by those norms being in place and agents assuming that they are in place that they may engage in the practice of ϕ -ing.

Regulative norms of speech acts are those which do not define their practice, i.e. which, even if not assumed to be in place, would still permit agents of engaging in said practice. Consider the following well-mannered norm for assertions: assert that p only if asserting that p is reasonably considered polite by the hearer. Consider the hypothetical scenario where no asserter asserts assuming that such norm is in place. Despite causing more distress and unpleasant situations the practice of asserting is not undermined. Agents still engage in it. A regulative norm simply determines what the best practice, or, in the case of assertions, what the best way of going about asserting is (being polite is more often than not the best practice).

The typical analogy that proponents of the normative view appeal to is with games.¹⁰⁶ Games are defined by the set of norms or rules which constitute the practice of playing them. Consider chess. A queen move is defined by something like the following rule: *move your queen only if there is a non-obstructed square that is vertically, horizontally or diagonally in the same line as your queen*. If one does not comply with the rule, then one is failing to perform a correct queen move (and is forced to withdraw it).

Contrast this with another rule: *do not move your queen early in the game*. In this case, it is pretty obvious to anyone who is familiar with the rules of chess that one can move the queen early and still be making a *correct* queen move. The latter rule simply regulates queen moves, it determines what it is generally the best practice when it comes to moving the queen.

Analogously, constitutive and regulative norms of speech acts are both in place but, while the latter regulates its practice by informing which one should typically follow concerning how to best

¹⁰⁶ See Maitra (2011) for a discussion on how strong the analogy really is.

perform the speech act, the former defines the practice itself, to ϕ is to perform it assuming that such a rule is in place.

Next I go about showing how this talk of norms may be spelled out in terms of talk of commitments and entitlements and link this sort of talk with the social effects that speech act norm-violation naturally carry and then I explore how this talk transposes to assertions.

6.1.5 Assertions: norms and commitments

Norms are often infringed upon. This, of course, includes constitutive norms for speech acts. These infringements generate important social consequences to the agent infringing upon them. A normative view explains why those consequences are set forth. The reason is that engaging in speech act practice carries normative force with it. This normative force can be described in terms of commitments that agents undertake by engaging in said practice.

By (successfully) promising to do so-and-so I incur the commitment to do so-and-so. With the performance of the promise, I have placed myself under the normative shackles to fulfil it. It is now part of the common ground—shared with my addressee(s)—that I am under such commitment. My failure to comply with the normative restrictions, without good reason, means that my addressee(s) are entitled to penalise me for not fulfilling what I promised to do. The penalty may be nothing more than me not being considered a reliable promiser becoming part of the shared background among myself and my addressee(s). As a result of the penalty, probably my next promise to the same addressee(s) will not be taken seriously; i.e. it will not be taken as the illocutionary act of promising. The penalty that is seemingly light is in fact considerably heavy. What we do with words is an important aspect of our social interactions; we want our words to matter, i.e. it is important for us to accomplish things with words. The penalty restrains my ability to successfully perform promises. The penalty brought about by the unjustifiable failure to comply with the normative commitments undertaken by performing the promise is much more significant than a mere “slap on the wrist”.

The previous description illustrates the importance of the normative commitments speakers/hearers undertake with the performance of illocutionary acts. The norms are in place as a way to regulate our speech-driven social interactions.

Typically with each performance of an illocutionary act, speakers committed themselves to a set of normative restrictions. Unjustifiable violations of these norms naturally incur in some penalty; “there is a well-defined consequence of disobedience.” (Dummett 1978: 22) When it comes to incorrect illocutionary acts, i.e. acts that, while they are in force, violate a norm, the consequence of disobedience often involves some social penalty: a speaker may be considered a liar, for systematically performing false assertions, a speaker may be considered epistemically unreliable for systematically making claims to which she has no justification, a speaker may be considered untrustworthy for not fulfilling her promises, etc.

These commitments agents undertake by being engaged in the practice are spelled out by some scholars in terms of entitlements (e.g. Brandom 1994, 1998). Addressees are entitled to demand things of speakers. The most illustrative case is that of assertion. Asserting is putting forth a claim in the “public arena *as true*” to be used by others, when deploying their own inferences, which may be challenged. Challenging it includes demanding reasons for it. Others being entitled to those demands is another way of spelling out the normative force of asserting. The asserter commits herself to address the challenges to her claim (and, arguably, to withdraw it if unable to properly address those challenges).¹⁰⁷ This way of spelling out the normative roles of linguistic practices motivates treating assertion as being partly constituted by a norm governing its withdrawal.

6.2 *Characterising retraction from a normative perspective*

There is a well-defined consequence of an assertion’s proving incorrect, namely that the speaker must withdraw it. (Dummett 1979: 22)

One may characterise retractions by following two distinct avenues. One avenue is to understand it as a constitutive rule of speech acts. Some speech acts are constituted by the normative conditions one ought to follow to perform it. Another avenue is to characterise retraction as a speech act itself. One can do so by enumerating its felicity conditions (which I have already explored, by relying on work by Caponetto (2018)) and by spelling out its constitutive norms.¹⁰⁸

The first avenue, which I am going to explore next, builds on Dummett’s valuable insight (above) about what it is for an assertion to “prove incorrect”—that the speaker is under the obligation to withdraw it. I leave it open whether this insight should be expanded to every speech act or just some—perhaps a case could be made that only speech acts with epistemic import are partly constituted by a norm governing their withdrawal—, but I am fairly sceptical about restricting the insight this way being warranted; I fail to see a compelling reason to not apply it to any speech act which, when performed, determines that its author undertakes a set of commitments, which, when not met force the agent to withdraw the speech act.¹⁰⁹

The second avenue involves determining the set of norms that constitute retraction. This set of norms govern its practice and when they are brought in place via the performance of the speech act, it is defined by these norms—that when they are infringed upon the act is deemed incorrect. As stated in

¹⁰⁷ MacFarlane (2014) shares this view, that asserting, as practice, is to be understood in terms of asking and giving reasons (Brandom 1994: 131). Hence his claim that asserting is partly constituted by a retraction rule.

¹⁰⁸ These avenues are not incompatible with one another. It is perfectly possible that retraction is a speech act in its own right, and, at the same time, that there is a constitutive retraction norm for some speech acts, namely for assertion, which determines when the targeted speech act ought to be taken back (or undone).

¹⁰⁹ Notice how this does not apply to cancelling speech acts, such as retraction. The idea is that the agent is not undertaking any commitments when retracting, thus retraction should be governed by a constitutive norm that determines when it is obligatory to perform it.

previous sections, the constitutive norm being in place does not imply that it is always respected by agents, it implies that, when that is not the case, the act is wrong and, if the agent persistently infringes the norm and, and those successive infringements are recognised by other agents, some sort of social sanctions typically follow—e.g. the agent is no longer recognised as a reliable asserter, or as a reliable promisor...

6.2.1 Retraction as a Constitutive Rule of Speech Acts

Dummett's suggestion on the previous quote is that there is a rule that characterises the incorrect performance of assertions. The idea appears to be that part of what it is to assert is constituted by when it is obligatory to withdraw the assertion. Call the withdrawal of an illocutionary act retraction.¹¹⁰ Picking up on this idea, MacFarlane (2014: 108) claims that the retraction rule partly defines asserting. Here is how he puts it: "*Retraction Rule. A speaker in context c_2 is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of p made at c_1 if p is not true as used at c_1 and assessed from c_2 .*" The retraction rule plays a crucial role on his theory, he understands it as the practical difference between relativist and contextualist approaches: "[...] the pragmatic difference between R[elativism] and C[ontextualism] manifests itself in norms for the retraction of assertions rather than norms for the making of assertions." Just as assertions are governed by norms for their performance, they are governed by norms for their withdrawal.¹¹¹ The rule that governs its withdrawal is supposed to preserve some link with the rule that governs its performance. Recall Dummett's quote, the obligation to withdraw arises from the assertion "proving incorrect". Its incorrectness is determined by the rule which constitutes its performance. At this juncture you can pick your favoured assertion rule—alethic, epistemic... Whatever the precise rule that constitutes the performance of assertion, it is its infringement that explains the assertion's incorrectness; and, as a consequence, the obligation to withdraw it.¹¹² The assertion rule states when it is forbidden to perform the act, while the retraction rule states when it is obligatory to withdraw it. It becomes that this is as it should be when you consider that there is no insincerity involved when you retract a perfectly fine assertion, one whose content you still believe to be true. You may feel impelled to withdraw the assertion for a myriad of valid reasons besides its putative incorrectness.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Later on I will say more about how we should interpret a speech act's 'withdrawal'.

¹¹¹ Considering that retraction is a norm governing speech acts is obviously committed with a view on speech acts which claims that speech act are defined by the norms that govern their practice. Thus, if one is discontent with normative approaches to speech acts, one would not be more content with endorsing the claim that retraction is constitutive norm of speech acts. Of course, this is an issue only if you are not already convinced that normative views are the way to go.

¹¹² The link between the obligation to withdraw and the infringement of the constitutive rule of its performance is looser on MacFarlane's view—an agent may be obliged to withdraw perfectly correct assertions (2014: 110).

¹¹³ "There is nothing inherently wrong with retracting an assertion one still thinks is true—one may not want others to rely on one's word in this matter, or one may not want to take on the obligation of defending the assertion—and doing so is not "insincere" in the way that asserting something one does not believe to be true is." (MacFarlane 2014: 109)

Naturally the claim about retraction being a constitutive norm for assertion should be generalisable for every speech act. We have no reason to restrict the norm to assertions, when speakers can retract any speech act. Whence, the suggestion must be that there is a retraction norm partially constitutive of speech acts which governs when their withdrawal is obligatory.¹¹⁴ Hence, on this view, retraction is a constitutive element of speech acts (a norm) and not itself a speech act in its own right.¹¹⁵

The view that retraction is a rule constitutive of speech acts is naturally connected with normative views about speech acts. The latter view coupled with the claim that retraction constitutes speech practices, entails that a retraction rule (partly) defines the speech act it partly constitutes. Constitutive norms differ from regulative norms. While the latter are rules which indicate how to best be involved in a certain practice; the former are rules that, if not in place, imply that there would be no such practice. To make the distinction more vivid, the usual analogy which proponents of normative views appeal to is the analogy with games—as previously explored. Games typically involve constitutive rules, those which define the game, and regulative rules, those which point to better your play. *Do not move your knight to a square on the corner of the board* is a regulative rule for knight moves, because its only purpose is to indicate the knight moves you should avoid in a given position.¹¹⁶ Systematic infringement of the rule does not mean you are not moving the knight; it just means you are not a very good chess player. *Move your knight to a square that is two squares away horizontally and one square vertically, or two squares vertically and one square horizontally* is a constitutive rule of the knight move. The outcome of (systematically) infringing it is that you are failing to perform the knight move. Analogously, systematic infringement of a constitutive rule of speech act φ implies that you are acting under the assumption that you are not involved in the practice of φ -ing, for you are acting as if the constitutive rule is not in place and the practice of φ -ing is characterised by that rule, even if from time to time speakers infringe it. When the systematic infringement occurs, speakers are naturally held accountable for their infringement by not being recognised as φ -ers. The unrecognition implies that the φ -ing does not meet all of its preparatory conditions; namely that the speaker lacks the authority to φ ; whence, her φ -ing

¹¹⁴ As I have previously pointed out retraction is a *suis generis* speech act in this regard.

¹¹⁵ MacFarlane is unclear about his stance on this matter. But considering that the retraction rule plays such an important role on his theory, one cannot be under the impression that he is not considering retraction as a partly constitutive rule of speech acts.

¹¹⁶ As the famous saying by Dr. Tarrasch goes: “a knight on the rim is dim”.

misfiring.¹¹⁷ Not recognising the speaker's authority to φ is a natural consequence when you consider that the speaker is not engaging in φ -ing—she is acting as if the practice is not in place.

Under these views, retraction is characterised not necessarily as a speech act *per se* but as a rule which constitutes speech acts. Following Dummett's insight, the characterisation of retraction would go something along the following lines: *retracting A is to fulfil the obligation the speaker is under when A proves incorrect*. Whence, for a speech act φ , if φ is assessed as incorrect, then the speaker ought to retract φ . There would be a different rule governing the retraction of each type of speech act, because the properties which determine the correctness of a speech act vary according to the type of speech act we are talking about.

Consider promising. You should not promise something that you know you will not fulfil. Imagine you do so; which means that your promise was incorrectly performed. Since it was incorrect, you ought to retract it. The retraction norm for promises would look something like *Speaker S ought to retract the promise that p if S knows that p will not obtain*. This is quite different from what the retraction norm for assertion looks like (it will have something to do with truth, because that is the aim of asserting).

Hence, according to the view, there is a specific partly constitutive rule for retracting each type of speech act. The specificity of each retraction norm arises from what counts as the particular act being incorrect. The act's incorrectness triggers the mandate to withdraw it. This view, which considers retraction a constitutive norm of speech acts is, then, committed with the claim that a natural result of the systematic non-compliance with the mandate to retract the speech act is that the speaker loses the recognition of having the authority to perform the speech act she systematically fails to retract (when it is obligatory to do so).

One may argue that the recognition which the speaker loses is not as a performer of the targeted speech act for retraction, but as a retractor (of that speech act), since retraction governs the withdrawal of a speech act and not its performance. Fair enough. However this fails to grasp the fact that the commitments the speaker is under, which, according to the approach considers retraction a constitutive rule of the speech act, include the commitments to withdraw it when the speech act proves to be incorrect, are generated by the performance of the speech act and not by its retraction. Retraction generates no commitments.¹¹⁸ Thus, if there is an infringement on illocutionary commitments, the infringement affects the performance of the speech act and not its withdrawal.

¹¹⁷ So, there is a practical test to confirm whether a rule Σ is constitutive of φ -ing. Are speakers unrecognised as φ -ers when they systematically infringe Σ ? If we find out that the answer is negative, then Σ is not constitutive of φ -ing. Applying the test to retraction, as a purported constitutive rule of asserting, the question is whether speakers lose recognition as asserters when they systematically fail their obligation to retract. To my mind systematic failure of their obligation to retract does not result in the penalty of speaker becoming unrecognised φ -ers, where ' φ ' is the speech act that should have been targeted for retraction by the speaker. Perhaps undoing speech acts or undoing rules are fairly problematic for normative views on speech acts.

¹¹⁸ Such fact may be put forward as a reason not to consider retraction as a speech act *per se*. The argument would go as follows: felicitous speech acts necessarily generate illocutionary commitments, felicitous retractions do not generate illocutionary commitments, hence they cannot be speech acts.

Moreover, it is odd to imagine an agent lacking the recognition of having the authority to retract a speech act she has performed. The authority to withdraw it arises from her having performed it, she cannot lack the authority to withdraw once she has made the speech act. Thus, if infringing on the retraction rule generates any effects on the speaker's authority to do something, it must be on the speaker's authority to perform the speech act.

This is connected with the retraction norm describing an obligation to take the incorrect speech act back and not a prohibition to take back a perfectly fine one. Speakers are not forbidden to retract, they may do so at any time, for whatever reasons, even if they feel there was nothing wrong with what they did. Hence, the correct interpretation of the constitutive retraction norms for speech acts is not that the rule determines the circumstances in which performing the speech act is permissible, but that it determines the circumstances in which withdrawing it is obligatory. Failing to comply with obligations to withdraw φ does not seem to result in a penalty where an agent is, for all intended purposes, thenceforth not recognised as being able to φ felicitously. It seems to me we are putting the speaker under undue burden if she may lose her authority to perform a speech act if she (systematically) does not retract it when it is incorrect. I find it counter-intuitive to believe that she may be risking her authority to perform speech acts when she does not fulfil her putative commitments to retract them. An agent failing to retract (when it is her putative obligation to do so) does not seem to dent her authority to perform the act she failed to take back.

This matter is important because we want to explain the distinction between constitutive and regulatory norms in terms of which norms, if in place, would mean that there was no practice in the first place. Putting it a different way, the constitutive norms are those which, if the speaker assumes that the constitutive norms are not in place, she is acting as if she is not involved in the practice those norms constitute. So there is a natural reaction when others recognise that she is acting as if the norms which constitute the practice are not in place, agents will tend to fail to recognise her entitlement of being involved in the practice. When speakers tend to not recognise her authority as a part of said practice, her ability to engage in the practice is immensely (if not completely) undermined.

Whence, if there is a putative constitutive norm to φ -ing, which when systematically infringed upon, does not tend to undermine the speaker's authority to be involved in the practice of φ -ing, then we should consider it is as a merely a putative constitutive norm of the practice. It does not work as a constitutive norm, but as a regulatory norm. The systematic violation of regulatory norm just makes speakers bad φ -ers, but it is not supposed to undermine their authority as φ -ers.

So, under the view that retraction is a constitutive norm of other speech acts, there is an issue with the role that retraction plays in the practice of speech acts, the role does not seem to be one which governs the practice, but one which regulates it, instead. If this is right, the conclusion is problematic, because regulatory norms are not supposed to generate commitments which characterise the practice they regulate. Hence, if the rule is regulatory, the speakers are not under an obligation to retract when their speech act proves incorrect. We fail to capture Dummett's insight.

Taking stock: the retraction norm is supposed to determine the circumstances in which taking back the speech act is mandatory. These circumstances will differ according to the type of speech act the speaker is targeting for retraction. However, the norm does not carry the weight a constitutive norm ought to carry; hence, it is unclear how considering retraction a norm of other speech act generates the commitment agents are under when their act proves to be incorrect.

Another possibility is to consider retraction a speech act in its own right and not as a rule constitutive of our speech practices. Here we can characterise it by appealing to the norms which define it or we may choose to characterise it by appealing to the conditions that must be met to felicitously perform it. I have already explored the latter, by expanding on work by Laura Caponetto. Hence, I am taking the former route next and characterise retraction by tentatively spelling out its constitutive norms.

6.2.2 *Retraction as a Speech Act*

Considering retraction as a speech act (and not as a norm of the other speech acts) and assuming a normative approach to defining speech acts implies that characterising retraction is a matter of spelling out its constitutive norms. The constitutive norm(s) govern its practice; hence, there should be a norm in place which determines when its performance is incorrect, and its violation resulting in the speaker's obligation to withdraw the retraction itself. It is noteworthy that to apply Dummett's insight to other speech acts, including retraction, the constitutive norm has to determine the circumstances in which retracting is forbidden; determining the circumstances in which *not retracting* is forbidden is insufficient. However, as I will explore, there is good reason to avoid applying the insight to retraction.

Here I attempt to spell out the constitutive norm of retraction—i.e. when one must perform it. Retraction may occur for different reasons. One may retract a speech act because it was discourteous for performing it, because it was inappropriate, because it may lead to undesirable perlocutionary effects... However, those putative reasons to retract do not amount to a norm governing its performance. If there is such a thing as a constitutive norm for retraction, that norm states that one must retract when the targeted speech act for retraction is incorrect. Depending on your favoured semantic flavour, incorrectness may be spelled out in absolute or in relative terms—hence the loose characterisation here being consistent with relativist, contextualist or invariantist positions.¹¹⁹ For instance, if an assertion that p is incorrect if p is not true, as used in the context where the assertion was performed, then retracting an assertion that p is obligatory if p is not true, as used in the relevant context.

Since incorrectness can be applied to other speech acts, i.e. whenever their performance violates its constitutive norm(s), the constitutive norm for retraction can be expanded to include other speech

¹¹⁹ Since the constitutive norm, as it is here loosely stated, does not specify what amounts for a speech act to be incorrect, empirical data on the relation between falsity and retraction of assertions on matters of personal taste is irrelevant.

acts. Note that incorrectness will be differently spelled out depending on the speech act that is targeted for retraction. Thus, retracting ϕ and retracting σ , where $\phi \neq \sigma$, are constituted by different norms. Assuming that a speech act is defined by its set of constitutive norms, then there is no unique speech act that is retraction, but a speech act which amounts to retraction of assertions, retraction of promises, retraction of orders, and so on.

Notice that there is no inconsistency between characterising retraction this way and claiming that a retraction rule partly constitutes other speech acts—at least those whose performance carries a particular set of commitments. Contrary to most speech acts, retracting ϕ does not generate extra illocutionary commitments; quite the opposite, retracting undoes the commitments the agent undertook by performing the retracted speech act. Hence, it should not be surprising that the norm that governs the performance of the retraction of ϕ is an obligation-norm, and not a norm which determines when not to perform the act. For the same reason, it should also not be surprising that there is no constitutive norm that mandates the withdrawal of the retraction.

Retracting a speech act ϕ is, thus, normatively speaking, a *suis generis* speech act due to the fact that it is a cancelling act, targeting previous illocutionary commitments. I do not believe this applies to other ways of undoing things with words, such as amending and annulling, since amending a speech act ϕ does not merely take back previous illocutionary commitments, it modifies the previous commitments to new ones, it should be governed by a norm which forbids its performance and a norm which obliges its withdrawal. As for annullments, they are not undoing illocutionary commitments, for they target speech acts which have misfired—whose performance did not bring about illocutionary commitments (although it may have brought about perlocutionary ones). It is true that they do not bring about additional commitments and, perhaps, that explains why, presumably, annulling speech acts is not partly governed by a norm mandating its withdrawal, but the norm governing its performance is a prohibition-norm—i.e. states the conditions when the act should not be performed. The idea is that annulling ϕ is permissible only if ϕ misfired. Hence retracting being constituted by a *suis generis* set of norms.

With retraction characterised, in the next section I distinguish and assess the relativist and contextualist accounts for retraction by confronting those views with available empirical data on the phenomenon.

6.3 Accounting for retraction

The reader is now in a position to understand what retracting amounts to. In this section I go into how one can account for what is going on when agents retract evaluative assertions. I go into what each theory predicts regarding retraction.

To give the reader an initial general idea, truth relativism predicts that mandatory retractions do not require that the performance of the targeted speech act was faulty. While contextualists and

invariantists predict that, if there is such a thing as mandatory retractions, then it requires that the performance of the original speech act was faulty, i.e. that the asserted content is false from the context in which the assertion was performed. This is because the relevant parameter to assess whether an assertion is correct are determined by the context in which the speech act was performed. Hence, the relevant parameters to assess the assertion's correctness do not vary from when the speech act was performed to when the agent is considering whether to retract.

It is important to stress the following caveat: the focus is on mandatory retractions of evaluative assertions, not on simply retractions. Non-relativists accept that it is perfectly fine to retract *faultless* assertions. Many factors may influence an agent to retract: the original assertion being inappropriate in a specific context, new evidence that cast doubt on what was originally asserted being now available... the point here is whether agents may be mandated to retract an evaluative assertion even if the assertion, when performed, violated no alethic norm.

Next I describe how truth relativism accounts for retraction and what phenomena the view predicts. I begin by using MacFarlane's view as a paradigmatic example of a relativist approach. After describing what truth relativism predicts regarding the retraction of evaluative assertions, I turn my attention to the other variantist views and explain why the predictions on retraction are incompatible. I assess the available empirical data on the issue and discuss whether it supports relativism. Later on I contrast this view with other relativist views that are differently motivated, and explain how the previous incompatibility is solved, while accounting for the empirical data.

6.3.1 *Truth relativism and retraction*

Truth relativism's central claim is that certain sentences are assessment-sensitive. Candidates for sentences that possess this feature can be found in discourse about matters of personal taste, moral discourse, aesthetic discourse, and so on. To say that a sentence is assessment-sensitive is to say that its truth depends not only on features of the context of use but also on features of the context from which its use is assessed (MacFarlane 2005, 2014). According to AS, propositions are assessed from contexts of assessment, which are not fixed by any feature of the context of use, but by the assessor. Since the context of assessment is the context of the assessor, the proposal is not about relativizing truth to an additional parameter provided by some feature of the context of use.¹²⁰

MacFarlane believes that we can make sense of assessment-sensitive truth by considering its role in the norms that govern our assertion practices. Part of his defence of relativism therefore consists in spelling out these norms, showing that they do presuppose a relativistic framework like the one he proposes. According to MacFarlane's proposal, assertions are (partially) constituted by a truth norm. The norm is formulated as follows:

¹²⁰ "It is important that the context of assessment is not fixed in any way by facts about the context of use, including the speaker's intentions; there is no 'correct' context from which to assess a particular speech act." (MacFarlane 2014: 61–2)

Reflexive Truth Rule (RTR). A speaker is permitted to assert that p at context c_1 only if p is true as used at c_1 and assessed from c_1 .¹²¹

RTR forbids the performance of assertions that are false as used and assessed from the context in and from which they are performed. Nonetheless, the rule does not commit one to claiming that it is wrong to assert a false proposition. If other norms are in play, the rule can be overridden.¹²²

Asserting is also “[p]utting a sentence forward in the public arena *as* true”; this implies that the sentence becomes “available for *others* to use in making further assertions” (Brandom 1994: 170). If this is so, then there should also be a rule whereby, given certain conditions, the speaker is required to remove the sentence she put forward from the “public arena”. The rule may be stated as follows:

Retraction Rule (RR). A speaker in context c_2 is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of p made at c_1 if p is not true as used at c_1 and assessed from c_2 .¹²³

According to RR, an speaker is only required to retract her assertion that p when, as assessed from the context of retraction, p as used at c_1 is not true. RR captures the speaker’s responsibility for putting forth a sentence as true by requiring that she should retract once the sentence is assessed as false.¹²⁴

When an assertion is retracted, the retractor is no longer expected to stand by it. The commitments undertook when asserting—for instance, to asserting truthfully or putting forward a sentence as true in the “public arena”—are no longer in play. The retractor is no longer subject to the norms governing the retracted assertion. Consider the example below.

Fish Soup Example

Julia: My father’s fish soup is not tasty.

¹²¹ (MacFarlane 2014: 102).

¹²² For a discussion of what it means for constitutive norms to be overridden, see e.g. García-Carpintero (2015).

¹²³ MacFarlane (2014: 108).

¹²⁴ RR is paramount for truth relativism, for it is what pragmatically differentiates it from contextualist theories. As MacFarlane states: “The basic thought is that the pragmatic difference between R[elativism] and C[ontextualism] manifests itself in norms for the retraction of assertions rather than norms for the making of assertions. R[elativism] predicts that an assertion of p at c_1 ought to be retracted by the asserter in c_3 , while C[ontextualism] predicts that it need not be retracted.” (2014: 108).

To clearly see this difference consider the following example by MacFarlane:

“Let c_1 be a context centered on ten-year-old Joey, who loves fish sticks. According to both R and C, the proposition that fish sticks are tasty is true as used at and assessed from c_1 . So the Reflexive Truth Rule tells us that Joey is permitted to assert that fish sticks are tasty. Let us suppose that he does. Now consider another context c_2 centered on Joey, ten years later. As a twenty-year old, Joey no longer likes the taste of fish sticks.

Here R and C diverge. According to R, the proposition that fish sticks are tasty is false as used at c_1 and assessed from c_2 , so by the Retraction Rule, Joey is now required to retract his earlier assertion. According to C, by contrast, the proposition that fish sticks are tasty is true as used at c_1 and assessed from c_2 , and Joey need not retract” (2014: 109).

Julia₁₉: My father's fish soup is so tasty.

When Julia is 19 she is obliged to retract the assertion she made when she was 9 years old. If she were not to retract, she would be violating RR. To do so would be incorrect, because Julia at 19 would allow for a sentence that is false—relatively to her present standard of taste—to be available as true for others to use.

Given that the contexts of assessment in RTR and in RR differ, it is possible that speakers have a duty to retract an assertion that (until then) violated no norm. “To say that one was wrong in claiming that p is not to say that one was wrong to claim that p . Sometimes it is right to make a claim that turns out to have been wrong (false)” (MacFarlane 2011: 148). Keep in mind that MacFarlane regards the act of assertion as involving the speaker's commitment to the truth of the propositional content expressed. Thus, it may be the case that one must retract a correct assertion, i.e. one that violated no norm. The idea here is that the speaker ought to update what she has put forth if it turns out to be false.

Non-relativists may react in two different ways (1) by claiming that there is no such thing as an assertoric commitment to retract or (2) by claiming that, although there is such a commitment, the commitment is triggered only when the original speech act turned out to have violated a norm. Next, I address how non-relativists opting for (1) looks like.

6.3.2 Denying the Retraction Rule: absolute and relative correction

MacFarlane (2014) claims that accounting for mandatory retractions of assertions is what distinguishes, in a practical sense, truth relativism from contextualism. The motivation for mandatory retraction has to do with the Brandomian idea that when one asserts that p one puts oneself forward to be challenged and it is committed to address those challenges. The appropriate addressing of accurate challenges to an assertion is to update one's assertoric commitments by removing them—i.e. to retract the assertion that p . One way to spell out this commitment is to take the commitment as resulting from a partial constitutive norm of asserting, which governs when it is obligatory to take back an assertion.

One natural reaction to this move is to reject that there is such a rule in the first place. If MacFarlane is right that such a rule is paramount to motivate truth relativism as a different semantic view about assessment-sensitive predicates, then denying that such a rule or such assertoric commitment exists undermines truth-relativism. A way to do this, which I explore here, is to argue that the commitment to retract would make assertion practices irrational.¹²⁵

Retracting A is to fulfil the obligation the speaker is under when A proves incorrect. The formulation is mute about how the reader ought to interpret ‘incorrect’. This is on purpose. The characterisation has to be consistent with a non-assessment sensitive interpretation of a speech act's incorrectness—i.e. it is

¹²⁵ A different way to achieve this is to show that empirical data on our linguistic practices supports the claim that there is no such commitment.

consistent with the claim that a speech is incorrect if it violates its constitutive norm(s)—and it has to be consistent with the assessment sensitive interpretation of a speech act's incorrectness—i.e. a speech act's incorrectness is sensitive to the context of assessment from which speakers evaluate its correctness.¹²⁶ What follows from the correctness' assessment-sensitivity is that an assertion may prove to be incorrect, in spite of it not having violated any rule when it was performed. Crucially, this is possible because context from which speakers assess a speech act and the context in which they perform it need not be the same. Since the performance of an assertion is correct in accordance to the rule which dictates when the performance is permissible relative to the context in which the speaker performs the assertion and withdrawing it is governed by a rule relative to the context in which the speaker withdraws the assertion, speakers can violate the latter without infringing on the former rule.

Clearly, according to a non-assessment-sensitive interpretation of a speech act's correctness (absolute correctness), Dummett's dictum is vindicated. Speakers ought to retract the assertion, when it violates the rule which governs its performance. Things get murkier when we endorse truth relativism. As I have mentioned, the rule for retracting may apply without it requiring the faulty performance of the speech act—by which I mean without requiring that the performance of the speech act violated a rule governing it. Moreover, it is possible that incorrect assertions need not be retracted, as long as the asserted content is true from the relevant context of assessment at the time. Truth relativist claim that assessing an assertion's correctness is not equivalent to assessing whether it infringed a rule when it was performed. On the one hand, obligatory retractions do not imply that the speaker was wrong to perform the act mandatorily targeted for retraction. On the other hand, an assertion *proving incorrect* is relative too, and, when interpreted that way, the obligation to retract is not a result of the performance of the assertion being incorrect (in the context in which the speech act was performed).

So, it does not seem easy to vindicate Dummett's dictum. Something close to the dictum is vindicated: that there is consequence to the asserted content being false, the speaker must withdraw her assertion. But, according to relative correctness, performing a false assertion does not entail that the assertion is incorrect.

The practical novelty in the relative notion of correctness is that the speaker is not just committed to her assertion being true, or being justified in the context she performed it. Her commitments are upheld with regard to any context from which the assertion may be assessed from. The relative correctness of the performance of an assertion depends on the assertoric commitments being in force not just relatively to the context of use but also relatively to each context from which the assertion is to be assessed from. When it comes to retraction, a context of assessment from which the asserted content turns out to be false overlaps with the context where the asserter can perform a retraction, then she ought to retract her assertion.

¹²⁶ This is particularly true of utterances of sentences with assessment-sensitive predicates. In cases where no assessment-sensitive predicate is uttered, the speech act's correctness is not assessment-sensitive in an interesting sense.

Needless to say that the commitments are practically more demanding only when it comes to assessment-sensitive content. If some content's truth-value is invariable as assessed from any context, then asserting said content is correct or incorrect regardless the context of assessment. So, for non-assessment-sensitive propositions it makes no difference to the asserter if the assertoric commitments she is under are in force for every context of assessment or not. Non-surprisingly the interesting cases are assessment-sensitive. Consider, then, the following example:

Alice stated that waterboarding terrorists was not wrong. She finds the American administration's behaviour during the Bush Jr. era acceptable regarding how they treated "enemy combatants". After many years she no longer agrees with her previous statement. She became aware that waterboarding is a cruel method, and now believes that she was wrong at the time.

Truth relativism predicts that Alice is obliged to retract. She is under such obligation, because the commitment she undertook when she asserted that waterboarding terrorists is not wrong involved not only the commitment to retract the assertion if it is true that waterboarding terrorists is wrong when assessed from the context in which the assertion was performed, but also when assessed from any other context she may occupy. For moral judgements contexts of assessments are characterised by moral standards; the p 's truth-value is a function of a possible world w (where w is the world of the context in which p was used) and a moral standard s .

At this point I believe it is fair to be suspicious of the rationality of committing oneself to what one is saying being true for every moral standard one may possibly endorse. One's expectation must be that at some point she will be under the obligation to retract what she has asserted. The concern is even more poignant when we are taking assessment-sensitive judgements about matters which our own standards tend to vary frequently, like judgements about personal taste. So, how is the asserter to aim at truth when she asserts, if when she performs the assertion there is no definite answer on whether what she asserted was true at the time?¹²⁷

¹²⁷ This is an interpretation of Evans' challenge against Relativism. Here is how Marques (2014) puts it: "Evans's challenge is, I think, as follows. When we make sincere assertions, we aim to speak truly. If truth is assessment-sensitive, there is no final answer to the question of whether our assertion was correct when we made it. (...) At best, we can aim to speak truly from a context. But, from which context?" (365).

For the criticism to have any bite it better not rely on a merely linguistic disagreement about what it is to *aim at the truth*.¹²⁸ Certainly, truth relativists are not claiming that to aim at the truth is to aim at truth in every context of assessment. Assessments involve parameters which need not be determined by the context of use, whence there is a myriad of contexts from which an assertion can be assessed.¹²⁹ There would be an excessive burden on the agent if to aim at truth involved aiming at it with regard to every context of assessment. Alice aiming at truth cannot require Alice aiming at truth from context of assessments occupied by other agents. Alice must not be under the commitment of taking back her assertion if from Felicity's assessment what she asserted is false. If that were the case, it would be incoherent for Alice to assert anything assessment-sensitive. Hence, the only reasonable option is that Alice is aiming at truth for each context which she may occupy, from the moment she performed her assertion onwards.¹³⁰

This limits the asserter's assertoric commitments to only contexts of assessment that she occupies and will occupy. With this restriction Alice is no longer obliged to retract her assertion if, from the context of assessment occupied at a certain time by an agent, her assertion is not true. The obligation comes into play only in contexts of assessment she occupies; in the case of her moral judgement, she is obliged to retract only when she endorses a moral standard from which she assesses her claim about waterboarding terrorists as not true. More generally, retracting the assertion is mandatory at t_{0+i} if the asserter accurately evaluates at t_{0+i} what she asserted at t_0 as not true.¹³¹

Arguably, this salvages truth relativism from entailing implausible assertoric commitments. But Marques (2014) has argued that the assertoric commitments entailed by the view are nonetheless subject to Evans' objection. Marques interprets Evans' challenge on truth relativism to be that "the kind of commitment one undertakes when one earnestly and rationally performs an action cannot make the connection between succeeding in keeping the commitment and earnestly forming an intention to do so be merely accidental." (370) The connection is "merely accidental" because endorsing any standard from which what was asserted is not true impedes the success of keeping the

¹²⁸ The following passage may indicate that the criticism relies on a misunderstanding on how to interpret what assertion aims at: "Such a conception of assertion is not coherent. In the first place, I do not understand the use of the ordinary word 'correct' to apply to one and the same historical act at some times and not at others, according to the state of the weather. Just as we use the terms 'good' and 'bad', 'obligatory' and 'permitted' to make an assessment, once and for all, of non-linguistic actions, so we use the term 'correct' to make a once-and-for-all assessment of speech-acts. Secondly, (...) if a theory of sense permits a subject to deduce that a particular utterance will now be correct, but later will be incorrect, it cannot assist the subject in deciding what to say, nor in interpreting the remarks of others. What should he aim at, or take others to be aiming at? Maximum correctness? But of course, if he knew the answer to this question, it would necessarily generate a once-and-for-all assessment of utterances, according to whether or not they meet whatever condition the answer gave" (Evans 1985: 349–50).

¹²⁹ See MacFarlane (2005: 309).

¹³⁰ See MacFarlane (2005: 320) and Marques (2014: 366)

¹³¹ Or as MacFarlane (2005: 320) puts it: "I conclude that the relativist should construe (W) along the lines of the fourth option, which privileges contexts the asserter occupies, while still allowing the relevant context of assessment to diverge from the context of use: (W*) In asserting that p at C1, one commits oneself to withdrawing the assertion (in any future context C2) if p is shown to be untrue relative to context of use C1 and context of assessment C2".

commitment, in spite of the asserter forming the intention to keep the commitment when she made the utterance. So, apparently, the connection is weaker because the features of the context of assessment need not arise from the context of use. Thus, weakening the connection seems to be a result from endorsing truth relativism, and Marques is claiming that that cannot be the result of the kind of commitment rational agents undertake when asserting.

Consider that Alice is a rational and informed agent about waterboarding and torture and about the different moral standards that she may come to assume during her life. Marques believes that truth relativism should predict that she would be baffled about whether she should voice her view on the matter; for she knows that there is a high chance of her being obliged to retract what she says at some other time.¹³² But the baffling reaction requires something else, it requires that there is something wrong with correctly asserting that p and at some later time mandatorily withdrawing it. Why should Alice be baffled from speaking her mind? She is being rational and cooperative. Rational and cooperative asserters assert at t what they believe to be true at t (assuming nothing else is at play that would prevent them from performing the assertion). Asserters violate no commitment when they, after some time, retract what they asserted at t and now believe to not be true. Thus, the view is consistent with a strong connection between successfully fulfilling one's assertoric commitments and intending to do so. It is unclear in which sense the connection weakening is a consequence of truth relativism. This consequence arises only if we are incoherent when attempting to spell out the view; i.e. if some assertoric commitment is not relativised to contexts of assessment.

Relative correctness apparently comes out unscathed from all of this. However, there is a larger issue at stake that I have already pointed to in previous sections and that Marques (2014, 2018) also points out: agents are not considered irrational or dishonest when they do not follow the presumable obligation to retract their assertion. This strongly indicates that there is no commitment to retract.¹³³ The most promising way to understand the relation between retraction and assertion is that there is, at most, a regulatory rule which determines that the *optimific* assertion practice typically involves agents retracting when their assertion turns out not being true. Importantly, no commitments arise from a regulatory rule. This is a general issue about the role retraction plays in our asserting practices, but, unfortunately for some truth relativists, it is crucial that agents commit themselves to retracting when what they have asserted is not true. It is through retraction that one can make sense of assessment-sensitivity. MacFarlane states it himself that the pragmatic difference between his view and rival views decisively relies on retraction. (MacFarlane 2014: 109) Thus, if we remove the assertoric commitment

¹³² “This is then the main point I want to make: if assessment-sensitive truth has any bite, there should be contexts of assessment at which the relevant parameters determine commitments conflicting with those available to speakers at the context of assessment provided by the context of utterance itself. Rational, earnest, reflective speakers are in a position to envisage that possibility. But our intuitions tell us that— far from experiencing the puzzlement that MacFarlane’s view entails— this is not going to deter us, when imaginatively in the shoes of these speakers, from making assertions, thereby consistently committing ourselves in the way we ordinarily do (to truth at our current contexts)” Marques (2014: 371).

¹³³ “It follows that our assertoric practice is not accurately described by those commitments, since rational and earnest agents can assert without incurring them” (Marques 2014: 372).

of retracting from the equation, truth relativism loses its main motivation and the *dummettian* strategy of making sense of relative truth through the role that truth plays in the practice of asserting (making and withdrawing it) fails, because explicating truth through its role in making the assertion “leaves contexts of assessment without any *essential* role to play”; (MacFarlane 2014, p. 104) therefore, doing away with any interesting result truth relativism may spring forth.

This effect is limited truth relativism. To make sense of *absolute* truth by explaining its role on our asserting practices a commitment to retract is not crucial — since contexts of assessment play no interesting role in absolute truth. This is clear when considering the notion of absolute correctness. The only context playing any relevant role when determining the correctness of an assertion is the context of use. What matters for the absolute correctness is that what was asserted is true from the perspective of the context in which the speech act was made. Thus, the assertoric commitments are limited to the context in which the speech act was performed. The speaker need not concern herself with other contexts of assessment, for the only relevant one overlaps with the context of use. If there is a commitment to retract an assertion when what was asserted, from the perspective of the context in which it was asserted, is false, then the commitment is strongly linked with the commitment to only perform assertions whose content is true. The violation of the latter, triggers the former commitment. Importantly, contexts of use play their essential role regardless of assertions generating a commitment to retract when the assertion proves incorrect. Absolute correctness does not require speakers undergoing retraction commitments when asserting to motivate the notion of context of use. Whence there being a retraction-related assertoric commitment is only essential to make sense of the context of assessment’s role.

The contention between truth relativism proponents and (indexical and non-indexical) contextualists is about whether context of assessments play any relevant role. The contention may be about two different matters: (1) assertoric commitments do not include commitments about retraction and (2) assertoric commitments include commitments about retraction, but retraction involves fault. We have seen the contention about (1) here. Next, we will spell out what the disagreement is about (2).

6.3.3 Retraction without Fault

Let us assume, purely for argument sake, that there is indeed a retraction commitment for assertions. The contention, then, is about whether the obligation to retract is triggered only when the assertion’s performance was incorrect or whether the obligation may triggered regardless of the assertion’s performance incorrectness. Putting it in a different way, the contention is about whether obligatory retraction involve admission of fault or not.

What is the sense according to which the agent is at fault? Surely the notion of fault should not be taken morally. When an agent is obliged to retract certainly that is not because she has done something morally wrong. Consider the *Fish Soup Example* again.

Fish Soup Example

Julia₁₉: My father's fish soup is so tasty.

Assume now, instead, that what Julia (at 19 years old) stated is false, according to her own taste standards at the time. The retraction commitments that she is under mandates that she retracts her assertion. However this is not because she committed a moral fault.¹³⁴ The relevant notion of fault, which has been repeatedly hinted at in previous sections, is linguistic and normative. Julia infringed on the norm that determines that she ought not to assert that p if p is false.

Thus, the disagreement between relativists and competing semantic views is whether agents ought to retract when no linguistic fault is involved. To understand the disparate predictions consider the following adaptation of the *Fish Soup Example*.

Julia₉: My father's fish soup is awful.

Assume that during the next ten years of her life Julia's taste standards have become more sophisticated, sophisticated enough to fully appreciate the immense quality of her father's cooking and his fish soup. Should Julia retract now, at 19, the assertion she made when she was 9.

What is one to make of this case? If one is a relativist, *à la* MacFarlane, one surely believes that Julia would be infringing a partially constitutive norm of assertion if she were to not retract the assertion she made when she was 9 years old. If one is not a relativist then Julia is not obliged to retract her original assertion, because there was nothing wrong with the performance of her assertion when she was 9 years old. Deciding between relativism and rival theories is deciding between which prediction is more accurate in these sort of cases.

Intuitively, even if Julia₁₉ was to not retract any of the evaluative assertions she performed when she was 9 (and consider there were many retractable assertions), one would not find her to be an unreliable asserter or retractor. One would not even hold her accountable for the assertions she performed when she was a child. It would seem irrational to believe that Julia still held the same beliefs about matters of personal taste. The assertoric commitments agents undergo when the assertion is performed have an expiring date, depending on the context and on what was originally asserted. I take it to be very intuitive that, in normal circumstances, it is irrational to demand that an adult retracts an assertion that p she has not previously retracted, even if she no longer endorses p . Thus, in this case it

¹³⁴ If the reader takes that the moral fault is that she purposely lied, then just consider an example where no purposed lying is involved, but what the speaker asserted is false nonetheless.

may be that it just happens that there is no obligation to retract because the illocutionary effects of the original assertion are no longer in force.¹³⁵

Unfortunately this strategy lets the relativist off the hook and allows for some leeway in accounting for putative counter-examples to what the theory predicts. Retractions misfire if the targeted speech act is no longer in force. Thus, the Retraction Rule does not predict in this case that agents ought to retract speech act whose illocutionary commitments are void (there is already nothing to retract). Hence, these sort of cases are not counter-examples to the rule, but consistent with it. Furthermore, relativists may explain potential problematic cases by appealing to this strategy: illocutionary effects are no longer in force, hence, retraction is not obligatory because it would misfire.¹³⁶

To avoid this, one is required to thread carefully when coming up with putative counter-examples against relativism. It is advisable that the relevant cases do not involve a large time gap between the performance of the original speech act and the performance of the retraction of the original speech act. Thus, the counter-example ought to be such that it avoids a plausible time gap for the agent's standard to have changed but not large enough so that one avoids the relativists' arguing that it is a case of a retraction misfiring. With that in mind consider the following example:

Julia_{atlunch}: *Lampreia à bordalesa* is awful.

At lunch Julia tries *Lampreia à bordalesa* for the first time. She does not enjoy the dish, considers it too rich and does not really care for the fish's texture. Thus, according to her standard of taste the dish in question is awful. She is persuaded to give the same dish another try at dinner. But this time she comes to appreciate how delicious and complex its taste is. From her new standard of taste, what she has asserted at lunch about *Lampreia à bordalesa* is not true. According to the relativist, she ought to take back her initial assertion, according to non-relativists there is no such obligation.

The main question is about which theory makes the right prediction. If there is such a norm in place (in the sense described by the relativist), then one expects that systematic violations of the norm from Julia would in her being justifiably held accountable for doing so. The violations can easily be systematic, because for every context of assessment A_x at time t_x where it is not true that *Lampreia à bordalesa* is awful assessed from the assessor's standard (in this case, Julia's) and Julia does not retract,

¹³⁵ von Fintel & Gillies (2008) point to the same phenomenon (time-lagging) when discussing relativist theories applied to epistemic modals. I believe the relativist should explain this away by arguing for the claim that the illocutionary effects are no longer in play; whence, retractions in cases with large time gaps seeming infelicitous.

¹³⁶ A tiny modification on the caveat of the Retraction does the trick: **Retraction Rule* (RR*)**. *An agent S ought to retract an assertion that p (whose illocutionary effects are still in force in context c2) performed in context c1 if as used in c1 and assessed from c2 p is not true.*

she is infringing on the retraction rule. Would one find Julia an unreliable asserter if she was to not comply with the norm to retract (given the norm how the relativist understands it) or would one find Julia to be accountable for violating a norm (as relativists understand it)? I do not have clear intuitions on this. However, I find it plausible that one would not recognise Julia as a reliable asserter or expect her to retract (evaluative) assertions when it turns out that they are not true (relative to a particular standard of assessment). However, I do not find it reasonable that Julia gets challenged on her previous assertion about *Lampreaia à bordalesa* after signalling that she now finds it tasty by someone claiming something like ... *but didn't you say that it was awful before*. If there was an expectation for her to retract the challenge would not sound petty, however it sounds that way, at least with the information I have provided here.

Notice that these queries about whether the predictions made by a particular semantic theory regarding whether agents are obliged to retract an assertion that p when p assessed from the context of retraction is false, even when no infringement on alethic or epistemic norms governing the performance of the assertion were made, are empirical. Hence, one should look to the empirical data available when considering how to best account for the retraction of evaluative assertions. Hopefully, the data will help one come to a conclusion, assuming that an important desideratum of a theory about retraction is to make predictions which accommodate the empirical data.

With this in mind, next I explore and describe the data available concerning the retraction of assertions of evaluative content. I focus on the study by Kneer (2021).¹³⁷ The study is solely focused on retracting assertions on matters of personal taste and I will attempt to make no conclusions on their basis about other areas of evaluative discourse, specifically, on moral and aesthetic discourses.

6.3.4 *The empirical data*

Truth relativists make testable predictions about retracting assertions of matters of personal taste (typically involving the utterance of predicates of personal tastes such as ‘funny’, ‘delicious’, ‘tasty’). The interesting predictions follow from the following rule:

Retraction Rule (RR). A speaker in context c_2 is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of p made at c_1 if p is not true as used at c_1 and assessed from c_2 .¹³⁸

If the asserted content is not true when assessed from the context of retraction, then the speaker is mandated to retract her previous assertion. As previously mentioned, the rationale behind this is that, when challenged, the speaker has to take back the normative commitments she undertook when the

¹³⁷ I am not taking into account Knobe & Yalcin (2014) and Marques (2018) for the mere reason that it is about epistemic modals. Given that I am focusing on matters of personal taste, morality and aesthetics, I will not consider their findings; although they point to a consistent trend when it comes to retraction on matters about personal taste and falsity.

¹³⁸ MacFarlane 2014: 108.

original assertion was made. Thus, the testable predictions are that agents, when assessing p to be false, would retract the original assertion of p . In order to test whether relativism accurately predicts agents' behaviours when it comes to retraction, Kneer (2021) has made a first experiment with two scenarios, one involving the predicate 'delicious' and another involving the predicate 'fun'.

FISH STICKS

John is five years old and loves fish sticks. One day he says to his sister Sally:

'Fish sticks are delicious.' Twenty years later his taste regarding fish sticks has changed. Sally asks him whether he still likes fish sticks and John says he doesn't anymore.

[A] Sally says: 'So what you said back when you were five was false.'

[B] Sally says: 'So you are required to take back what you said about fish sticks when you were five.'

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Sally's claim? (Kneer 2021: 6459)

Respondents were given either case [A] or case [B] and had to respond on a scale of 7 (completely agree) to 1 (completely disagree). Relativists predict that the mean agreement between answers to [A] and [B] be above the scale midpoint and contextualists predict that the mean agreement between the two answer be below.

Similar predictions occur in the other scenario:

SANDCASTLE

John is five years old and loves building sandcastles. One day he says to his sister Sally:

'Building sandcastles is great fun.' Twenty years later his opinion regarding sandcastles has changed. Sally asks him whether he still thinks building sandcastles is fun, and John says he doesn't.

[A] Sally says: 'So what you said back when you were five was false.'

[B] Sally says: 'So you are required to take back what you said about building sandcastles when you were five.'

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with Sally's claim? (1=completely disagree; 7=completely agree) (Kneer 2021: 6460)

The 164 participants were randomly assigned to one of the four combinations Fish Sticks and [A], Fish Sticks and [B], Sandcastle and [A] or Sandcastle and [B].

To sum up, the results were "clear and decisive". Participants strongly disagreed about [A] in each scenario and [B] in each scenario and both means, although truth ascriptions and retraction judgments coincided, mean agreement was considerably below the midpoint. Hence contradicting relativist predictions about these scenarios.

However, as Kneer himself admits, there are time lag concerns, such as the ones we have mentioned in previous sections and they may provide a way out to the relativist. Thus, another scenario where very little time lag is presented was submitted to 87 participants and the results are consistent with the results in the previous two scenarios; hence, preventing relativists from claiming that the

empirical data neglected to account for the fact that the original normative commitments may no longer be in place. This, according to Kneer, warrants the following conclusion: “[t]he truth value of claims of personal taste is sensitive to the context of use only, and assertions are not subject to a rule of retraction.” (2021: 6464)

This is already damaging for the relativist, but things get worse for those who attempt to motivate the view via a retraction rule for assertions. The fourth, and last experiment, shows that, even when agents consider the original assertion of p to be incorrect as assessed from the context in which the assertion was performed and p to be false as assessed from the context of retraction, agents do not agree (nor disagree) with the statement that the assertion *must* be retracted. This surprising result suggests that, if there is a retraction rule governing assertions, it does not have to do solely with truth. This result is surprising because it goes against previous experimental results (e.g. Knobe & Yalcin 2014). Kneer (2021) explains the disparity in results by previous experiments testing whether agents found the retraction *appropriate* and not whether agents found the retraction *required*. According to Kneer, finding it appropriate is not the adequate question to pose participants when testing whether there is a rule that mandates that agents retract under certain conditions.

However, ‘must’ is a fairly ambiguous term, and it may easily be interpreted much more strongly than an obligation that comes out from a linguistic rule. It may also be interpreted morally. Unless it is clear in what sense participants are taking ‘must’ to mean, the data do not decisively show that no retraction rule governs the practice of asserting. Nonetheless, the data do not support that there are mandatory retractions either. Hence, at the very least, MacFarlane’s motivation for relativism is empirically unfounded.

Moreover, according to the data in Kneer 2021 and data on epistemic modals in Knobe & Yalcin 2014, Khoo 2015, Beddor & Egan 2018, Marques 2018, relativist predictions are not consistent with the findings and, if a relativist view is to account for the inconsistencies, adjustments are required.

The empirical data indicate that at least in some areas of discourse there does not seem to be an obligation to retract assertions which assessed from the context of retraction are false. The data also suggest that the link between retraction of evaluative assertions and falsity is flimsy, insufficient to support that assertions are partially governed by a retraction rule. This suggests, as was mentioned on the previous section, that motivating truth relativism by appealing to such a rule is empirically unfounded. Fortunately for relativists, some scholars have pointed out that there is no need to motivate the view via mandatory retractions. The view can be motivated merely by explaining agents retracting correct assertions while admitting that they were wrong and by accounting for empirical data which point to what Dinges & Zakkou (2020) have called *Even Split* and *Direction Effect* phenomena.

Their experimental study suggests that, contrary to what one may have expected, agents truth ascriptions evenly split among contextualist and relativist predictions, with regard to matters of personal taste. To better illustrate consider one of their experimental cases.

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:

“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!”

[P]articipants 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”. (Dinges & Zakkou 2020: 9)

Data show that agents were split about whether to classify what was said as false or true. Ascribing the original utterance FALSE is consistent with relativist predictions (and inconsistent with contextualist predictions), since, according to the current assessment the sentence ‘Yumble is tasty.’, expresses a false proposition. Hence, signaling, as argued by relativists, that average speakers find predicates of personal taste assessment sensitive. Ascribing the original utterance TRUE is consistent with contextualist predictions (and inconsistent with relativist predictions), since, according to contextualists, the relevant standard to assess the truth-value of what the sentence ‘Yumble is tasty.’ is the initial standard (determined by the context in which the sentence was uttered). With respect to that standard the sentence expresses a false proposition. Hence, signaling, as argued by contextualists, that average speakers find predicates of personal taste use sensitive.

Thus, the results indicate that in terms of truth ascriptions there is an even split between relativist interpretations and contextualist interpretations.

Kneer (2022) takes issue with this. He argues that the question for the contextualist hypothesis is ill-formulated: it “sounds confusing, if not confused, and the expression “still” can trigger a sense of contradiction.” (120) Kneer, then, suggests the following revising question to pose to participants: “[Contextualist (revised)] “What I said was true. At the time I didn’t find Yumble tasty.”” (121) With the revised question, results have shown that agents agree much more often with the contextualist hypothesis than they do with relativist hypothesis. Kneer (2022) believes these findings undermine the claim that there is such a thing as *Even Split* and, therefore, Dinges and Zakkou (2020)’s hybrid relativist proposal.

Dinges and Zakkou also argue that empirical findings support what they call *Direction Effect*—i.e. that agents tend to favour a relativist reading when their original statement expresses dislike, while when the original statement expresses liking that does not occur.

There has been mixed empirical support for the effect. By applying the revised contextualist question, Kneer (2022) has concluded from the results that there appears to be a direction effect; however, even when the original statement expresses dislike, agents still favour a contextualist reading; even though, not as much.

My main objection to Kneer's approach has to do with the revised contextualist question. If Dinges and Zakkou (2020) are right, then the revised contextualist question, due to the 'At the time I didn't find Yumble tasty.' sentence is explicitly setting the context of use as the relevant context of assessment. The revised part is determining that the relevant time to assess the original assertion is the time when it was performed. This tends to favour a contextualist reading, especially given that the relativist question makes no analogous determination. Thus, given how the questions are formulated in Kneer's revised empirical study, the study is skewed in the contextualist's favour.

Notwithstanding, and even if Kneer's criticisms are on the right track, there is yet something left unexplained, (i) the cases of agents favouring a relativist reading when it comes to truth-ascription and (ii) the cases of agents agreeing that the speaker ought to retract their original assertion. Both (i) and (ii) although, according to the data in Kneer 2022, are rarer, they are still significant enough to require an explanation (even if the phenomena are not characterised as even splits). The query is, thus, which theory is better suited to deal with the mixed experimental results.

Relativism endorses the view that the context of assessment need not coincide with the context of use, because it is not determined by the parameters arising from the context in which the speaker is using the sentence. However, this does not mean that the relevant assessment, given a specific conversational dynamics, does not coincide with the parameters determined by the use of the sentence. Hence, in those cases the assessment will coincide with the assessment made from the context where the original assertion was performed. This is what some relativists (see Dinges & Zakkou 2020) call 'hybrid relativism'.¹³⁹ Importantly, contextualism does not have the same semantic flexibility. Regardless if one is non-indexical or indexical contextualist, the relevant parameters for assessing whether an assertion is correct - i.e. if the asserted content is true—are determined by the context of use. This, in principle,

Kneer may believe that amending relativism weakens the view:

Personally, I think that the more tailor-made amendments relativism requires, the less it is suited as a unified semantics of perspectival expressions (...). At some stage, all the extra flexibility invoked to save relativism might turn it into a somewhat unpalatable anything-goes picture. (Kneer 2021: 6470)

However, it is crucial not to confound the welcome flexibility of truth relativism due to the fact that it uses an additional tool, context of assessment, which allows for a greater adaptation when accounting for mixed empirical results, with an "anything-goes" picture. Assessors may find, given a particular conversational dynamics and linguistic clues, that the relevant parameters to assess the correctness of an assertion are those coinciding with the parameters arising from the context in which the assertion

¹³⁹ Dinges and Zakkou (2020) partially account for the phenonema found in the empirical studies they have conducted by endorsing this picture.

was performed. This is not an “anything-goes” picture. If anything mixed empirical results support this picture.

It is important to note that, although a view which states that the parameters relevant for the assessment of an assertion partially result from conversational dynamics fits well with contextualism about evaluative terms, mixed empirical results on this matter undermine the claim that evaluative terms are use-sensitive and not assessment-sensitive. The reason is straightforward: contextualist views lack the flexibility that an additional semantic tool like contexts of assessment provides. If contextualism holds, then it must be the case that the relevant parameters are those solely determined by the use of evaluative terms. If results indicate that a non-negligible amount of interactions are interpreted as the relevant parameters not being those determined by the use of the expression, then the only way for the contextualist to account for the findings is to argue for the denial that the results truly indicate what they supposedly do, which is e.g. what Kneer (2022) does. This is a consequence of the truth relativist, who is willing to go for a more flexible picture, being on a more comfortable initial position than the contextualist is with regards to the possible empirical findings. Flexible relativism makes the weaker prediction of the two: it only predicts that there is a non-negligible amount of cases where agents make truth-ascriptions inconsistent with the claim that evaluative terms are use-sensitive and that there is a non-negligible amount of cases where agents agree that the original assertion should be retracted because the asserted content is assessed as false from the context of the retractor, even though the same content is assessed as true from the context in which the assertion was performed.

The empirical findings on retraction of assertions on matter of personal taste successfully undermine a non-flexible relativist approach applied to this area of discourse, but they fail to clearly favour a particular view on predicates of personal taste. Hence, the debate on which theory best accounts for the retraction is still open.

Furthermore, empirical studies concerning retraction of assertions on areas of evaluative discourse have focused on predicates of personal taste (and epistemic modals). Thus, even if empirical findings were to decisively favour a particular view that would not mean the end of the matter, given that empirical studies on retraction in moral and aesthetic discourses are, as far as I know, non-existent.

There is a very good reason for empirical findings to be focused on predicates of personal taste and epistemic modals. Relativists (such as MacFarlane) preferred examples involved predicates of personal taste and epistemic modals. These examples were the ones supposed to fuel relativist intuitions about retraction.

However, there is no reason to assume that retraction is a uniform phenomenon across areas of evaluative discourse. If there it is not a uniform phenomenon and there are relevant differences across different areas of discourse, then one has no reason to believe that there is (or should be) a unified semantics for evaluative expressions.

In the next section I will address whether retraction is a uniform phenomenon when it comes to assertion sentences containing moral and personal predicates. I will argue that it is not a uniform

phenomenon and I will conclude this chapter by extracting consequences of the non-uniformity of retraction for the debate regarding which semantic theory is preferable in accounting for evaluative expressions.

6.4 The case for a non-uniform account of retraction

In this section I want to make a case for considering retraction to not behave uniformly across different areas of evaluative discourse, more specifically by comparing retraction of assertions on matters of personal taste and assertion on matters of morality. The paradigmatic cases will be assertions of sentences containing ‘funny’ and ‘tasty’ and assertions of sentences containing ‘wrong’/‘bad’ and ‘permissible’, for personal taste and moral assertions respectively.

I will explore three features that, as I will argue, show that moral retractions, when compared to other areas of evaluative discourse, specifically, personal taste, are more commonly accompanied by an admission of fault—that their original assertion was incorrect. The first feature is found in Ferrari & Zeman 2014, where it is argued that agents expect moral retractions to admit fault while the same expectation is not present when it comes to retractions of personal taste. The second feature I explore has to do with the pervasiveness of retraction across areas of discourse. I will argue that *explicit* moral retractions are more common than personal taste retractions. I will argue that this feature is connected with the larger importance that coordinating on moral matters has for our social lives. The last feature has to do with what I call the *expiration date* phenomenon. I argue that moral assertions generate illocutionary effects that take longer to expire than personal taste assertions and, whence, the time gap for felicitous retractions is larger with regard to moral retractions than personal taste retractions. This disparity is important, because this too shows that retractions does not behave uniformly when one compares moral talk and talk on matters of personal taste.

An initial caveat, before diving into it. The evidence in favour of the non-uniformity of the phenomenon of retraction across distinct areas of discourse relies on intuitions, mostly my own. The intuitions can be empirically tested. However, no empirical tests are available as of yet and, therefore, the evidence is, when taken in isolation shaky. Hence, what I will put forward should be taken with a grain of salt. Notwithstanding, I believe that, taken as whole, the evidence significantly indicates to a common conclusion: retraction is a non-uniform phenomenon across areas of evaluative discourse.

6.4.1 Explicit admission of fault in moral retractions and retractions on matters of personal taste

Ferrari and Zeman (2014) have identified that personal taste and moral retractions have the following distinctive features: on the one hand, personal taste retractions need not be accompanied by an expression signaling that retractors were *wrong* for holding the gustatory standard they held at the time of utterance. On the other hand, moral retractions are expected to be accompanied by an expression

signalling that retractors were *wrong* for holding the moral standard they previously held, at the time of utterance. The expression which is typically used to signal that something went array with the original assertion is ‘I was wrong...’. There is an ambiguity with the use of the expression that needs to be settled. It is unclear whether the agent means that what she previously asserted was false or that the standard which she previously held was wrong according to her now (and the standard she holds now). Consider the following case.

Fausto believes that bullfighting is morally permissible. He signals that it is so when discussing the issue with his sister. She, as is often between these two siblings, disagrees. She finds bullfighting morally reprehensible because it causes gratuitous suffering to a sentient being. Fausto does not value suffering of sentient enough to consider that it surpasses the enjoyment humans may have from watching the spectacle in the arena.

After a few months, Fausto watched a documentary about the food industry and how animals suffer so that food is produced. The documentary had such an effect on Fausto that he has reviewed his previous moral standard, he now believes that gratuitous suffering of sentient beings is morally wrong.

One afternoon Fausto and his sister are invited by a friend to attend a bullfighting performance. Fausto promptly refuses and adds that he finds bullfighting to be morally wrong.

His sister: ‘I thought you said bullfighting was morally permissible.’

Fausto: ‘I was wrong. I take it back. I no longer believe that.’

Now, contrast the bullfighting case with the following case:

Julia believes that *lampreia à bordalesa* is not tasty. She signals that it is not tasty when discussing the issue with her brother. He, as is often between these two siblings, disagrees. He finds *lampreia à bordalesa* one of the tastiest dishes he has ever tried. Julia does not care very much for the fish’s texture and for its strong flavour.

After a few months, Julia tried dishes with strong flavour and texture. This has had an important impact on Julia’s gustatory standards, so much so that she has reviewed her previous gustatory standards and now believes that *lampreia à bordalesa* is actually extremely tasty.

One afternoon Julia and her brother are invited by a friend to dinner at a particular restaurant. The friend warns them that the dish will be *lampreia à bordalesa*. Julia excitedly replies that they will be happy to attend.

Her brother: 'I thought you said *lampreia à bordalesa* wasn't tasty.'

Julia: 'I was wrong. I take it back. I no longer believe that.'

The intuition that these cases are supposed to trigger with the reader is that, although one would not expect Fausto to not add that he was at fault for previously asserting that bullfighting is permissible, one would not find it odd for Julia to not have add 'I was wrong,' while signaling her retraction. Thus, according to Ferrari and Zeman (2014) it would be *unexpected* for Fausto to just merely utter 'I take it back.' (while not admitting fault). But it would be perfectly fine for Julia to merely utter the same sentence, even though she is not admitting fault.

As I stated earlier, it is ambiguous whether the admission of fault targets the performance of the original assertion or the admission of fault targets the original standard which the agent assessed the asserted content from (as Ferrari & Zeman 2014 argue). I find the former interpretation more compelling because one would expect Julia's retraction, where she admits fault, to be interpreted in the same way. However, it sounds rather odd to interpret Julia's 'I was wrong,' as targeting her previous gustatory standards and not what she asserted. In which sense would their previous gustatory standards be wrong? Certainly not morally. One would need to make the case that it is reasonable to criticize other gustatory standards. It seems odd that one would do so. I just find it much more intuitive to interpret the criticism as targeting the content of the assertion.

The motivation for Ferrari and Zeman (2014) to argue that the right interpretation is (or that it is a reasonable interpretation) to consider that moral retractions typically involve retractors criticizing their previous moral standard is to make these data amendable to a relativist account. If the admission of fault does not target the asserted content, then this is consistent with a MacFarlane-like picture where agents are not ascribing that their original was incorrect (due to the asserted content being false, as was originally used).

But, as I have previously made clear, this is not necessary. Relativists can go flexible and concede that admissions of fault while retracting are more common in moral retractions than when it comes to retractions targeting assertions on matters of personal taste. This is also consistent with the way I proposed accounting for the retraction *asymmetry* that Ferrari and Zeman (2014) point to:

Arguably, clear-cut cases are more common in moral discourse because moral issues are usually interpreted as more universalizable than issues concerning personal taste, which seem to depend much more on the idiosyncrasies of individuals. This is an empirical claim about how speakers intuitively view these two areas of discourse. (Santos 2017: 78)

Adapting the idea from Santos 2017, admissions of fault targeting the original assertion are more common when it comes to moral retractions because agents tend to view moral issues more objectively; i.e. agents tend to assess their original assertion's correctness from their newly adopted moral standard; while, when it comes to matters of personal taste, agents see assertions as depending much more on

individual idiosyncrasies and, thus, tend to not assess their original assertion's correctness from their newly adopted gustatory standard.

If the interpretation of 'I was wrong.' I have argued for thus far when accompanying retractions is on the right track, then the disparity between moral retractions and personal taste retractions comes down to it being more common to assess moral topics more objectively than matters of personal taste. The result of this gradable disparity is about how agents are expected to retract: in the moral case, when they are willing to admit fault, in the personal taste case, no such expectation is present (or at least typically not present).

In Santos 2017 I suggest the following sociological explanation for this feature that moral retractions do not share with personal taste retractions:

The claim explains that speakers' opinions about taste do not usually involve strong views on gustatory standards—agents do not feel compelled to do so because such matters usually lack universalizability. On the other hand, given that agents think that moral properties are usually universalizable, opinions on such matters usually are accompanied by strong views about moral standards. Also, people seem to give more importance to moral matters than to matters about personal taste—which is consistent with the idea that we have stronger moral opinions than opinions about personal taste. (Santos 2017: 78)

While navigating social life, agents typically do not have a very strong view about their personal tastes. They are important factors in our social interactions, but moral views usually play a much more important role when it comes to forming one's social circle. Agents tend to interact to be more confrontational with agents who do not share their views on moral matters. The suggestion explains why agents tend to cast blame for previously making a moral claim they no longer endorse. These strong views amount to agents interpreting moral claims as universalizable and more objective than claims on matters of personal taste—which tend to be interpreted as more idiosyncratic. This disparity is, according to my explanation, related with how agents use moral predicates and predicates of personal taste, which strengthens the possibility that important semantic differences are present.

This distinctive feature about moral and personal taste retractions relies excessively on intuition (particularly my own). This is a major deficiency of how my claims are supported. It would be interesting to verify whether empirical data supports this distinction regarding retraction across evaluative areas of discourse. To do this, studies, specifically on this issue, are needed. As far as I know, there are none thus far.

So, assuming the reader shares my intuition (and Ferrari and Zeman's), we have a reason to consider that evaluative retractions do not behave uniformly across different areas of discourse. Next, I want to argue that there is also another important distinction which is also related with disparities in terms of the differences of social importance of our evaluative interactions.

6.4.2 Pervasiveness of moral retractions

Just to reiterate the initial disclaimer: my claim here will heavily rely on my own intuitions.

Here is the empirical claim in a nutshell that, if true, further indicates that the retraction of evaluative assertion is a non-uniform phenomenon: moral retractions are more pervasive than personal taste retractions. The empirical claim that moral retractions are more common than retractions when matters of personal taste are concerned is relevant because it fits well with how moral interactions and moral talk are a part of our social lives and how matters about taste are a part of our social lives. As previously stated, the hypothesis is that agents tend to regard moral matters as more objective than matters concerning personal taste and this, in turn, is explained by how morality is a more important social glue than matters concerning personal taste. This is not to discount the importance of personal taste in social interactions and in the building of a sense of group belonging, but moral divergence plays a greater role, particularly when it comes to group exclusion and social exclusion.

In turn, this explains why moral retractions are more common. Since moral interactions play a greater role, in the sense I stated above, when compared to interactions about matters of personal taste, one expects agents to be more solicitous in retracting moral assertions when they find that those previous assertions are inadequate in the new context.¹⁴⁰ As I have stated in this chapter, the aim of retracting assertions is to remove one's illocutionary commitments undertaken by the performance of the retracted speech act, thus updating the background information that one is no longer committed to address putative challenges made against what one originally asserted. This function, coupled with the importance moral interactions have for group cohesion, explains why one should expect agents to retract moral claims than other evaluative claims.

This is a significant distinction regarding retraction among other areas of discourse which should be taken into account in attempts to explain the phenomenon. As seen above, the features of our moral interactions for social cohesion are related with agents ascribing a greater degree of objectivity and universalizability to moral claims, which in turn may carry over important semantic implications for the understanding of evaluative predicates across evaluative areas.

The last distinction I want to point out has to do with a different phenomenon, that I dubbed as the *expiration date* phenomenon, which relies on the idea that depending on the area of evaluative discourse assertoric commitments may take longer to vanish as time goes by.

¹⁴⁰ With 'inadequate' I am including whatever the agent may find as a legitimate reason to retract the assertion: because in the context it is impolite, false, irrelevant...

6.4.3 Time-lagging phenomenon and retraction

The last point of disparity between retractions of assertions across different areas of evaluative discourse has to do with what von Fintel and Gillies (2008) have dubbed *time-lagging* phenomenon. Here is how they illustrate it, when talking about epistemic modals and relativism's (CIA in their parlance) theories about the rejection of epistemic modal claims:

[A]s t_a gets much later than t_e , it becomes increasingly silly to go in for the sort of rejection that the CIA predicts. Suppose we are putting a randomly chosen card in an envelope. You catch a glimpse of the card and know that it is a black-suited face card. You say (19a). Then, ten years later when we open the envelope—it's the Jack of Clubs—we cannot complain with (19b)

(19) a. You: It might be the King of Spades.

b. Us (ten years later): ??Wrong!/What you said is false! (Fintel & Gillies 2008: 86)

They are not talking about retraction *per se*, but rejection. However, the same sort of time-lagging phenomenon occurs. As the gap between the time when the original assertion is performed and the time when the agent is considering its retraction increases the degree of likelihood of the retraction being infelicitous increases. The time-lagging phenomenon can be explained by the illocutionary effects of assertions diminishing as time goes by. If enough time goes by those effects may completely dissipate.

Thus, the rejection's infelicity that von Fintel and Gillies stress is explained by the fact that the speech act performed ten years before is no longer in effect, in the sense that the illocutionary effects that its performance generated are no longer in effect.

Recall that the aim of retracting assertions is to undo their assertoric commitments. If those assertoric commitments are no longer in effect, then retracting the assertion is infelicitous—in the same sense that it is infelicitous to retract previously retracted assertions. To illustrate this consider the exchange below.

Fausto (before watching a George Carlin special): Carlin isn't funny.

Fausto (after watching the special): I take it back.

Fausto (a few seconds after retracting his previous assertion): He's so funny!

Julia: Didn't you say that George Carlin wasn't funny.

The only way to interpret what Julia claimed as felicitous is to assume that she was unaware of Fausto's retraction (or that she did not understand it fully); otherwise, her claim looks petty or unserious. The infelicity of Julia's claim is due to the original assertion no longer being in effect—i.e. the illocutionary effects of Fausto's assertion have been undone due to his retraction. The explanation is that a similar

thing occurs with time-lag-like phenomena. When sufficient time has elapsed after the original assertion was performed its illocutionary effects dwindle and retracting the speech act or rejecting its content becomes superfluous. It is not surprising, then, that time-lag phenomena connected with retractions also leads to infelicitous or (in some cases) misfiring retractions.

Consider the following example to illustrate the point.

Julia (when she was twenty) asserts that George Carlin isn't funny.

Julia (when she is forty) laughs at a George Carlin joke, which triggers the following reply from Fausto: 'Didn't you say years ago Carlin wasn't funny?'

The intuitive reading is that Julia is not expected to retract her assertion because twenty years after she made an assertion about George Carlin's comedy. This is signalled by the challenge from Fausto, when she is forty, sounding petty. A reply from Julia to the challenge 'That was twenty years ago.' is completely understandable. Our idiosyncrasies are expected to change as time goes by and, accordingly, we are not expected to hold to our claims regarding our idiosyncrasies perpetually or for a very long period of time.

The period of time that is required to elapse for the illocutionary effects of assertions to fade is perhaps sensitive to the asserted content, the circumstance in which the assertion was performed, the speaker's characteristics at the time of assertion... but it eventually fades.

The important feature of time-lagging phenomenon for present purposes is that depending on the area of evaluative discourse illocutionary effects tend to take longer or less time to dissipate. To illustrate this point consider a similar example involving moral claims.

Julia (when she was twenty) asserts that bullfighting is permissible.

Julia (when she is forty) reacts disgusted to bullfighting while watching it on TV, which prompts the following reply from Fausto: 'Didn't you years ago bullfighting was morally permissible?'

The intuitive reading is that Julia is expected to retract her assertion, even after twenty years have elapsed since she performed it. Fausto's reply to Julia's reaction does not sound petty, it is a perfectly understandable way to challenge her previous moral view. This is signalled by Julia's eventual 'That was twenty years ago.' sounding unsatisfactory. Julia is still accountable because the illocutionary effects of her initial assertion on bullfighting have not faded away.

These sort of cases can be easily built where, I claim, the shared intuition is that previously undertaken assertoric commitments on moral matters tend to take longer to fade away than assertoric commitments on matters of personal taste. As a consequence moral retractions are felicitous and do not misfire in more contexts than personal taste retractions. This is an interesting consequence for

accounts of retraction of evaluative assertions. Assuming that there is a link, even if weaker than one might expect, between falsity and retraction, then it is more common for that link to fail to hold (in a particular manner) for the retraction of personal taste assertions than it is for the retraction of moral assertions.¹⁴¹ The reason for this is that false claims about matters of personal taste are felicitously retracted at less circumstances (or times), than false claims about morality. Hence, more false claims, although false, are not felicitously retractable in the area of personal taste than when it comes to moral assertion.

This feature is not only consistent but a natural consequence of what I have considered to be the different social impact of moral talk and personal taste talk. Recall that agents typically place greater weight when it comes to social cohesion to moral talk than they do with matters of personal taste. This, in turn, explains agents tendency to ascribe objective features to morality while ascribing more subject-dependent features to personal taste. Given this greater importance that morality has for the cohesion of social fabric, it is not surprising that illocutionary effects of moral claims tend to take longer to fade away than illocutionary effects of claims in other evaluative areas. Whence, this signals another aspect relatively to which retraction of evaluative assertions does not behave uniformly across the different areas of evaluative discourse.

With this I have provided three elements, albeit relying heavily on intuition, showing that retraction does not behave uniformly. I have suggested that these features have semantic import. Theorists on evaluative discourse make descriptive claims on how agents tend to use evaluative words and expressions. If the non-uniform behaviour of retractions across areas of evaluative discourse is linked with agents ascribing different features to moral talk and to talk on matters of personal taste, then this evidences that one lacks support for the assumption that semantic theories should account for moral predicates and predicates of personal taste as if they are semantic alike. I explore what this consequence looks like in more detail next.

6.4.4 The aftermath

In this section, I have brought forth evidence that retraction (like disagreement) is not a uniform phenomenon across areas of discourse. Depending on the area of evaluative discourse (here I have focused on comparing the phenomenon in moral discourse with discourse on matters of personal taste),

Thus the picture I have depicted in this section undermines the following claim:

Uniformity Claim 2 (UC2). Retractions of evaluative assertions should be accounted for uniformly (across the different areas of evaluative discourse).

¹⁴¹ Empirical studies on retraction of moral assertions could further support this hypothesis.

As I have explored in Chapter 4, the debate on evaluatives assumes that competing semantic theories are tested according to whether their predictions comply with agents usage of evaluative talk. Here I have worked under that assumption. One of the important linguistic phenomena where the accuracy of those predictions is relevant to assess the available semantic theories is retraction. Whence, UC2 implying that a semantic theory has better prospects if it accurately accounts for how agents tend to retract evaluative assertions, regardless the area of discourse. Once UC2 is undermined consequences become more complex. Firstly, the step from the accurate predictions of how agents tend to engage while retracting evaluative assertions in a specific area of discourse to accurate predictions of the same phenomenon in every area of discourse is unfounded. Secondly, it is unfounded to believe that the picture we are going to get is a uniform semantic account across the board. Thirdly, a semantic theory with the resources that permit it to adapt its account of retractions taking into consideration the peculiarities of the phenomenon in each area of evaluative discourse has to be viewed as an advantage, specially if UC2 turns out to be false.

My claim here is not that UC2 is false, it is that, since one has evidence that retraction is not a uniform phenomenon across areas of evaluative discourse, the expectation that UC2 holds is unfounded and, hence, should not be a pervasive assumption in the debate. This changes the perspective on the empirical landscape on retraction. What was perhaps previously considered strong evidence that a given theory failed to account for retraction, without justification for UC2, should add the caveat that not accounting for retraction in a particular area of evaluative discourse does not evidence the overall failure of the theory in accounting for how agents engage in every area of evaluative talk. To reach the more general conclusion, empirical data must be equally decisive in other areas of evaluative talk.

The undermining of UC2 also puts into question the support for believing that a uniform account of evaluative retraction is to be expected. There is a lack of evidence that this will be the case. This lack of evidence opens the real possibility for a pluralist account of evaluative predicates. What I mean by 'pluralist' merely consists in the view that different semantic accounts hold for evaluative predicates depending on the area of evaluative discourse—e.g. a view where semantic account X holds for moral discourse, while a different account (call it Y) holds for discourse on predicates of personal taste. The best case for a pluralist view is usually made by pointing out the shortcomings of the monist alternatives. But the situation here is different. The thesis that retraction of evaluative claims is a uniform phenomenon across areas of evaluative discourse is false, which implies that expecting that a unique semantic view accounts for the retraction phenomenon across areas of discourse is unwarranted.

6.5 Taking stock

In this chapter I began by making a detour into speech act theory, so the reader could get a better grip on what retraction is: a type of exercitive usually performed which removes at least some of the illocutionary commitments undertaken when the targeted speech act was made. I characterised its felicitous conditions by expanding on Caponetto (2018) and distinguished retraction from other ways of undoings. Retraction, contrary to annulment, targets felicitously performative speech acts. Annulment is a way of undoing the perlocutionary effects of a speech which misfired when originally performed. Contrary to amendments, retractions do not merely adjust the illocutionary commitments—typically by adapting to the conversational flow—they remove them.

After briefly spelling out the distinction between regulative and constitutive norms of speech acts and exploring how the normative force in the practice of assertion commits asserters to being challenged and withdraw their assertion when failing to meet that challenge, I explained how certain relativists motivate their theories by analysing the speech act of assertion in terms of being partly constitutive by a retraction norm. To quickly recall, constitutive norms are those rules which define the particular speech act, i.e. those which, by being in place, uniquely characterise the speech act. Importantly, this does not imply that one is not performing a given speech act if its constitutive norms are being violated. It is by the constitutive norms being in place that the performance of the speech act is the performance of that particular speech act, hence allowing for the recognition that something went wrong with it when said norm is infringed upon. Assuming that assertions are constituted by a norm governing their performance and that the aim of assertion is truth (or knowledge), then there is a truth norm or a norm implying that one must not assert content that is untrue. Intuitively, when the performance of the assertion goes wrong there is also a norm governing its withdrawal—a retraction norm. Hence, arguably, assertion is partly constituted by a norm governing its performance and partly constituted by a norm governing its withdrawal.

The partly constitutive retraction norm for assertions plays the role of determining the conditions when an assertion is required to be taken back. The norm determines that an assertion that p is required to be targeted for retraction when p is false. Since the context of use and the context of retraction share different parameters, an assertion may have been performed correctly and yet, when assessed, may turn out that its content is false and, thus, that the agent ought to retract it.

I assessed how compelling a norm of retraction for assertions is when confronted with the available empirical data on retraction of personal taste claims. I concluded that the data suggest that such norm is not in place and this, in turn, undermines a non-flexible relativist approach to personal taste predicates—i.e. if relativism is to accommodate the data, then it needs to make way for a contextualist-like account of some retractions, depending on the conversational dynamics. This can be done by explaining these cases as cases where context of use and context of assessment coinciding.

Given particular conversational dynamics, in some cases, it is the context of use that is the relevant context of assessment. This appears to accommodate the data.

Finally, I made the case for a non-uniform account of retraction of evaluative terms. The case heavily relied on my own intuitions and rested upon three empirical claims: (i) moral retractions tend to be accompanied by agents explicitly signalling admission of fault; (ii) retractions in moral discourse are more pervasive than retractions in personal taste discourse and (iii) assertoric commitments for moral assertions tend to be upheld for a longer time than assertoric commitments for personal taste assertions. I tentatively accounted for these distinctions by grounding them in the fact that agents ascribe a greater degree of objectivity and universalizability to moral claims. The explanation amounts to claiming that, given that moral predicates are high-pressure predicates, while personal taste predicates are low-pressure predicates, retracting moral assertions and retracting personal taste assertion does not carry the same weight in our social interactions and these sort of social facts typically carries over to shared linguistic practices and word meaning.

7 Conclusion

I have divided the dissertation in five parts (excluding introduction and this chapter). The first part concerned a description of the linguistic features of evaluative terms. The aim was to assess whether evaluative adjectives are genuinely distinctive from other gradable adjectives. I began by pointing out which shared linguistic features warranted including evaluatives in the category of gradable adjectives. Those features included evaluative appearing in comparative constructions, they may appear with adverbs such as ‘very’, ‘bit’, ‘extremely’ and, finally, they appear with ‘for/to Δ ’ constructions. The first features signal that evaluatives behave as if they have a scale structure—i.e. the object that they apply to apply along a scale—, and the latter feature signals that they behave as if they are relative to a comparison class.

The claim that evaluatives are semantically distinctive from other gradable adjectives relies on two assumptions:

- (A1) Evaluative adjectives are semantically evaluative.
- (A2) The relativisation to a standard (i.e. a standard determined by an experiencer/appraiser) is part of the adjectives’ meaning.

The two assumptions are connected. The purported semantically evaluative aspect of evaluatives has to do with the relativisation to a standard determined by the comparison class, in this case, by an experiencer or appraiser. It is via this relativisation that an evaluative adjective—e.g. ‘tasty’—being true of a given object conveys its evaluative content; i.e. that said object is in some way pleasurable according to the standard determined by the experiencer or appraiser, and that corresponds to the evaluative content of the adjective.

Thus, if (A1–2) are on the right track, then the relativisation to a standard determined by an experience/appraiser must be encoded in the adjective’s semantics. Putting it in a different way the adjective’s comparison class must not be contextually provided, but part of the adjective’s meaning.

At this juncture the distinction between relative and absolute gradable adjectives is paramount. If the assumptions are to hold, then evaluative adjectives must be absolute gradable adjectives—i.e. their comparison class must be semantically restricted. Following Liao et. al 2016 there is empirical support for (A2). I argued that the empirical support is not decisive by undermining how effective The Felicity Question Test (FQT) and The ‘for a(n) N’ Construction Test (FCT) are when distinguishing between adjectives whose comparison class is semantically restricted (absolute) and those whose comparison class is contextually restricted (relative).

Nonetheless, motivation for endorsing (A1–2) can be found elsewhere, specifically, it can be found by appealing to particular features of evaluative disagreements. Contrary to disagreements involving merely descriptive matters, evaluative disagreements are *persistent*. Evaluative disagreements

may subsist even if both parties involved in the disagreement agree about all the relevant (descriptive) facts. If this is on the right track, then the obvious explanation for the persistence of evaluative disagreements is that evaluative adjectives are semantically evaluative. Hence parties involved in such a disagreement may agree on all the relevant facts and yet disagree about evaluative matters. The aim of the next chapter (the third one) is to assess whether a strategy like that of Sundell (2016) is successful in undermining the assumptions (A1–2) by arguing that persistent evaluative disagreements are non-canonical, i.e. not about the content literally expressed by the parties disagreeing.

With this in mind, after providing some helpful conceptual distinctions, I explain in more detail how the persistence, when it comes to evaluative disagreements, motivates (A1–2). Then I spell out, by expanding on the strategy in Sundell 2016, how this feature is accounted for without implying any of the assumptions. The strategy amounts to appealing to the metalinguistic usage of evaluative terms and interpret the persistence of evaluative disagreements via metalinguistic negotiations—i.e. disputes about how a particular word or expression ought to be deployed. This construes persistent evaluative disagreements as disputes about word usage; capturing the normative aspect of these disagreements by depicting them as disputes about what ought to be the proper word usage for a particular end. Hence accounting for these disagreements persisting even when the parties involved agree about all the non-normative relevant facts on the matter. If this strategy is successful, then there is no reason to assume that evaluative terms are semantically different from other words and expressions that, although sometimes used to convey evaluative information, are semantically non-evaluative. Moreover, since the proper word usage is determined via the particular ends that agents have in mind when disagreeing, the comparative class is contextually restricted. So, looking at specific features of evaluative disagreements is supposed to motive (A1–2), then the strategy of explaining away the persistence of evaluative disagreements by treating them as metalinguistic disputes has to be blocked.

Part of the way to block this strategy borrows ideas from Marques 2017, which consist in arguing that appealing to metalinguistic negotiations does not capture disagreeing for the *right reasons* (those may be moral, aesthetic...) when persistent evaluative disputes are involved. Since metalinguistic disputes are triggered by a disagreement about what the proper word-usage for a specific end is, persistent disagreements are portrayed as being for merely *practical reasons*. Whatever one says about evaluative terms, one's account should also describe the role evaluative talk plays in social interactions and such role is not merely practical or motivated by practical reasons.

Another way to block the metalinguistic usage strategy is by further motivating (A1–2). If the assumptions do not hold the connection between evaluative content and evaluative terms is much looser than if they hold. The reason is straightforward: given that evaluatives convey evaluative information as a result of contextual effects (if the assumptions are false), then it is possible that under certain settings the link between evaluative content and value-word is broken. Given this, I argue that denying the assumptions precludes one from accounting for the distinction in terms of the strength of this link between thin and thick evaluative terms. Moreover, in the case of thin terms the link is so

strong that, for any social setting, evaluative disagreements deploying such terms are not merely due to practical reasons. This can be easily explained only if the assumptions hold.

In the following chapter (the fourth) I mapped the semantic alternatives for evaluative terms available in the market and determine the desiderata I focus on later on. I start by spelling out what the invariantist family of views consists in. Invariantists hold that evaluative terms' extension or meaning does not vary relative to context of use, nor does their extension or correct usage vary depending on the context of assessment or standard from which their usage is being assessed from. Invariantists need to provide an explanation for the apparent possibility of faultless disagreements when it comes to evaluative disagreements—i.e. disputes where neither of the parties involved have made a mistaken for claiming what they do and for not reviewing their claim as a result of the disagreement. In this sense Sundell's strategy fits well with an invariantist proposal, it explains faultlessness non-canonically and, thus, in spite of this purported feature of evaluative disagreements, invariantists can hold that evaluative terms are not use or assessment-sensitive. However, given the worries raised against the metalinguistic negotiations account, it is unclear how invariantism is supposed to account for the possibility of faultless disagreements when it comes to evaluatives. For this reason I consider invariantist views in a worse position than rival views.

The rival views I explore belong to the variantist family. The common feature shared by these views is that evaluative terms are either use or assessment-sensitive—i.e. either their extension and meaning vary according to the context in which they are used or their extension varies according to the context from which they are assessed. I have labeled use-sensitive views contextualist views. The reason for it is that these views agree that evaluative terms are use-sensitive. Indexical contextualism claims that evaluative terms are indexical-like: what they express is necessarily saturated by context. Non-indexical contextualism, on the other hand, holds that evaluative terms' extension depends on the standard of assessment. Non-indexicalists argue that to assess whether an evaluative claim is true, the circumstances of evaluation include a further parameter, besides world and time. Nonetheless, as with those two parameter this further parameter is determined via context of use—hence non-indexicalists being also contextualists.

The other variantist view I considered is relativism. Relativists believe that evaluative terms' extension depends on the standard of assessment, however, contrary to non-indexicalists, they hold that such standard is brought about by the context of assessment, and not context of use. Contexts of assessment are similar to contexts of use. The important difference is that the parameters of the context of assessment do not coincide with the parameter of the context of use: they include world of assessment, assessor, time of assessment, location of assessment... I ended the chapter by spelling out what some of the linguistic phenomena these theories need to account for. I focus on two (which are the linguistic phenomena I have focused for the remaining of the dissertation and that will occupy much of my attention): evaluative disagreements and retraction of evaluative claims.

In the next chapter (the fifth) I focused on evaluative disagreements. I began by exploring the different senses in which agents may disagree. Then I spelled out how one can make a compelling case in favour of faultless disagreement from the persistence of evaluative disputes. I explain the different notions of faultlessness that may be involved in faultless disagreements. In the next section I argued against the assumption that evaluative disagreements should be accounted for uniformly (across the different areas of evaluative discourse). I borrowed ideas from Stojanovic (2019) and spelled out the linguistic evidence that indicate that one should not assume that evaluative disputes behave uniformly and, hence, that further argument that one should expect a uniform account of evaluative disagreements is needed. Nonetheless, proponents of the uniformity claim may feel inclined to appeal to the following common and purportedly specific feature of evaluative disputes: that faultless disagreements can be triggered even when evaluative adjectives occur in the comparative form. I show that this linguistic is a specific characteristic of evaluative disputes. Other gradable multidimensional terms may also trigger faultless disputes while occurring in the comparative form. If this is right and evaluative terms are typically multidimensional, then one does not have grounds to claim that this feature is due to any specific feature of evaluative terms and, hence, cannot appeal to faultlessness to motivate the view that evaluative disagreements should be accounted for uniformly. Moreover, the lack of a specific feature indicates that resorting to evaluative disagreements to motivate a specific account for evaluative terms is equally unwarranted.

The last chapter (the sixth) regards the phenomenon of retraction. I characterised retraction as the speech that takes back the illocutionary commitments undertaken by the performance of the targeted speech act. I then motivated a retraction norm for other speech act, which governs their withdrawal, especially when it comes to assertion (for it is typically thought to be the speech act that aims at truth and the linguistic counterpart of belief). Before making the case for a non-uniform account of retraction, I assessed how relativists and contextualists fare when accounting for retraction in face of the available empirical data on the phenomenon. I conclude that the data is inconclusive, but that it seems to favour a contextualist or a flexible relativist view.

I present three reasons in favour of a non-uniform account of retraction: (i) retractions of moral claims is usually accompanied by an explicit admission of fault, while retractions of claims of matters of personal taste typically are not (this is suggested in Ferrari & Zeman 2014); (ii) moral retractions are more pervasive than personal taste retractions; (iii) previously undertaken assertoric commitments on moral matters tend to take longer to fade away than assertoric commitments on matters of personal taste. I then suggested that the disparity of these feature has semantic import. The reason for (i–iii) is that agents tend to view moral talk as more objective than personal taste talk and this explanation further suggests that moral predicates and personal taste predicates are not semantically akin.

The data I appealed to is untested empirical data which heavily rely on my own intuitions. In spite of this limitation, I find that it is sufficient for a compelling case to undermine the claim that retractions of evaluative assertions should be accounted for uniformly (across the different areas of

evaluative discourse). Undermining it simply implies that the assumption is unwarranted, and if it is to be taken seriously, further argument is needed.

Thus, this opens an avenue that is generally not considered in the discussion on evaluative terms, the possibility for a moderate pluralist approach for evaluative disputes and retractions—i.e. specific semantic accounts according to the area of evaluative discourse. If the uniformity claims are unwarranted, then such a pluralist approach is as plausible as a monist one.

This partially answers the question *if the purported justification for the uniformity claim regarding evaluative disagreements (UC1) and the uniformity claim regarding retraction (UC2) are each undermined in the way I presented here (i.e. evaluative disagreements and retractions do not behave uniformly across different areas of evaluative discourse), where does it leave us?* The other part of the answer is another consequence that I would like to stress here. Assuming that the empirical and linguistic data I marshalled to undermine (UC1–2) is on the right track, then the data indicate that evaluative disagreements and retractions are not uniform phenomena. If so, then this lack of uniformity is to be interpreted as part of the desiderata any account of evaluatives should render—regardless whether the account is monist or pluralist. Hence, when assessing semantic alternatives for evaluative discourse, this addition to the desiderata may be used as part of the criteria for the assessment.

So, if one is interested in comparatively assessing the available monist views for evaluative terms, then one should consider flexibility an important theoretical feature. As I hinted at in the previous chapter, a flexible version of truth relativism possesses this feature to a greater degree than rival views. This is so due to the fact that they have a further tool, context of assessment, which allows for a contextual-like explanation of retraction in some cases and a relativist-like explanation of retraction in other cases. It is unclear whether this is sufficient to account for the differences in terms of evaluative disagreements and retractions across different areas of discourse and, hence, whether it is in a better position than a pluralist approach. This is a topic that I believe is worth of future exploring in future research. Nonetheless, with the present information, at the very least, it is in a better position in properly rendering the desiderata than other rival monist views.

As I have repeatedly pointed out, the empirical data that I have presented undermining UC2 heavily relies on my own intuitions. Given the lack of empirical data on retraction comparing retraction of moral claims and claims on personal taste, new empirical studies focusing on this particular comparison when it comes to the explicit admission of fault in moral and personal taste retractions, when it comes to the pervasiveness of moral and personal taste retractions and when it comes to the time-lagging phenomenon of moral and personal taste assertions are important to settle whether UC2 holds or not.

Studies could be conducted in a similar format to previous empirical studies that I have cited in the previous section (e.g. Dinges & Sakko 2020, Kneer 2021, 2022). A group of participants are given vignette A and a group of participants are given vignette B, where A is a case where a moral retraction by an agent S is present and B a case of personal taste retraction by an agent S. The questions for

testing the comparison in the explicit admission of fault may include: “Is S's admission of fault appropriate?” and “Is S not explicitly admitting fault appropriate in this case?”. For the case of pervasiveness one could compare the frequency of what participants consider to be obligatory retractions and appropriate retractions of moral claims and personal taste claims. To test the time-lagging, the vignettes need to include a case like those I presented in section 6.4.3 and then ask participants whether the agent is obliged to retract or whether her retraction was appropriate. Exploring this empirical work is a feasible possible avenue for future research that would shed important light on whether the empirical claims I make track retraction practices.

To sum up, this dissertation makes what I believe to be three significant new contributions for the debate on evaluative terms, evaluative disagreements and retraction of evaluative claims. The first significant new contribution concerns how one can find a reason to uphold the assumption that evaluatives are *genuinely* evaluative by stressing the difference between how thin terms are strongly connected to talk motivated by evaluative reasons, even across different social settings, and how thick term are more loosely connected. This difference and, particularly, the way thin terms connect to evaluative content across different social settings can only be explained if the assumption holds true.

Another significant contribution worth pointing out is that, not only there is evidence suggesting UC1 is false (and, hence, at the very least, the claim being unwarranted), but also that scholars must provide further argument if they are to motivate their particular semantic views on evaluatives by looking to faultless disagreement. There is no linguistic data suggesting that the possibility of faultless disagreement when the relevant adjective occurs in the comparative form is a particular feature of evaluatives. Due to multidimensionality non-evaluative gradable adjectives may also occur in the comparative form in faultless disagreements. Hence, claiming that evaluative disagreements share the specific feature of being triggered even if the evaluative adjective occurs in the comparative form is untrue.

The third and final significant contribution that I would like to stress is the undermining of UC2. I have suggested that there is empirical data evidencing that UC2 does not hold and, thus, that one should not assume that the claim is justified. UC2 not holding implies that retraction is not a uniform phenomenon across different areas of evaluative discourse. This, coupled with the undermining of UC1, paints the following compelling picture: there is no reason to assume that one should get a uniform (or monist) semantic account of evaluatives regardless the area of evaluative discourse one is considering; hence, making a pluralist approach a more compelling pursuit.

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