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## **Disagreement, Retraction, and the Importance of Perspective**

Abstract: In the semantic debate about *perspectival expressions* – predicates of taste, aesthetic and moral terms, epistemic modals, etc. – intuitions about armchair scenarios (e.g., disagreement, retraction) have played a crucial role. More recently, various experimental studies have been conducted, both in relation to disagreement (e.g., Cova, 2012; Foushee and Srinivasan, 2017; Solt, 2018) and retraction (e.g., Knobe and Yalcin, 2014; Khoo, 2018; Beddor and Egan, 2018; Dinges and Zakkou, 2020; Kneer 2021; 2022; Almagro, Bordonaba Plou and Villanueva, 2023; Marques, 2024), with the aim of establishing a more solid foundation for semantic theorizing. Both these types of data have been used to argue for or against certain views (e.g., contextualism, relativism). In this paper, I discern a common thread in the use of these data and argue for two claims: i) which perspective is adopted by those judging the armchair scenarios put forward and by the participants in experimental studies crucially matters for the viability of the intended results; ii) failure to properly attend to this puts recent experimental work at risk. Finally, I consider the case of cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction and assess their importance for the semantic debate about perspectival expressions, as well as for the claim that perspective matters in putting forward the data on which decisions about the right semantic view are made.

Keywords: perspectival expressions, contextualism, relativism, intuition, experimental studies

It is not a secret that, when trying to support certain theses or views, philosophers rely heavily on intuitions. In the philosophy of language, these intuitions are presented in or extracted from various scenarios in which the target expressions are used; the felicity of those uses is then taken to support or create problems for one view or another. Thus, while intuitions are fallible and their status not ideally clear, they do hold significant power over the fate of a view, and while a view departing from said intuitions is sometimes considered to be philosophically desirable, not aligning with them is more often taken as a bad omen for the view in question.

In the literature about perspectival expressions, intuitions have played a crucial role – for example, in disagreement<sup>1</sup> or retraction scenarios. Usually, authors present various armchair scenarios that are taken to give rise to certain intuitions, accounting (or not

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<sup>1</sup> Bordonaba-Plou (2021) has recently argued for their “centrality” based on a meta-analysis of 40 papers addressing disagreements about taste.

accounting) for which is then considered to support or sink a certain view. More recently, however, experimental studies that aim to overcome the idiosyncrasy of particular authors' intuitions by testing at a larger scale the intuitions of "the folk" have been conducted. These have also been employed to argue in favor or against one view or another. For example, intuitions of "faultless disagreement", both in armchair scenarios and in experimental studies, have been taken by many relativists to pose a problem for contextualism, while some contextualists have retorted to intuitive cases of retraction by putting forward armchair scenarios and experimental studies showing that the phenomenon doesn't support relativism.

In this paper, I won't be concerned with the nature of intuitions, nor will I provide arguments for any of the views on the market. What I rather set out to do is offer some reflections on the importance of the perspectives of those judging armchair scenarios or of the participants in the experimental studies, with the aim of pointing out a certain methodological limitation of some recent studies that could put their findings at risk. To show this, I will survey both the data about disagreement and about retraction, showing that they exhibit a common thread. In this connection, the main ideas I want to put forward in this paper are the following: i) which perspective is adopted by judges of armchair scenarios or by participants in experimental studies crucially matters for their intended outcomes; ii) recent experimental work about perspectival expressions has not given due attention to this issue and is thus at risk of invalidating the results arrived at. While the first claim is trivial, the second is not. The take home message of the paper should be that in proposing armchair scenarios and in designing experimental studies, the perspective of those judging the former or of the participants in the latter are crucial for the viability of the results and should be taken into consideration in a more systematic way. In a slogan: perspective matters!

The plan of the paper is as follows. I will start (section 1) with a quick introduction of the target expressions and of the two semantic views that I will be referring to. In section 2, I focus on disagreement data and show that perspective has played, both in armchair scenarios and in experimental studies, a crucial role. I then move, in section 3, to retraction data, which will again be investigated both as presented in armchair scenarios and in experimental studies. My aim will be to show that, while in the case of disagreement some confusions regarding the dialectical impact of the data can and have been clarified, in the case of retraction this is not (yet) so. In section 4, I turn to the interesting case of cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction and assess their significance for the semantic debate about perspectival expressions. In section 5, I summarize and conclude.

## 1. Perspectival expressions: characterization and two main views in the debate

The main characters in this paper are *perspectival expressions* – natural language terms for the interpretation of which the provision of a perspective is needed. As common examples of such expressions, philosophers mention predicates of personal taste (“tasty”, “fun”, “disgusting”, “boring”, etc.), aesthetic adjectives (“beautiful”, “ugly”, “balanced”, “sublime”, etc.), moral terms (“good”, “bad”, “ought to”, etc.), epistemic modals (“might”, “must”, etc. – taken in their epistemic, not metaphysical, sense), other epistemic vocabulary (“knows”, “is justified”, etc.), gradable adjectives (“rich”, “tall”, etc.). I’m taking here “perspective” as an umbrella term, signifying different things for different expressions: standards of taste for predicates of personal taste, aesthetic, moral, and epistemic standards for aesthetic, moral, and epistemic terms, respectively, bodies of information for epistemic modals, comparison classes for gradable adjectives, etc. In whatever way one might characterize perspectives, the point remains that something like that is necessary for the semantic interpretation of the expressions in question.

Perspectival expressions, like many other natural language expressions, have been observed to be *context-sensitive* – in the sense that utterances of the same sentence in different contexts intuitively have different truth values. For example, when a sentence like

Raw avocado is tasty.

is uttered in a context in which the speaker likes raw avocado, it is intuitively true, whereas when uttered in a context in which the speaker doesn’t like it, it is intuitively false. A natural thought is that appeal to perspectives can account for this type of context-sensitivity; in other words, the context-sensitivity in question is tightly connected to the perspectivity of the target expressions at stake. In fact, most views in the semantic debate about perspectival expression can be said to provide different accounts of their context-sensitivity.

What are the main views in this debate? As in any area of research, there are many options. In this paper, I will focus on two views: *contextualism* and *relativism*. According to the former, the contents of utterances containing perspectival expressions are perspective-specific – that is, a perspective is present in their content; additionally, perspectives are determined by features of the context of utterance (for representative views, see Dreier, 1990; DeRose, 1992; Stojanovic, 2007; Glanzberg, 2007; Cappelen and Hawthorne, 2009; Schaffer, 2011; etc.). According to the latter, the contents of utterances containing perspectival expressions are perspective-neutral – that is, perspectives are part not of the contents, but of

the circumstances of evaluation (Kaplan's (1989) term) provided by the relevant context. Here, two contexts have been distinguished: that of *utterance*, which settles the perspective parameter in moderate versions of the relativism (see, among others, Kölbel, 2004b; 2009; Kompa, 2005; Recanati, 2007; Brogaard, 2008; etc.), and that of *assessment*, which provides the value for the perspective parameter in radical versions of the view (MacFarlane, 2005; 2014; Egan, Hawthorne and Weatherson, 2005; Lasersohn, 2005; 2017; etc.).

As expected, a long and complex debate has ensued between proponents of these views. The main arguments in the debate can be grouped into two categories: those based on intuitive/interpretative phenomena such as disagreement, eavesdropping, retraction, etc. and those based on syntactic phenomena like licensing, binding, control, sluicing, anaphora, embeddings under speech/attitude verbs, etc. While the former have been used mostly by relativists against contextualists, the latter have been part of the arsenal used by contextualists against relativism. It is worth mentioning that the status of each of the arguments mentioned is under contention, while the debate rages on. As the title of paper suggests, I will focus here on only two of these arguments: disagreement and retraction.

The last piece of the puzzle that is needed by way of introducing perspectival expressions and the considerations to follow is the observation that they can be used in several ways. Of utmost importance here is Lasersohn's (2005; 2017) distinction between various uses of these expressions, depending on the perspectives adopted. Thus, according to Lasersohn, perspectival expressions can have *egocentric* (autocentric) uses, when one judges something to be the case from one own's point of view (as when one is "speaking one's mind", as the colloquial saying goes), *exocentric* uses, when one judges something to be the case from someone else's point of view (as in the expression "walking on someone else's shoes") or even *acentric* uses, when one judges something to be the case from a neutral point of view (or from a "bird's eye view"). To give a gist of the difference between these uses: one can use a predicate of taste like "tasty" to express their own preferences, to express what others like (say, children or pets), or to report an exchange in which the reporter is not personally involved in.

## **2. The importance of perspective in disagreement data**

Early on in the debate about perspectival terms, one phenomenon that has been considered by relativists to create problems for the contextualist has been "faultless disagreement" (Wright, 1990; Kölbel, 2004a; etc.). One way to characterize this phenomenon is the following:

A faultless disagreement is a situation where there is a thinker A, a thinker B, and a proposition (a content of judgment)  $p$  s. t.

(a) A believes (judges) that  $p$  and B believes (judges) that not- $p$ ;

(b) neither A nor B has made a mistake (is at fault). (Kölbel, 2004a: 53-54)

Another way to claim that faultless disagreement is problematic for contextualism was to draw attention to exchanges like

RAW AVOCADO

Anne: Raw avocado is tasty.

Ben: No, it's not! Raw avocado is disgusting.,

which have been thought to sometimes elicit both an intuition that the interlocutors are disagreeing and that they are not at fault (see, among many others, Lasersohn, 2005; 2017). Although it is tempting to think that the situations described by Kölbel's definition are precisely the ones in which the intuitions mentioned are generated, the two might not overlap. Kölbel himself doesn't take the definition to underscore any notion of faultless disagreement the folk have, and which presumably drive the intuitions mentioned. Kölbel doesn't rely on such intuitions to make the case for relativism; in fact, in a recent paper, he writes that

(...) no reference to disagreement is needed to generate the motivation for [relativism]. It can be motivated by the simple observation that [A] seems to believe something and [B] seems to reject what [A] believes. There seems to be a  $p$  such that [A] believes that  $p$  and [B] believes that not- $p$ . Nevertheless, none of them is committing any mistake: their beliefs are correct. [Relativism] can accept that things are as they seem. (Kölbel, 2022: 486)

While it is true that not all relativists rely on intuitions of disagreement and faultlessness to motivate their view (MacFarlane (2014) is also known to refrain from doing so), many do. For example, Lasersohn, another main proponent of the view in relation to predicates of taste and other perspectival expressions, has made it clear that the phenomenon is one involving intuitions people have when faced with exchanges like RAW AVOCADO. Thus, he speaks of "intuitions of contradiction or direct disagreement" (Lasersohn, 2005: 682) and of various views he criticizes as being unable to account for "one of the original

intuitions that opened the whole inquiry, namely, the intuition that if [Anne] says something is [tasty], and [Bob] says it's not [tasty], they're contradicting each other – expressing direct and overt disagreement with one another” (Lasersohn, 2005: 658). Importantly, Lasersohn takes such exchanges to amount to faultless disagreements, which he characterizes as ones in which

[w]e (...) regard [the interlocutors] as disagreeing with one another. Yet neither one of them seems to be making an error of fact. We may regard each of them as entitled to his or her own opinion – as fully justified in adopting and asserting that opinion – even though this places them in direct contradiction to one another. (Lasersohn, 2017: 7)

To my mind, this characterization – tailored to assertion and not belief – is very close to Kölbel's above. Yet, Lasersohn does not shy away from talking about intuitions of disagreement and faultlessness or from taking the aim of the theory to be that of capturing such intuitions. The truth is that it has become nowadays customary in the debate – perhaps contrary to Kölbel's intention – to take the phenomenon to be explained as stemming precisely from intuitions of disagreement and faultlessness. That such intuitions exist is also what the experimental studies I will deal with below establish – regardless of whether some relativist or another has taken these intuitions to play a dialectical role in the debate or not. In any case, I will follow this trend and take the problem posed by faultless disagreement to be related (perhaps essentially) to the intuitions people have about the two aspects of the exchanges at stake.

One important observation in relation to both characterizations of the phenomenon is that they assume that disagreement is *doxastic* (i.e., involves beliefs/judgments or assertions and propositions/contents of judgments) and conceives the mistake/fault in question as *alethic* (i.e., failing to believe/judge something as true or as committing an error of fact). Needless to say, this notion of disagreement is not the only possible one, and neither is the notion of mistake/fault proposed. However, to make better sense of the points I want to make in what follows, for most of the paper I will assume these ways of understanding disagreement and mistake/fault. (I will come back to this definition in relation to cross-linguistic disagreement in section 4.)

We can now finally move to the challenge faultless disagreement poses. It has been contended by some actors in the debate that the phenomenon spells trouble for contextualists

because they cannot account for the disagreement part (understood in conformity with Kölbel's or Lasersohn's definition). To see this, consider the way a contextualist view would render the relevant utterances of the exchange between Anne and Ben<sup>2</sup> (bolded material signifies proposition expressed):

RAW AVOCADO (C)

Anne: **Raw avocado is tasty-for-Anne.**

Ben: **Raw avocado is not tasty-for-Ben.**

According to contextualism, "tasty" contributes different predicates in different contexts of utterance, due to a different perspective being relevant for each utterance, and thus the propositions expressed are different. In this case, the propositions expressed are not contradictory. Thus, under the understanding of disagreement canvassed above, the intuition of disagreement is not accounted for, even if the one of faultlessness is.

Since the challenge has been raised, a variety of contextualist answers have been provided (see Khoo, 2017; Zeman, 2017 for comprehensive reviews). As I already made clear, it is not my aim here to ascertain whether these answers decisively address the challenge from faultless disagreement. What I rather want to point out is that, even in such simple exchanges, which perspective interlocutors are taken to adopt (i.e., in which way the exchanges are interpreted by those that are supposed to have the relevant intuitions) matters for the presumed dialectical effect of the examples. In the case at hand, for the objection to get going, those whose intuitions are meant to be elicited have to presuppose that both interlocutors are using "tasty" *egocentrically* – that is, by each from their own point of view. One can argue that the initial case made by the relativists appealing to intuitions was imprecise in this respect. This is supported by the fact that one immediate response to the challenge on the contextualist side was to say that the initial examples (similar to RAW AVOCADO) were too skeletal to give raise to the intuitions relativists took them to give raise to; Schaffer, for example, claims that "the case for relativism relies on a misrepresentative sample of underdeveloped cases" (Schaffer, 2011: 211), and other contextualists have expressed similar ideas (e.g., Glanzberg, 2007; Stojanovic, 2007; Cappelen and Hawthorne, 2009). Additionally, various contextualists have appealed to different types of uses of perspectival expressions to show that the challenge (understood as having to secure *some*

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<sup>2</sup> I am assuming for the moment that the relevant perspective is that of the speaker. This will be questioned below.

*kind* of disagreement) can be met. For example, in exchanges in which Anne is using “tasty” egocentrically and Ben exocentrically, from Anne’s point of view, or exchanges in which both Anne and Ben are using “tasty” exocentrically, from a third party’s point of view<sup>3</sup>, it is easy to show that contextualism yields disagreement (under the assumed understanding) – as the following renderings show:

RAW AVOCADO (egocentric/exocentric)

Anne: **Raw avocado is tasty-for-Anne.**

Ben: **Raw avocado is not tasty-for-Anne.**

RAW AVOCADO (exocentric/exocentric)

Anne: **Raw avocado is tasty-for-John.**

Ben: **Raw Avocado is not tasty-for-John.**

Of course, that such moves on the contextualist part have very little dialectical force is quite clear (for making this point, see, among others, Zeman (2016), more recently followed by Karczewska (2021) and Berškýtė (2021)). But it is fair to say that, in raising the challenge from faultless disagreement, the relativist has *assumed* that the interlocutors in the exchanges presented use the relevant expressions egocentrically. It was then a good reply to point out that, by using the relevant expressions in different ways, disagreement can be secured, forcing the relativist to clarify the issue by making the assumption of the egocentric use explicit. With this out of the way, the challenge can safely be raised. From here, the debate has split between contextualists denying that there is such a phenomenon as “faultless disagreement” in the relevant exchanges and contextualists that acknowledge it to exist and go on to offer different accounts (taking disagreement to be conative, pragmatic, etc.). Importantly, the point of the contextualist reply considered is the same with the first point I’m arguing for in this paper: when proposing examples meant to elicit certain intuitions that are then taken to support or create troubles for a certain view or another, perspective matters.

The same assumption that a certain use is employed by the interlocutors in the exchanges meant to generate intuitions can also be seen in various experimental studies

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<sup>3</sup> Providing more context would make interpreting the interlocutors in the exchange as employing the uses in question easier. For example, in the first interpretation of the exchange, the context could be that Ben is trying to avoid Anne getting hurt, as illustrated by a possible continuation of the dialogue with “Remember when you had it last time and got sick?”. In the second interpretation of the exchange, the context could be that both Anne and Ben are trying to see what foods their son John likes, and they are closely observing his behaviour; an illustrative continuation by Ben might be “He clearly made a disgusted face.”



conducted with the aim of testing whether people take certain exchanges (like RAW AVOCADO) to be faultless disagreements. While rather scarce, such studies have unequivocally shown that people do take the interlocutors in the relevant exchanges to be disagreeing faultlessly. While this is a significant result, the way in which the interlocutors have been interpreted by the participants has not been strictly controlled, but mostly assumed. To exemplify, consider the often-cited study by Cova and Pain (2012), where they test participants' responses, with the aim of assigning them a "normativism score" (tracking whether participants think that aesthetic or taste judgments are absolute and subject-invariant; the lower the score the more subjective the predicates involved are). This is how the authors describe their method:

[The] method consists in a short vignette describing a disagreement between two individuals making two incompatible and contradictory judgments bearing on the relevant predicate. Subjects are asked whether one of the individuals is correct and the other incorrect, or if they are both correct, or both wrong, or if it makes no sense to speak in terms of being correct and being incorrect in this situation. The answer enables us to see whether the subject is normativist or not. Consider for example the following vignette:

Agathe and Ulrich are on holidays in the country. While having a walk in the fields, they hear a nightingale singing. Agathe says: "What beautiful singing!"  
But Ulrich answers: "No. It's definitely not beautiful."

After reading the vignette, subjects are asked: According to you:

1. One of them is right and the other is not.
2. Both are right.
3. Both are wrong.
4. Neither is right or wrong. It makes no sense to speak in terms of correctness in this situation. Everyone is entitled to his own opinion. (Cova and Pain, 2012: 245).

The results show that participants get low normativism scores when judging scenarios in which aesthetic terms and predicates of taste are involved. However, in the description above it is simply *assumed* that the interlocutors (Agathe and Ulrich) use the aesthetic and taste

predicates at stake egocentrically rather than in other ways, and that they are interpreted by the participants as doing so.

More recent studies follow suit. Thus, Foushee and Srinivasan (2017) have tested both kids' and adults' judgments about made-up objects (e.g., "pimwits") in relation to gradable adjectives, including aesthetic predicates, using exchanges like

Zoe: That's a spotted/tall/pretty pimwit.

Cookie Monster: No, that's not a spotted/tall/pretty pimwit. (Foushee and Srinivasan, 2017: 380),

in relation to which participants "answered whether each speaker was 'wrong' or 'could be right,' and explained why" (Foushee and Srinivasan, 2017: 381). The results indicate that participants indeed judge that the interlocutors (Zoe and Cookie Monster) are disagreeing faultlessly, but, as before, which perspective the participants adopt is not fully controlled – although, obviously, the experimenters took the interlocutors to use the relevant expressions egocentrically. Finally, in the study by Solt (2018), she has tested whether participants find disagreement faultless with aesthetic and taste predicates in the comparative form, using exchanges like

A: The vase on the table is more beautiful than the one on the bookshelf.

B: No, the vase on the bookshelf is more beautiful. (Solt, 2018: 63),

while "their task was to classify each [exchange] using one of two response options: 'only one can be right; the other one must be wrong' and 'it's a matter of opinion'" (Solt, 2018: 64). As with the two other studies mentioned, the second option was preferred by the participants, but the assumed interpretation is that the interlocutors (A and B) use the relevant predicate of taste (in the comparative) egocentrically.

Of course, that a certain perspective is assumed need not be problematic, in the sense of skewing the results. This could either happen because there is not much choice in the scenario given, or because there is good justification for the interlocutors (and hence for the participants) to adopt the perspective that is assumed. For example, in one of Foushee and Srinivasan's (2017) experiments, the participants are supposed to make their respective judgments based on the interlocutors' previous experiences (made available to the participants), which makes the egocentric use natural. More generally, the reason why the

assumption in question in most of the studies showcased is not problematic is that the experimenters intended to test whether the expressions in question are *subjective*, or pertain to matters of opinion rather than to matters of fact – the mark of which is taken to be the very possibility of disagreeing faultlessly. It is then not surprising that disagreement involving the interlocutors adopting egocentric perspectives was assumed. What’s more, the point is also not that for the cases in which no such justification seems to be readily available, the situation is irremediable; there might in fact be easy ways to fix the issue. As before, what I want to stress is that this is an important issue which cannot be left to chance and should be controlled. I turn now to the data about retraction, where – I claim – assuming a certain perspective proves to be somewhat more problematic.

### **3. The importance of perspective in retraction data**

Alongside faultless disagreement, retraction has played a significant role in the debate between contextualism and relativism. What is retraction? It is the act of “taking back” a previous speech act – assertion, question, command etc. – on the basis of it not being appropriate in a new context, by means of certain locutions (“retraction markers”). In the case of assertions, most of the time to be inappropriate in the relevant sense is for their content to be false.

Retraction is present with ordinary expressions, but also with perspectival ones. Pretty much any factual claim can be retracted, once it is shown to be false.<sup>4</sup> Here’s an example:

EARTH

Eli, at 5: The Earth is flat.

Eli, after going to school: I was wrong, the Earth is not flat.

While this example is trivial, the history of science is replete with more important ones. Regarding perspectival expressions, most of them have been considered to be amenable to retraction. Here are just two examples, with predicates of taste and epistemic modals, which will be important also later:

SPINACH

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<sup>4</sup> I’m simplifying here things by assuming that the falsity of a claim is the only reason for retraction. Of course, one can retract for a variety of reasons – a claim was offensive, the process of coming to believe erroneous, etc. Furthermore, not only false claims but also true ones can be retracted (for example, a true claim that wasn’t justified in a proper way). This raises interesting issues about retraction, but I will bypass them here.

Anne, in her childhood: Spinach is tasty.

Ben, now: Hey, remember when you said that spinach is tasty?

Anne, now: I was wrong. Spinach is not tasty.

BOSTON

Sally: Joe might be in Boston.

George: No, he can't be in Boston. I just saw him an hour ago in Berkeley.

Sally: Okay, then, scratch that. (MacFarlane, 2011: 148).

Here, "I was wrong" and "scratch that" are what I called above retraction markers.

Let us briefly see what the problem posed by retraction is. Here are three claims about retraction that might aid understanding: there is a change in the retractor's situation vis-à-vis the initial assertion (e.g., a change in perspective, gathering more information) that makes it currently inappropriate; the retractors' utterances of the linguistic markers of retraction are felicitous; retractors deny the same content as that asserted in their initial assertion (retraction is sometimes cashed out as "disagreeing with one's previous self"). Given this, it is easy to see why retraction has been considered problematic for contextualism. The following is a rendering of the relevant parts of the exchange above (again, bolded material signifies propositions expressed):

SPINACH (C)

Anne, in her childhood: **Spinach is tasty-for-A<sub>c</sub>.**

Anne, now: **A<sub>c</sub> was wrong. Spinach is not tasty-for-A<sub>a</sub>.**

There are two issues here. First, uttering the disagreement marker "I was wrong" is infelicitous: why was A<sub>c</sub> wrong? Her utterance was true in the original context of utterance and still is true in the current context (that in which the retraction takes place). Second, Anne denies a different proposition than that asserted in her initial assertion, thus losing the idea of disagreeing with her previous self.

In contrast, accounting for retraction is not problem for radical relativism.<sup>5</sup> According to the view's rendering of the relevant parts of the exchange above,

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<sup>5</sup> I won't be concerned here with the issue whether retraction can be accounted for by moderate versions of relativism. For a positive answer, see Dinges (2022).

SPINACH (R)

Anne, in her childhood: **Spinach is tasty.**

Anne, now: **A<sub>c</sub> was wrong. Spinach is not tasty.,**

it is the case both that “I was wrong” is felicitous (A<sub>c</sub> was wrong because her utterance is not true anymore in the current context, which is her context of assessment and the one relevant in evaluating her previous assertion) and that Anne denies the same content as that asserted in her initial assertion.

Some authors in the debate have claimed that retraction is not only a phenomenon that simply happens with perspectival expressions and that needs an explanation, but that it is *mandatory*. Famously, MacFarlane takes the following rule to underlie our practice and claims that we should abide by it:

**Retraction Rule (RR):** An agent 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  $c_2$ . (MacFarlane, 2014: 108)

The idea that retraction is mandatory has not received a warm welcome in the literature. There are two main types of objections with which (RR) has been met: *armchair considerations* consisting in various scenarios aiming at showing either that retraction is not mandatory (von Fintel and Gillies, 2008; Raffman, 2016; Marques 2018) or that it is not felicitous in cases in which the relativist predicts it should be (Dowell, 2011; Marques, 2018); and *empirical studies*, attempting to show that the connection between retraction and truth is not as tight as envisaged by relativists (Knobe and Yalcin 2014) or simply that it is not as robust a phenomenon as the relativist has imagined it (Kneer, 2021; 2022; Marques, 2024). In what follows, in order to save some space, I will select one of each of these strategies and comment on their methodological status to illustrate the general point of the paper.

First, pertaining to armchair considerations aiming at questioning the claim that retraction is mandatory, consider this often-cited case from von Fintel and Gillies (2008: 81) with epistemic modals:

KEYS

[Alex is helping Billy search for his keys.]

Alex: The keys might be in the drawer.

Billy: (Looks in the drawer, agitated.) They're not. Why did you say that?

Alex: Look, I didn't say they were in the drawer. I said they might be there – and they might have been. Sheesh.

The point of the example is that people sometimes rightfully resist retracting. In a similar vein, Marques (2018: 3346) offers the following example involving predicates of taste:

#### POCOYO

I used to find Pocoyo funny, and I do not anymore. Still, I was not wrong when I was 3 years old and found it funny. It was the funniest thing back then!

The point of the example is that such a take on the issue is neither irrational nor insincere. Assuming that one agrees that the relevant utterances are felicitous in the two examples, they show that retraction is not mandatory and thus constitute a direct attack on **(RR)**.

As with disagreement, my aim here is not to chime in on this debate, but to point out the role of perspective in the dialectic between the two positions. As just mentioned, the point of the examples above is to show that there are contexts in which one need not to retract. But arguably the reason these examples support the intuition that one need not retract has to do with perspectives: one way to interpret the examples is by taking them to push the intuition that the relevant perspective to be adopted by the interlocutors is the one in the context of utterance (Alex's before Billy looked in the drawer; Marques' when she was 3 years old), and not that in the context of assessment. This amounts to claiming that which perspective the interlocutors are taken to embrace by those attending to the scenarios matters for the intended results, thus supporting the general point I'm making. (There is the further question of whether radical relativism can account for these cases. I believe it can, by adopting a *flexible* version of the view<sup>6</sup>; flexible versions of relativism have been previously proposed or at least discussed (see Zeman, 2010; 2024; MacFarlane, 2011; 2014; Khoo, 2015; Beddor and Egan,

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<sup>6</sup> A flexible version of relativism implies that the assessor is not forced to adopt the relevant perspective of the context of assessment, but can adopt the one of the context of utterance. This helps with both KEYS and POCOYO because they are cases in which the assessor should adopt the perspective of the context of utterance, not that of the context of assessment, and thus retraction won't be mandated – as the intuitions in such cases dictate. This leads to the question of when the perspective adopted should be that of the context of utterance and when that of the context of assessment. I respond to this question in a principled manner in Zeman (2024) by relying on the notion of *the importance of the situation of the asserter in a context of assessment* (in a nutshell: adopt the relevant perspective of the context of utterance when the situation of the asserter is important in the current context of assessment).

2018; Dinges and Zakkou, 2020; etc.) But, as already made clear, showing this is not my aim in the paper).

Moving on to experimental studies, I will focus on two that aim to show that retraction is not a robust phenomenon, and hence that the relativist’s reliance on it is not mandated. Recently, Kneer (2021), focusing on predicates of personal taste in English, has tested scenarios similar to SPINACH, without the retraction but with the speaker making their change of mind explicit (“I don’t like it anymore.”). Participants were asked to mark their level of agreement/disagreement (“To what extent do you agree or disagree with [x]’s claim?”) on a 7-point Likert scale with two utterances by the challenger (x): “So what you said back [then] was false.” and “So you are required to take back what you said [back then].” The findings are summarized in the following chart:

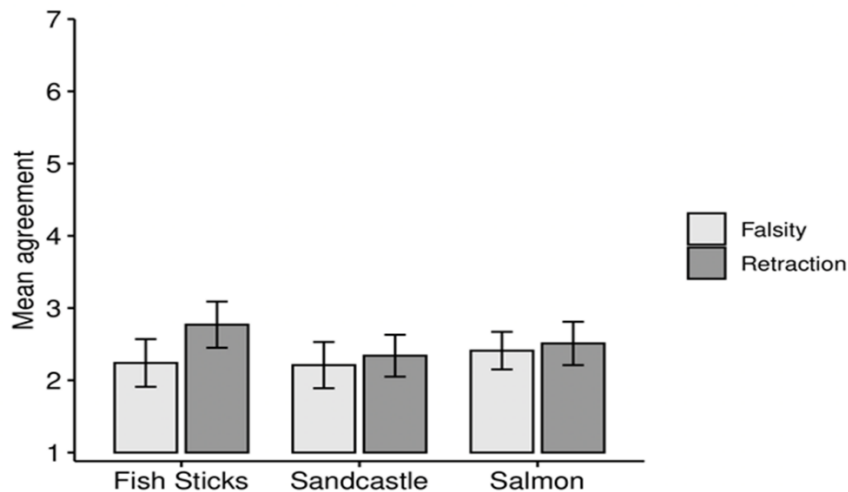


Figure 1: Mean agreement with the statement that an original taste claim was false at the context of utterance and that it must be retracted given preference reversals across different scenarios. Error bars denote standard error of the mean. (Kneer 2022: 5).

With a similar aim in mind, but this time focusing on epistemic modals in Spanish, Marques (2024) has tested similar scenarios to BOSTON. The vignettes she distributed were as follows:

Sara y Jorge están hablando sobre si José estará en Barcelona. Sara considera cuidadosamente toda la información que tiene a su disposición y concluye que no puede saberlo con seguridad. Sara dice:

José puede estar en Barcelona.

Justo después, Jorge recibe un mensaje de José por correo electrónico. El mensaje indica que José está en Valencia. Jorge dice:

No, José no está en Barcelona. Él está en Valencia. (Marques 2024: 59)

[Sarah and George are talking about whether John is in Barcelona. Sarah carefully considers all the information she has available and concludes that she cannot know for sure. She says:

John might be in Barcelona.

Immediately after, George receives an email message from John. The message indicates that John is in Valencia. George says:

No, John is not in Barcelona. He is in Valencia.] (*My translation.*)

As in Kneer’s study, participants were asked to mark their level of agreement/disagreement on a 7-point Likert scale with three sentences (in 2 conditions: modal and non-modal): “Lo que Sara ha dicho es falso.” (“What Sarah said is false.”), “Sara tiene la obligación de retirar lo que ha dicho.” (“Sarah is required to retract what she said.”), “Es apropiado que Sara retire lo que ha dicho.” (“It is appropriate for Sarah to retract what she said.”), with the following results:

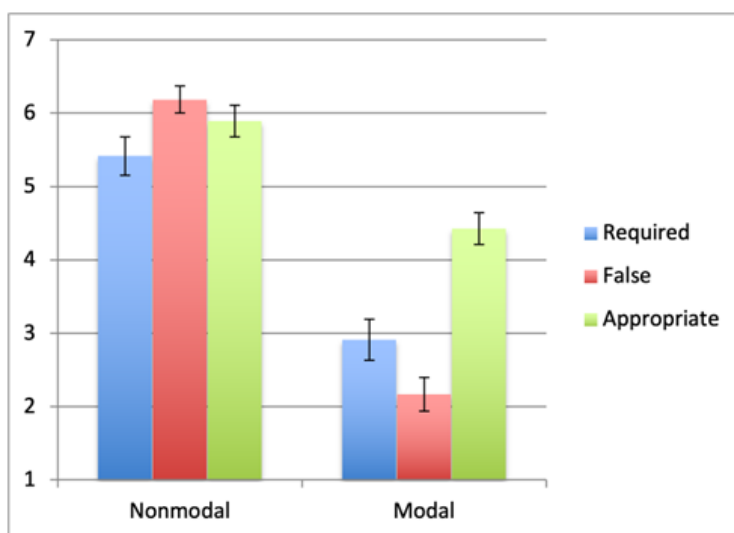


Figure [2]: Mean responses by condition for Experiment 2 with Spanish speakers. Error bars show standard error of the mean. (Marques 2024: 49).

Consistent with Kneer’s results, Marques’ show that retraction with epistemic modals is not robust when the question is about retraction being mandatory (and replicates the results in



Knobe and Yalcin (2014) when the question is about retraction being appropriate).<sup>7</sup> As for the significance of these results, Kneer is unequivocal: “The findings presented in this paper are quite clear: In three experiments modelled on a scenario which truth relativists present as data in favour of their semantics, empirical data proper suggests otherwise. The predictions of MacFarlane style relativism regarding truth assessment and retraction stand refuted both in terms of absolute results, as well as vis à vis the relativist benchmark levels. The predictions of contextualism, on the other hand, are confirmed in both respects.” (Kneer 2021: 6469). Marques (2024) makes similar remarks.

What can the relativist do when facing these results? There are (at least) two strategies available to the relativist who wants to keep some version of **(RR)**: weaken the normative force of the rule (from taking retraction to be required to being appropriate, or permissible) and restrict the application range of the rule to a set of well-circumscribed cases (see Zeman, 2024 for exploring both these options). I will not pursue any of these answers here; once again, my aim in this paper is not to defend relativism. Rather, as with the case of empirical studies concerned with disagreement mentioned in the previous section, I want to focus on a methodological issue: namely, that in Kneer’s and Marques’ studies perspective hasn’t been appropriately taken into consideration.

To see this, consider first the question of what the aim of the studies mentioned is. It is reasonable to say that they aim at getting judgments from the participants about the retraction being mandatory in various scenarios. But, given that we are dealing with perspectival expressions and with retraction, at least two perspectives are relevant to the participants: that of the context of utterance and that of the context of assessment (of the interlocutors in the vignettes). Thus, in essence, the studies ask participants to adopt one of these (or identify with, or assume, or...) in giving their judgments. Now, which of these contexts/perspectives participants adopt is crucial for the validity of the results vis-à-vis retraction. For example, if participants adopt the perspective of the context of utterance, then it makes little sense to retract. In order for the studies to show that retraction is not robust, they have to show that the perspective adopted by the participants is that of the context of assessment. It is my contention that the recent experimental studies just surveyed have not ruled out that the perspective adopted by participants in the studies is not that of the context of utterance. But as long as this is not strictly controlled, the results are not entirely full proof.

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<sup>7</sup> In a different experiment involving epistemic modals in English, using the same type of vignettes as those presented above, Marques has obtained results similar to Kneer’s involving predicates of taste.

I hasten to add that the unwarranted assumption that participants in experimental studies adopt one perspective or another (or that they interpret the interlocutors in the vignettes as adopting a particular perspective or another) is present in both contextualist-friendly *and* relativist-friendly studies. To exemplify, in a recent paper, Almagro, Bordonaba and Villanueva (2023) present experimental results that seem to be friendlier to relativism (by restricting and thus salvaging (**RR**)) than Kneer's and Marques'. Their main claim is that retraction is mandatory in formal contexts, rather than in the less formal ones that have been presupposed in the majority of examples found in the literature. I don't entirely agree with their conclusions; however, as before, my aim is to stress that the perspective adopted by the participants in the studies matters. While their results don't seem to be fraught by the assumption that the perspective adopted by the participants is that of the context of assessment – since the result they get is that retraction (in formal contexts) is a robust phenomenon, which does make sense if *that* perspective is adopted – it is nevertheless the case that this is rather assumed than properly controlled.

I should also add that many of the authors mentioned are aware – at least in the background – of the problem the adoption of perspectives poses. This is of course to be expected, since the issue is a practical one pertaining to the way of constructing successful experiments in philosophy. Indeed, some aspects of the experimental set-up these authors use can be taken to be sensitive to this issue. However, I am not convinced that they have all managed to solve the issue in a way that doesn't (still) raise questions about the viability of the results. In the remainder of this section, I briefly survey and comment on a few attempts to assure that the perspective adopted by the participants in the studies is that of the context of assessment.

Thus, in his study, Kneer (2021) inserts the phrase “I don't like it anymore.” in the dialogue between the interlocutors in the vignettes, with the aim of conveying that a change in the interlocutor's tastes has taken place. But it seems to me that this isn't enough to rule out participants adopting the perspective of the context of utterance: while understanding that the interlocutor's tastes have changed, this doesn't *directly* lead to the participants adopting the perspective in the context of assessment. Similarly, Almagro, Bordonaba and Villanueva (2023), convinced by a general methodological worry raised by Dinges and Zakkou (2020: 7), presumably intend to fix the issue by asking participants “whether someone might ask others to retract, or whether participants think that they should retract, rather than being asked whether they agree with whatever somebody else says” (Almagro, Bordonada and Villanueva 2023: 9). Again, requiring participants to judge whether they themselves should retract in the

scenarios given doesn't settle the issue of which perspective the participants adopt, since they might take *themselves* to be adopting any of the two perspectives available. Finally, in a reply to the important study by Knobe and Yalcin (2014), the first questioning the relativist's reliance on retraction via an experimental approach, Beddor and Egan (2018) have run their own experiments and have attempted to contain the problem by specifying the context so that to make it clear which issue (the "question under discussion", in their terminology) is pursued by the interlocutors. While this is a step in the right direction, it might still not be a general enough solution: first, their experiments involve only epistemic modals, and it is not entirely clear how to apply this solution to other types of expressions; second, they themselves admit that explaining the adoption of different perspectives through the notion of "question under discussion" is limited<sup>8</sup> and, hence, that this cannot amount to a full answer.

I myself don't have a general answer to how this practical issue should be solved; as with disagreement, it might be that by finessing some of the attempts briefly described above the problem could be contained, or that some other solution might lie at the horizon. The conclusion I want to draw about these recent experimental studies on retraction is that, while the issue of assuring that the right perspective is adopted by the participants is tricky, a solution is nevertheless needed, on pain of endangering the validity of the results. Perspective, indeed, matters.

#### **4. Cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction and their significance for the debate**

In this final section I want to address the issue of cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction, and their significance for the semantic debate focused on so far. More precisely, what I set out to do is to assess whether such phenomena pose different challenges than their intra-linguistic counterparts and whether the same moves are available for the views in the debate in this case as well. Finally, I will investigate whether *perspective* plays any role within them – as I argued it did in cases of intra-linguistic disagreement and retraction.

But, first, what are cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction? A cross-linguistic disagreement is simply a disagreement had by people who speak different languages about a certain issue. As a ready example, negotiations between representatives of two countries need not take place in the same language, and it is easy to imagine a disagreement that ensues in such a context. Similarly, cross-linguistic retraction is a retraction that is done in a different

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<sup>8</sup> See their admission that "it would be implausibly strong to claim that the QUD Constraint is the only principle governing the choice of a context of assessment" (2018: 11)). For a different criticism of their position vis-à-vis flexibility, see Zeman (2024).

language than that of the initial assertion. A multinational company, for example, might retract in one language a statement made in a different language to avoid possible repercussions.

It is perhaps difficult, but surely not impossible, to imagine cross-linguistic disagreements and retractions with perspectival expressions – for example, with “tasty” and its counterparts in various languages. However, the significance of such data for the debate between contextualism and relativism about these expressions crucially depends on two factors: first, on whether the relevant intuitions are present (the double intuition that the interlocutors disagree faultlessly and the intuition that retraction is felicitous); second, on whether the expressions at stake can be inter-translated accurately and without loss. What an accurate translation amounts to is a notoriously contentious issue. Here I will assume that an accurate translation of a term, at minimum, preserves its semantic content and that two terms, when accurately translated and without loss, express the same concept. The first issue above is an empirical one: whether the phenomenon is robust can be established by experimental work. The second touches on questions such as whether a term like “tasty” corresponds to a concept of tastiness that is universally shared or whether there are many such concepts instead (perhaps one for each language), what is the relation between these many concepts, what is the relevance of these concepts for the philosophical issue of what taste (or tastiness), etc. A positive answer to the first question amounts to defending a position about predicates of taste that comes close to what Stich and Mizumoto (2018: ix-x) have called *the universality thesis* for “know” and knowledge attributions. For my discussion below, however, such a strong thesis need not be assumed. What I will assume (but just for the sake of discussion) is a weaker thesis – call it *the inter-translatability thesis* – according to which “tasty” and other predicates of taste (or other perspectival expressions, such as epistemic modals) can be translated accurately and without loss from at least one language into another. In the case of “tasty”, we can stipulate that the cross-linguistic meaning is something along the lines of “pleasurable when tasted by  $x$ ”, where  $x$  is an experiencer.

Whether the inter-translatability thesis is true is also an empirical issue. My aim here is not to establish the thesis or its negation, but to discuss all the possible options and ramifications of accepting it for the semantic debate about perspectival expressions. Starting with disagreement, if we assume that the (double) intuition that the interlocutors disagree faultlessly is in place and that the two terms at stake are inter-translatable, then the cross-linguistic case doesn’t pose any special problems. Given the second assumption, there is no source of semantic variation that comes from any of the two inter-translatable predicates

*themselves*. What remains then as the source of this variation, on the contextualist view, is the perspective adopted by each interlocutor. As in the intra-linguistic case, the perspective-specific propositions expressed by the two utterances of sentences from different languages differ in the perspectives that are part of them and are thus not contradictory. So, the challenge for contextualism is the same as that in the intra-linguistic case: to account for the intuition of disagreement. Since they cannot do that, under the understanding of disagreement canvassed in section 2 and assumed in the rest of the paper, the same moves are available to the contextualist: relegate disagreement at the pragmatic level, adopt a conative notion of disagreement, etc. On the other hand, for relativism the perspective adopted by each interlocutor is *not* a source of semantic variation, and the perspective-neutral propositions expressed by the two utterances of sentences from different languages don't differ in perspectives and are contradictory, thus avoiding the problem. As for the issue of the importance of perspective, the point remains here, too: since the challenge from disagreement requires that each of the interlocutors speaks egocentrically (as pointed out in section 2), one has to pay attention to the perspective adopted by the interlocutors in the scenarios presented, and to the one adopted by those judging these scenarios or by those participating in experimental studies.

Moving to retraction, if we again assume that the intuition that retracting is felicitous and adopt the requirement that the same proposition is retracted as the one initially asserted, as well as that the two terms at stake are inter-translatable, cross-linguistic retraction doesn't pose any special problems either. As before, given the second assumption, there is no source of semantic variation that comes from any of the two inter-translatable predicates *themselves*. What remains then as the source of this variation, on the contextualist view, is the perspective adopted by each interlocutor. As in the intra-linguistic case, the perspective-specific propositions expressed by the two utterances of sentences from different languages differ only in the perspectives that are part of them. Thus, the challenge for contextualism is the same as that in the intra-linguistic case: to account for the intuition that retraction is felicitous and that the same content is retracted. On the other hand, relativism easily accounts for cross-linguistic retraction because the perspective adopted by each interlocutor is not a source of semantic variation, and thus the perspective-neutral proposition retracted is the same and retraction felicitous. Finally, in relation to the issue of the importance of perspective, the point remains valid: since the challenge from retraction requires that the retractor adopts the perspective of the context of assessment (and not that of the context of utterance – as pointed out in section 3), one has to pay attention to the perspective adopted by the retractors in the

scenarios presented, and to the one adopted by those judging these scenarios or by those participating in experimental studies.

What happens, though, if the two terms from the two different languages are not inter-translatable? How does this affect the dialectic between the two views considered vis-à-vis disagreement and retraction? It is fair to say that in such a case the burden lies on the intuition of (faultless) disagreement: if the intuition is present and robust, it has to be explained; if it isn't, then there is no challenge to reply to. Let's take the first option first. As generally with intuitions, this is an empirical matter; thus, some pressure to claim that people speaking different languages are (faultlessly) disagreeing about a certain issue comes from empirical studies – for example, from the one by Mizumoto (2018). In that paper, Mizumoto has run several experiments testing the response to various scenarios involving knowledge ascriptions of both English and Japanese speakers; in some cases, the responses to questions of the form “Does S know that p?” are very different, and the hypothesis is that this has to do with the existence in Japanese of two terms what would correspond to the English “know”: “wakatte-iru” and “shitte-iru”, used by Japanese speakers almost interchangeably in ordinary talk, but which seem to make a big difference in the scenarios considered. If this is true, there is at least one sense in which English speakers using “know” and Japanese speakers using one of the two Japanese terms can be said to disagree about knowledge ascriptions.

I have a couple of remarks about this study. First, although the experiments are no doubt valuable for the semantics of knowledge ascriptions and might have a significant impact on epistemological questions, it is not clear whether the same situation would replicate with other perspectival expressions – for example, predicates of taste. After all, the existence of the two terms in Japanese corresponding to the English “know” is a rather special situation, and – experimental studies to that effect missing – it is not straightforward that similar situations can be easily found with predicates of taste (or other perspectival expressions) across languages. Second, it should be noted that the structure of Mizumoto's experiments is different from that of those in the studies by Cova and Pain (2012), Foushee and Srinivasan (2017) and Solt (2018) presented in section 2: while the latter *directly* test whether participants take the interlocutors in the vignettes to faultlessly disagree (with the robust result that they indeed do), in the former the conclusion that participants disagree about knowledge attributions is *deduced* based on the answers they give. This might leave room for speculation about the nature of the disagreement at stake: although it might seem that the proposition expressed by an English speaker and the one expressed by a Japanese speaker in the relevant cases are contradictory, that might not be so. After all, many

exchanges can pass as disagreements when in fact they are not. To be fair to Mizumoto, in his studies there is no actual exchange between the speakers of the two languages, and so the disagreement described corresponds to one *in state* rather than *in activity* (to use Cappelen and Hawthorne's (2009) distinction). But even so, the same issues vis-à-vis its significance for the debate about the semantics of perspectival expressions arise: whether the intuition is robust, whether the same concepts are entertained by the speakers of the two languages, etc. For the crucial question that needs to be answered, even if we take the disagreement showcased by Mizumoto to be in state, is what exactly is it that the interlocutors disagree about (and what exactly is the retracter supposed to retract, in the case of retraction). This is also the crucial question if the disagreement considered was in activity (that is, based on actual exchanges between speakers of different languages, of the sort alluded to at the beginning of this section).

But let us set aside these qualms for the moment and see what such cases would actually mean for the debate focused on. If the intuition of (faultless) disagreement in cross-linguistic exchanges is robust, even if the relevant terms from the two languages are not inter-translatable, it is clear that the notion of disagreement assumed so far has to be abandoned. For, according to it, disagreement is a matter of expressing contradictory propositions (in the case of retraction, of retracting the same proposition) and if one takes the relevant terms to have different meanings (or to express different concepts, to use an alternative manner of speaking), then that cannot be assured. Rather, this would suggest that the disagreement involved in cross-linguistic exchanges is of a different nature. There are plenty of options to choose from in the literature: as already mentioned, one could conceive of disagreement with predicates of taste (and other perspectival expressions) as being conative instead of cognitive (e.g., Huvenes, 2012); as being pragmatic rather than semantic (e.g., Lopez de Sa, 2008; Silk, 2016; Zakkou, 2019); or – perhaps the best option here – as a metalinguistic one (e.g., Sundell, 2011; Plunkett and Sundell, 2013), about which concept (of knowledge, of taste, etc.) is or should be used.<sup>9</sup>

One might argue that the mere possibility of the case expanded on above amounts to an argument against relativism, with its focus on propositions and doxastic disagreement. But this shouldn't follow. In principle, the relativist is happy to allow different kinds of disagreement (in fact, MacFarlane (2014) already adopts *disagreement pluralism* – even

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<sup>9</sup> The same reasoning, with the same kind of options, is available if we take disagreement to be in state, as in Mizumoto's studies. The latter (metalinguistic, or metaconceptual) option seems to me to fit well with Mizumoto's *conceptual pluralist* view about knowledge terms: "[o]ur observations here suggest that we should expect many further different concepts of knowledge to be found in the world" (Mizumoto, 2018: 118).

though his notion is domain-specific, with types of disagreement corresponding to types of discourses), including the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph. The additional claim is that cross-linguistic disagreement is of a different nature than intra-linguistic disagreement. This would result in a loss of unity, by offering different treatments to what looks like similar phenomena, but this is perhaps a fair price to pay. There is also another issue to consider, which is that the cross-linguistic case focused on can also be used as an argument against certain versions of contextualism. First, let's note that, if one assumes that the two predicates are not inter-translatable, as we were assuming so far, then the predicates themselves become a source of semantic variation, as when two interlocutors speaking the same language would use an ambiguous or polysemous word. For the contextualist, this would then be another source of semantic variation, in addition to the perspective adopted by each interlocutor, while for the relativist it would be the only one (assuming the other words in the respective sentences are inter-translatable).<sup>10</sup> One (early) argument against contextualism (see, e.g., Kölbel, 2004b; Lasersohn, 2005) has relied precisely on the difference between the target expressions (e.g., predicates of taste) and indexicals (considered the hallmark of semantic variation) in disagreement scenarios: while the intuition of disagreement is present in exchanges like RAW AVOCADO, taking the interlocutors to disagree in exchanges like

DOCTOR

Alice: I'm a doctor.

Bob: No, I'm a doctor.

doesn't make sense. The argument is thus one against taking "tasty" to vary semantically across contexts. But it is obvious that this argument is effective only against certain *versions* of contextualism – namely, those that take the relevant expressions to be akin to indexicals or those that pin down the context-sensitivity to the word itself and not to a further syntactic element (e.g., a variable for perspectives). This is why the most popular versions of contextualism postulate precisely such a further syntactic element (see, for example, Stojanovic, 2007; Glanzberg, 2007; Schaffer, 2011; etc.) and why semantic variation is circumscribed to the values the variable for perspectives takes in different contexts. This also neatly explains both the challenge from disagreement and the way contextualists have

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<sup>10</sup> It is an interesting question whether this case could be used as an argument for an all-encompassing relativist view, according to which languages themselves would be an element in the context of assessment alongside the ones postulated by MacFarlane. For a recent defence of such a view, see Mizumoto (2023).



initially tried to respond to it (by focusing on exocentric uses of the predicates in question – see section 2). But, if the contextualist adopts this version, then cross-linguistic disagreement with terms that are not inter-translatable is ruled out, and we are back to the case of disagreement with inter-translatable terms – which, as we saw above, poses no special problems in relation to disagreement and retraction.

One could object to the assumption of inter-translatability I made, on grounds that it is too strong.<sup>11</sup> In other words, it is unreasonable to think of translation as *without rest*, so that the entire meaning of a word from one language gets preserved in translating it into another language, or that two words from different languages would express exactly the same concept. This is a fair complaint, but I'm not entirely sure what it brings new to the discussion. For assume that there is a core meaning of "tasty" that remains constant across languages, and which makes speakers of different languages talk about tastiness, and not something else, alongside additional meaning elements pertaining to the words for "tasty" in different languages. If two words express this core meaning in the contexts in which they are uttered (or if that is preserved in translation), then this is fully analogous to the case in which the terms are inter-translatable (in the strong sense I assumed), and so the challenge disagreement poses in the cross- and intra-linguistic cases is the same. If, on the other hand, the words express the respective additional (different) meanings in the contexts in which they are uttered, then one seems to be pushed towards the same conclusion as the one I reached in the paragraph above: namely, that the cross-linguistic case is incompatible with understanding disagreement as doxastic along the lines of Kölbel's definition, and that other options should be sought. So, no new conclusions have been arrived at, thus relaxing the constraints on translation doesn't seem to make a difference to the general outcome of the discussion.<sup>12</sup>

Before closing, I would like to explore whether there is a third possibility besides the two ones discussed, one that again highlights the importance of perspective in the case of cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction. Although this is merely a speculation on my part (experimental studies would be most welcome), I think that too much of a difference in perspective might have an odd effect in cases in which the two expressions in question are inter-translatable. The situation I'm imagining is such that, while there is no variation in the relevant predicate itself across the two languages, the perspectives of those speaking the two

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<sup>11</sup> I thank Mizumoto Masaharu for bringing up and for discussion of this point.

<sup>12</sup> This also seems to hold at the conceptual level: presumably, one can claim that there is a "minimal" concept of tastiness laying at the basis of all the different concepts expressed by terms from different languages.

languages – the interlocutors or those judging the scenarios or vignettes – are radically different. In such a case it won't be surprising that adopting the perspective of the other interlocutor is more difficult and that, as a consequence, tolerance of the interlocutors' perspective would be harder to come by. For example, if someone who judges an armchair scenario or participates in an experimental study finds either the perspective of the interlocutor they are supposed to adopt or that of the interlocutor they are supposed to disagree with too different, they might not be ready to make the "perspective shift" required. In concrete terms, this would mean that the judges of armchair scenarios or participants in experimental studies would take disagreement to be faultless in less cases, due to their inability to accept one of the two relevant perspectives as a possible one to have. As for retraction, they would demand it more often if the less familiar perspective is that in the context of utterance or less often if the less familiar perspective is that in the context of assessment. If the case described is indeed possible, then it would constitute a third option alongside the two described above.<sup>13</sup> This would be, again, a case in which perspectives are important, although the role they play in such cases (a *restrictive* role, as it were) is different from both the one played in the previous cases of cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction and the one played in the intra-linguistic counterparts of these phenomena.

## 5. Summary and conclusions

In this paper, I've tried to show that perspective matters when dealing with data about disagreement and retraction, both in armchair scenarios put forward in order to elicit certain intuitions and in experimental studies testing the intuitions of the folk. I have started (in section 1) with introducing perspectival expressions and the two broad views in the debate (contextualism and relativism). I have then considered the two phenomena that played an important role in this debate: disagreement (section 2) and retraction (section 3), used mostly by relativists against contextualism. My main aim in these sections was not to weigh in in the debate but to point out that, for each argument to work as intended, which perspective interlocutors in the exchanges proposed as data, and thus which perspective those judging the armchair scenarios or those participating in the experimental studies adopt, crucially matters. While in the case of disagreement failure to attend to this doesn't have serious effects, in the case of recent experimental studies of retraction the risk is greater: it might directly undermine the results. However, this should not be taken as a refutation of either method –

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<sup>13</sup> This could, of course, happen in intra-linguistic disagreement and retraction as well.

putting forward armchair scenarios or conducting experimental studies – but as a cautionary tale about not paying enough attention to a certain element in the construction of experiments. Finally, I have considered cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction, with the aim of ascertaining its role in the dialectic between the two semantic views considered. I have distinguished between several subcases of these phenomena and argued that they can play a distinctive role from their intra-linguistic counterparts depending on the availability of a translation of the relevant terms and on the presence of the relevant intuitions. Consideration of cross-linguistic disagreement and retraction further supports the idea that, when it comes to such data, perspective matters.

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