

Counterstance Contingency: A Pragmatic Theory of Subjective Meaning

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1 Introduction

It is perfectly common for human beings to share their subjective perspectives with others: reports about what we find *tasty* or *fun* are widespread and frequently motivate others to express agreeing or disagreeing opinions. Individual perspectives differ as to who counts as *rich* or *poor* and as to what counts as *expensive* or *inexpensive*. And there is a prominent tradition in philosophy and humanistic thought more generally holding that normative judgments — judgments about how to live and what to do — do not describe matters of fact but rather express subjective moral sentiments. To say that stealing is *wrong*, for example, is not to ascribe some objective property to the act of stealing, as we do when we say that stealing is illegal according to the laws of the United States. Instead, on this view, to say that stealing is wrong is to express a subjective attitude of disapproval toward the act of stealing.

A compelling motivation for the need of a closer investigation into the language of subjectivity is that it presents a challenge to contemporary views of the nature of meaning within linguistics and neighboring fields. The predominant methodological approach to semantics, the *truth-conditional paradigm*, emphasizes the role of language as a medium for representation. Sentences have content, on this view, in virtue of their capacity to describe the world to be a certain way. The meaning of a sentence, accordingly, is to be captured in terms of its truth conditions — how the world would have to be for the sentence to be true — and the meaning of its subsentential parts (nouns, verbs, and the like) in terms of their contribution to those conditions. It is undeniable that the advent of truth-conditional semantics has led to great progress in the analysis of meaning, but key features of subjective language relating to individual perspective and experience have remained resistant to analyses that assign an essentially descriptive character to semantic content.

This paper focuses on three cross-linguistically robust interpretive and distributional characteristics of subjective predicates that have resisted a comprehensive analysis: the extensions of subjective predicates are perspective-dependent in a non-indexical way; subjective predicates introduce experiential evidential requirements; and subjective predicates differ from objective predicates in their distribution under certain types of propositional attitude verbs. The goal of this paper is to argue that these features can be derived in a uniform way, without introducing special kinds of meanings or interpretive operations for subjective predicates, and within a broadly truth conditional approach to semantic content, given a view of subjective language as an essentially pragmatic, context-sensitive phenomenon. Specifically, we propose that subjectivity reflects speakers' recognition of the possibility of COUNTERSTANCES: alternative common grounds that differ only in decisions about how to resolve indeterminacy about linguistic practice, not in non-linguistic facts, and we show how a characterization of subjective predicates as counterstance contingent expressions can derive their interpretive and distributional properties.

2 Characteristics of subjective predicates

Perhaps the best-known characteristic of subjective predicates is that they show a particular kind of non-indexical perspective dependence, which is manifested most clearly in linguistic disagreements such as the one illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. A: This fish is tasty.
 b. B: No, this fish is not tasty.

What is notable about this case is that even in a situation in which A and B have identical evidential bases (both have tasted the same fish, for example), their disagreement is “faultless” in the sense that both are justified in making the assertions they make; neither can be said to be wrong or mistaken. At the same time, the speakers are understood to be in a real disagreement: their utterances are heard to be contradictory, and it is of course impossible (or incoherent) for a single speaker to believe that the proposition expressed by A’s utterance and the one expressed by B’s utterance are both true.

The perspective dependence manifested by subjective predicates is crucially distinguished from that of semantically context-sensitive predicates such as *local* in (2).

- (2) a. A: This fish is local.
b. B: No, this fish is not local.

If A and B both mean the same thing by *local* in these utterances (e.g., local to where A and B jointly live, or local to some region that they have been discussing), then their disagreement is not faultless: one is right and one is wrong. If, on the other hand, A and B mean different things by *local* — A means *local to A’s region* and B means *local to B’s region* — then they are not in disagreement.

A second identifying characteristic of subjective predicates, observed by Ninan (2014), is that they introduce implications of direct experience in assertions and denials. As shown in (3a-b), an assertion or denial that *tasty* or *fun* holds of an object or event is incompatible with a further claim that the speaker has no (relevant) experience with that object or event.

- (3) a. This fish is tasty. #I have never tried it, but I can tell from how it looks.
b. Skiing is not fun. #I have never tried it, and I never will.

The fact that this requirement projects out of negative contexts makes it look like a presupposition, but, as Ninan shows, it does not project out of other presupposition holes: none of the examples in (4) imply that the speaker has tasted the fish.

- (4) a. If the fish is tasty, I will buy it.
b. The fish might be tasty.
c. The fish must be tasty.

This contrasts with true presuppositions, such as the anaphoric presupposition of *too*. The examples in (5), read with focal stress on *fish*, are felicitous only if it is part of the common ground that I bought something other than the fish.

- (5) a. If I buy the fish too, then I won’t have enough money to get home.
b. I might buy the fish too.
c. I must buy the fish too.

Similarly, the experience implication cannot be cancelled. Presuppositions can be cancelled (with some effort) by a combination of negation and focus on the presupposition trigger, as in (6), but applying the same strategy to taste predicates leads to incoherence, as in (7).

- (6) a. I didn’t eat the fish *too* — that’s the only thing I ate!
b. I don’t *regret* that I went skiing, because I didn’t go skiing at all!
(7) a. # The isn’t *tasty* — I’ve never tried it!
b. # Skiing is not *fun* — I’ve never done it!

Ninan proposes that the direct experience implication associated with taste predicates is the result of the interaction of the principle in (8) with general felicity conditions on assertion (and denial), which require a speaker to know (or justifiably believe) what she asserts.

- (8) *Acquaintance Principle*
In an autocentric context c , s_c knows (at t_c in w_c) whether $\llbracket o \text{ is } \textit{tasty} \rrbracket^c = 1$ only if s_c has tasted o prior to t_c in w_c .

However, as Ninan acknowledges, “...the defender of [(8)] needs to come up with a plausible account of the meaning of taste predicates which helps to explain why autocentric taste propositions cannot be known unless the agent has the relevant kind of first-hand experience (and why exocentric knowledge is not subject to this requirement).” One of the goals of this paper is to provide such an account.

Finally, subjective predicates are uniquely embeddable under a class of SUBJECTIVE ATTITUDE VERBS (SAVs; see Sæbø 2009, Stephenson 2007, Bouchard 2012, Kennedy 2013, Fleisher 2013, Umbach 2016; Bylinina forthcoming). In English, the class of SAVs includes *find* and *consider* but not the regular doxastic attitude verb *believe*. The pattern of embedding of subjective predicates is illustrated by the following examples. As shown by (9), predicates of personal taste like *tasty* is embeddable under all three verbs.

- (9) a. Kim finds this beer tasty.
b. Kim considers this beer tasty.
c. Kim believes this beer to be tasty.

In contrast, the vague predicate *transparent* is embeddable only under *consider* and *believe*, despite the fact that what counts as transparent is, to a certain extent, a matter of perspective.

- (10) a. # Kim finds this beer transparent.
b. Kim considers this beer transparent.
c. Kim believes this beer to be transparent.

Finally, a predicate like *Japanese*, when used to speculate about the country of origin of the beer, is unacceptable under both *find* and *consider*.

- (11) a. # Kim finds this beer Japanese.
b. # Kim considers this beer Japanese.
c. Kim believes this beer to be Japanese.

Together, these examples show first that subjective predicates are constrained in their distribution, and second that there are at least two classes of subjective predicates: those that embed under both *find* and *consider*, such as *tasty* predicates of personal taste; and those that embed only under *consider*, such as *transparent*.

A second important feature of SAVs is that they give rise to evidential implications, which can be illustrated by the following story.

- (12) **New food**
Kim presents her two cats with a new brand of cat food. Hoshi, who eats anything, devours the food. Nikko, who is very picky, takes one sniff and walks away. Observing this behavior, Kim says “This new food is not tasty.”¹

I can report on this situation described in New Food using either (25a) or (25b), but an utterance of (25c) sounds very strange.

- (13) a. Kim doesn’t believe the new food is tasty.
b. Kim doesn’t consider the new food tasty.
c. !! Kim doesn’t find the new food tasty.

The reason that (25c) sounds strange is that it, unlike (25a), presupposes that Kim has tasted the food, but the story in (12) makes it clear that she has not. (25a-b) do not. And unlike what we saw with bare assertions and denials, this experience requirement is a proper presupposition: all of (26a-d) require Kim to have tasted the food, and the inference can be cancelled in (15).

¹ In this example, *tasty* is understood “exocentrically,” from the perspective of the cat, so Ninan’s Acquaintance Principle isn’t active in the usual way. (The example still implies that the cat has tasted the food, however.)

- (14) a. Kim doesn't find the food tasty.
 b. If Kim found the food tasty, we'll buy it.
 c. Kim might have found the food tasty.
 d. Kim must have found the food tasty.
- (15) Kim didn't *find* the food tasty — she never tried it!

Summarizing, an account of subjectivity must explain: 1) non-indexical perspective dependence and “faultless disagreement;” 2) the direct experience implications associated with assertions and denials of subjective predicates and their difference from presuppositions; 3) the distribution of subjective predicates under subjective attitude verbs, their different evidential presuppositions, and the difference between these evidential requirements and those associated with bare assertions/denials.

3 Counterstances

Most of the work on subjectivity thus far has focused on the analysis of perspective dependence, and by far the leading analytical framework is the relativist one developed in work by Lasersohn (2005, 2017), MacFarlane (2014) and others. The central thesis of this work is that denotations are fixed not just relative to worlds and times, but also relative to assessors. The propositions expressed by A and B in (1) are contradictory because they cannot both be true relative to a single assessor, but A and B's disagreement is “faultless” because the propositions can both be true as assessed by A and B, respectively. Unlike true context-dependent terms, however, assessment sensitive expressions do not differ in semantic content in different circumstances of evaluation, which explains the difference between (1) and (2).

Relativism thus provides an explanation for non-indexical perspective dependence, but it does not provide an account of the evidential properties of subjective predicates, as Ninan has already pointed out, and it provides no insights at all on the distribution of subjective vs. objective predicates under subjective attitude verbs, as argued by Sæbø (2009), Kennedy (2013), Fleisher (2013) and Kennedy & Willer (2017). In particular, it provides no account of the differences between *find* and *consider* illustrated above in (10), and no account of the experiential implications of SAVs. At a more general level, relativism provides no answer to a much deeper question about subjectivity: which predicates are subjective and which are not?

In an effort to provide a substantive account of subjective language, and to provide a uniform explanation of the three phenomena illustrated above, we propose to analyze subjectivity not in terms of a semantic parameter that is arbitrarily associated with certain kinds of predicates, but instead to analyze it as a fundamentally pragmatic phenomenon that emerges out of language users' sensitivity to, and awareness of, underdetermination of linguistic practice by what they take to be the facts. Our analysis builds on two observations, which we take to be non-controversial. First, fixing the meanings of expressions in a context of utterance involves decisions about how to resolve both semantic and pragmatic underdetermination: thresholds and criteria of application, dimensions of evaluation, conventions of use, and so forth. And second, language users are aware that these decisions are to a large extent arbitrary, and could have been made differently. We refer to alternative resolutions of underdetermined aspects of meaning and use as COUNTERSTANCES, which we model as sets of possible worlds that vary not in matters of fact, but in matters of linguistic practice.

Following traditional Stalnakerian approaches, we assume that the context of utterance determines a CONTEXT SET $s_c \subseteq W$, which is the set of worlds compatible with the common ground, and we draw a pragmatic distinction between aspects of s_c that discourse participants take to be grounded in objective facts vs. those they take to be (to an extent) arbitrary matters of linguistic practice. Both kinds of facts are relevant to truth. Whether (16) is true, for example, depends both on the properties of 「22才の別れ」, which are objective facts of the world, and on decisions about how to use the adjective *good* — how good is good (for a song), what factors make a song good, etc. — which is a matter of linguistic practice.

(16) 「22才の別れ」 is a good song.

To spell this out formally, we begin with the definition of counterstance in (17).

(17) κ_c : a (possibly partial) function from a context set (or other information carrier) to a set of its *counterstances*, where each $s' \in \kappa_c(s)$ agrees with s on its factual information but disagrees on contextually salient decisions about linguistic practice

We then define COUNTERSTANCE CONTINGENCY as in (18) to single out propositions whose true is dependent not on facts of the world but on matters of linguistic practice.

(18) A proposition $p \subseteq W$ is *counterstance contingent* in context c iff $\exists s \in \mathcal{P}(W) \exists s' \in \kappa_c(s) : s \subseteq p \ \& \ s' \not\subseteq p$.

Counterstance contingency is the key property that distinguishes subjective attitude verbs from other attitude verbs in our analysis, but in order to capture differences within the class of SAVs, such as *find* vs. *consider*, we must further refine our notion of counterstance. This refinement is based on the observation that some kinds of indeterminacy about meaning can be fixed by explicit agreement in a natural way, but others cannot be so fixed. For example, the criteria of application for a predicate like *vegetarian* are flexible, as is the threshold of application for a vague predicate like *expensive*, but both can be stipulated in order to allow a conversation to proceed, as in (19).

- (19) For the purposes of this discussion ...
- a. ✓ ... let's count Lee as vegetarian, since the only animals he eats are oysters.
 - b. ✓ ... let's count these oysters as expensive, because they cost \$36 per dozen.

The same is not true for experiential predicates like *fascinating* and *tasty*:

- (20) For the purposes of this discussion ...
- a. ?? ... let's count Lee as fascinating, since he is an expert on oysters.
 - b. ?? let's count these oysters as tasty, because of their texture and brine.

The examples in (20) sound odd, intuitively, because they require us to single out a particular perspective or dimension as “the correct one” for evaluating claims involving *fascinating* and *tasty*, but the result of such a move is highly artificial, and counter to our normal understanding of the meanings of these expressions. We take this to indicate that certain kinds of meaning indeterminacy can be fixed via stipulative discourse moves, while others cannot be, or at least not in a natural way.

We model this distinction by introducing a second contextual function κ_c^* that imposes structure on the original counterstance set generated by κ_c :

(21) κ_c^* : a (possibly partial) function from a set of counterstances to a set of its subsets, such that the members of each subset agree on those resolutions of uncertainty of meaning that support coordination by stipulation.

Intuitively, $\kappa_c(s)$ provides the full set of (contextually salient) resolutions of uncertainty of meaning and use in s , and $\kappa_c^*(\kappa_c(s))$ structures those resolutions into equivalence classes. Within each equivalence class, those resolutions of uncertainty that allow for coordination by stipulation remain constant: it will be uniformly true or false in each partition, for example, whether Lee is vegetarian or whether the oysters are expensive, because each class corresponds to different ways of the criteria for applying *vegetarian* and *expensive*. Resolutions of uncertainty of meaning that allow for coordination by stipulation thus vary across equivalence classes, but not within them. In contrast, resolutions of uncertainty of meaning that do not allow for coordination by stipulation, such as the perspectives and dimensions that are relevant for the application of *fascinating* and *tasty*, vary both across equivalence classes *and* within them.

With these considerations in hand, we define the concept of RADICAL COUNTERSTANCE CONTINGENCY as in (22).

- (22) A proposition p is *radically counterstance contingent* in context c iff $\exists s \in \mathcal{P}(W): s \subseteq p \ \& \ \forall \pi \in \kappa^*_c(\kappa_c(s)) \ \exists s' \in \pi: s' \not\subseteq p$

In short: a radically counterstance contingent proposition is counterstance contingent no matter how we fix parameters that can be coordinated by stipulation. This provides the basis for our account of *find* vs. *consider*, and our more general account of subjectivity, to which we now turn.

4 Subjectivity is sensitivity to counterstance

We begin with an account of the distribution of subjective predicates in SAVs. Our core proposal is that subjective attitude verbs are like many other attitude verbs in imposing a contingency presupposition on their prejacent: it should at issue whether the prejacent holds in worlds relevant to the kind of attitude that the predicate expresses (cf. Condoravdi 2002, von Stechow & Gillies 2010, Giannakidou & Mari 2015, 2016). SAVs are special in that the contingency condition concerns worlds that differ not in matters of fact, but matters of linguistic practice: subjective attitude verbs presuppose that their prejacent is counterstance contingent.

Specifically, we propose that SAVs are just like *believe* in terms of at-issue meaning — they entail that the attitude holder believes that the prejacent is true — but differ in presupposing that the truth of the prejacent is not preserved across counterstances. *Find* and *consider* further differ from each other in that the latter merely presupposes counterstance contingency, while the former presupposes *radical* counterstance contingency. The details are spelled out in the denotations in (23).

- (23) a. $[[\alpha \text{ believes } \phi]]^{c,w} = 1$ iff $\text{Dox}(w(\alpha), w) \subseteq [[\phi]]^c$
 b. $[[\alpha \text{ considers } \phi]]^{c,w}$ is defined only if $[[\phi]]^c$ is counterstance contingent in context c .
 If defined, then $[[\alpha \text{ considers } \phi]]^{c,w} = [[\alpha \text{ believes } \phi]]^{c,w}$
 c. $[[\alpha \text{ finds } \phi]]^{c,w}$ is defined only if $[[\phi]]^c$ is radically counterstance contingent in context c .
 If defined, then $[[\alpha \text{ finds } \phi]]^{c,w} = [[\alpha \text{ believes } \phi]]^{c,w}$

These denotations account for the distribution of subjective predicates under subjective attitude verbs. All of the examples in (24) are acceptable because the embedded proposition is not merely counterstance contingent, but radically counterstance contingent: the criteria for fixing a meaning for *tasty* are variable and indeterminate, and cannot be stipulated.

- (24) a. Kim finds this beer tasty.
 b. Kim considers this beer tasty.
 c. Kim believes this beer to be tasty.

The criteria for fixing a meaning for *transparent*, in contrast, can be stipulated: we may decide for the purpose of one interaction that it is sufficient to be able to see through a liquid for it to count as transparent; in a different interaction, we may require the liquid to be at least as transparent as water. The embedded proposition in (25) is therefore counterstance contingent but not radically so, so embedding under *consider* (and *believe*) is acceptable, but embedding under *find* is not.

- (25) a. # Kim finds this beer transparent.
 b. Kim considers this beer transparent.
 c. Kim believes this beer to be transparent.

Finally, consider the case of nationality terms like *Japanese*. In many contexts, the extension of such a predicate is determined entirely by worldly facts: whether something is Japanese depends on whether its country of origin is Japan or not. In such a context, the truth of the embedded propositions in (26) does not vary across counterstances, and the examples with *find* and *consider* are unacceptable.

- (26) a. # Kim finds this beer Japanese.

- b. # Kim considers this beer Japanese.
- c. Kim believes this beer to be Japanese.

In some contexts, however, it may be a matter of linguistic negotiation whether other factors play a role in determining whether a nationality term applies: would it be sufficient for a beer to be brewed by a Japanese brewery to count as Japanese, even if the beer were brewed in another country? Would the use of non-Japanese ingredients disqualify a beer from counting as Japanese, even if it were brewed in Japan? Would the use of traditional or non-traditional brewing techniques make a difference? And so forth. In a context in which these factors are under negotiation, the truth of the prejacent in the examples in (26) varies not only based on properties of the beer, but also based on decisions about how to use the expression *Japanese*, rendering the embedded proposition counterstance contingent (but not radically so). And indeed, in such a context (26) is acceptable; similarly, a speaker's use of an example like (26b) indicates precisely that she is presuming it to be a matter of linguistic negotiation, and not merely a matter of national origin, whether the beer is Japanese or not. This example illustrates the fundamentally pragmatic aspect of our proposal: subjectivity is not a once-and-for-all semantic property of predicates, but depends crucially on context, and whether it is taken to be a matter of negotiation how the expressions should be used.

We now turn to an account of the experience implications associated with subjective predicates, in both embedded and matrix contexts. First, recall from the New Food example in (12) that (27c) presupposes that Kim has tasted the new cat food but (27a-b) do not.

- (27) Kim: "This new food is not tasty."
- a. Kim doesn't believe the new food is tasty.
 - b. Kim doesn't consider the new food tasty.
 - c. Kim doesn't find the new food tasty.

We claim that this presupposition is a special case of a more general presupposition regarding the evidential basis for belief in a (radically) counterstance contingent proposition. In general, belief ascriptions presuppose that the attitude holder has some evidence to support their belief: they are acquainted with some bit of information that supports their judgment.² Subjective attitude verbs assert belief in propositions whose truth is presupposed to be contingent not on worldly facts, but on facts that influence decisions about linguistic practice. We therefore expect that the evidential presuppositions of SAVs should have to do specifically with facts that are pertinent to assessing the linguistic factors on which the truth of the prejacent turns.

Consider *consider*. As shown by in (28), the evidential basis for *considering* ϕ is stronger than it is for *believing* ϕ : to consider the beer transparent, the attitude holder must have seen it.

- (28) Kim hasn't seen the beer, but based on its smell...
- a. ... she believes it to be transparent.
 - b. # ... she considers it transparent.

We claim that this is an instance of the evidential presupposition on belief. Given the presupposition of counterstance contingency, the truth of the prejacent in (28) hinges on decisions about how much

² This is illustrated nicely by the real-life exchange in (i) between National Public Radio White House correspondent Maura Liasson and the former White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer.

- (i) **Maura Liasson:** "Does [the president] believe that millions voted illegally in this election, and what evidence do you have of widespread voter fraud?"
Sean Spicer: "The president does believe that ... based on studies and evidence people have presented to him."

transparency is necessary to make something transparent. In order to make a judgment about such a case, it is necessary to actually see the object; (28) thus presupposes visual acquaintance with the beer.

In the case of *find*, which presupposes radical counterstance contingency, the truth of the prejacent depends not (only) on the resolution of uncertain aspects of meaning that can be stipulated, such as the threshold for application of the predicate, but also on the resolution of aspects of meaning that cannot be stipulated, such as the experiential qualities that make a glass of beer or a bowl of cat food appealing or not. The evidential presupposition requires the attitude holder to have knowledge of such experiential qualities, which, we claim, can be gained only by direct experience of the relevant sort — in the case of taste claims, by tasting the object in question.

This same line of explanation, we claim, can also be extended to account for the experience implications of predicates of personal taste in unembedded contexts, which we illustrated with the examples in (3), repeated below.

- (3) a. This fish is tasty. #I have never tried it, but I can tell from how it looks.
- b. Skiing is not fun. #I have never tried it, and I never will.

As discussed in section 2, the experience implications of these examples are not true presuppositions, but instead appear to be tied specifically to the speech act of assertion (Ninan 2014). Ninan's Acquaintance Principle stipulates that the speaker can know a proposition involving a predicate of personal taste only if she has direct experience of the relevant sort to evaluate the predicate, and then derives the pattern of experience implications from a general felicity condition on assertion that requires a speaker to know (or justifiably believe) that which she asserts (Austin 1961, Williamson 2000). But, as Ninan himself observed, this account left open the question of why a subjective proposition cannot be known without direct experience.

Our answer to this question invokes the dynamics of assertion of propositions whose content is uncertain. Following Barker (2002), we assume that assertions of propositions with uncertain content update the information state in two ways. On the one hand, they perform a “descriptive update” and eliminate worlds from the context set in which the facts are incompatible with the truth of the proposition. On the other hand, they also update the discourse model so that parameters of meaning whose values are uncertain — such as the delineation parameter involved in fixing the extension of a vague predicate — are refined in such a way as to rule out incompatibility with the truth of the proposition asserted. This does not eliminate uncertainty of meaning, but it reduces it.

Generalizing Barker's notion to our framework, we propose that assertions involving subjective predicates are assertions of radically counterstance-contingent propositions, which perform both a descriptive update and what we will call a “counterstance update.” When a speaker asserts “the fish is tasty,” she does not propose to update the context with the proposition that the fish is tasty *by her assessment*, which is the relativist position; instead, she asserts the radically counterstance contingent proposition that the fish is tasty, and thereby proposes to update the discourse model to eliminate counterstances in which this proposition is false. But since the felicity conditions on assertion require that she know (or justifiably believe) that which she asserts, it follows that in speech acts of assertion, the evidential conditions on belief in radically counterstance contingent propositions should obtain, which, as we argued above, require direct experience of the relevant sort.

Finally, integrating Barker's dynamics into the counterstance framework also provides us with a ready account of the manifestation of non-indexical perspective dependence that we see in “faultless disagreement” interactions. At a fundamental level, the counterstance framework simply *is* a model of non-indexical perspective dependence, cashed out as a generalization of all possible resolutions of uncertainty of meaning. This model is consistent with some resolutions being based in content-determining parameters (the thresholds of vague predicates may fall in this category), but certainly does not require this, and is ultimately agnostic as to the source of uncertainty. If the dynamics of conversation involve update of counterstance in the way suggested above, then part of accepting an assertion involves eliminating worlds that disagree with its descriptive update potential, and part

involves eliminating counterstances that disagree with its counterstance update potential. In the case of the former, there is an authority that determines the correctness of an assertion: the facts of the world. In the case of the latter, however, which is intertwined with the communicative interactions and coordination of language users, there is, in the general case, no authority: no individual speaker can dictate how the uncertain aspects of meaning that give rise to counterstance should be resolved. This absence of authority — or insistence on negotiation — is what gives the sense of “faultlessness” in disagreements involving subjective predicates.

5 Conclusion

We have proposed to model speakers’ awareness of the arbitrariness of decisions about how to resolve uncertainty of meaning in terms of counterstances: sets of worlds which differ from an information carrier only in how such decisions are made. We have used this model to explain several key properties of subjective predicates: their distribution in the complements of subjective attitude verbs, their various experience implications, and their perspective dependence. If our proposal is on the right track, it leads to a reassessment of contemporary views on the nature of subjective language. Subjectivity does not correlate with semantic type or a formal feature of semantic interpretation, such as a designated perspectival argument, parameter, or mode of assessment. Instead, subjectivity is a fundamentally pragmatic phenomenon that emerges from the use of a descriptive but incomplete semantics by agents who are aware of the arbitrariness of the decisions they make to resolve uncertainty about meaning for the purpose of communication.

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