Affecting meaning: Subjectivity and evaluativity in gradable adjectives

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Chapter 2

Gradability, evlauativity, subjectivity

In this chapter we present the core phenomena that will be discussed in the dissertation. In section 2.1 we will give a descriptive introduction to gradable adjectives and a first typology that classifies them, the relative vs. absolute distinction. Predicates of personal taste (PPTs hereafter) like pretty, tasty, beautiful belong, as it seems, to the family of relative gradable adjectives (RGAs hereafter), along with, e.g., long, heavy, skilful. It is the goal of this thesis to investigate how PPTs stand in relation to RGAs, their next-of-kin.

RGAs do not form a uniform class. One of the reasons for this is that, in a specific sense, they are all evaluative, but not all of them in the same way. In section 2.2 we will give a preliminary description of the notion of evaluativity we will develop in the dissertation. We shall see that evaluativity as we think of it relates closely to the way other authors have understood it, but it differs as well in crucial respects.

PPTs have drawn semanticists’ attention mainly because they are, in some sense, subjective. We will discuss three markers of subjectivity in section 2.3. As we shall argue, some of these can also be found in other RGAs. In this chapter we do not make claims about whether there is just one source of subjectivity, or more than one. The challenge for this dissertation is to investigate the sense in which RGAs are subjective, and why PPTs stand out in this respect.

RGAs are heavily context-dependent. However, we do not wish this claim to be read as taking a position in the contextualism vs. minimalism debate in semantics. We do not wish to enter that debate and make claims about whether, for instance, comparison classes are determined by literal meaning, by context, or by a combination of these two. As it will turn out in the coming chapters, we recant from this discussion for fairly principled reasons, for we do not partake in the shared assumption of contextualists and minimalists alike, namely, that semantic content is to be specified truth-conditionally. Our argument, however, will only set off in chapter 3.

1Cf., Cappelen and Lepore [2005], Stanley [2005], among other views in this debate.
2.1 The menagerie of gradable adjectives

Gradable adjectives have been thoroughly discussed in semantics. Adjectives like long, heavy, wet, empty, tasty, painful, beautiful, all belong to this class. It is widely agreed that they do not form a perfectly homogeneous family, and there exist various typologies that classify them. We introduce in subsection 2.1.1 a description of the basic features of gradable adjectives, and in subsection 2.1.2 we briefly the relative vs. absolute typology. In this dissertation, we wish to zoom into RGAs to investigate their evaluativity, as discussed in section 2.2, and subjectivity, presented in section 2.3. For that reason, and as a methodological decision, we will leave absolute gradable adjectives aside. Actually, we do not think absolute gradable adjectives are essentially different from relative ones, but as a means to restrict the scope of the phenomena that we examine, we postpone an analysis of absolute ones. In subsection 2.1.3 we present PPTs understood very broadly, and we discuss how, and to what extent, they belong to the subfamily of RGAs.

2.1.1 Gradable vs. non-gradable adjectives

There are plenty of well-known characterisations of gradable adjectives as class of noun modifiers. It is not such an easy task, however, to give one that does not entail strong and often disputable theoretical commitments. For instance, one can define gradable adjectives as those adjectives which denote a property’s being instantiated to a certain extent, or that they come to denote a property only after one can fix threshold that an object must reach in order to count as having that property. Clear as these descriptions may be, they hinge on theoretical views that we do not wish to endorse at this point. In fact, we will defend in later chapters a theoretical approach that relinquishes the postulation of standard measurements or thresholds as necessary components of the interpretation of gradable adjectives. So here we try to keep the characterisation at a descriptive level, and postpone theoretical considerations to the next chapter and subsequent ones.

What is common to all gradable adjectives? First off, these adjectives have a positive (unmarked) form, and also comparative and superlative forms. In English, comparatives are formed either by the addition of the suffix -er to the positive form or the anteposition of the determiner more (examples of irregular cases are far, further; good, better). We exemplify a few adjectives in comparative form here:

\[\text{longer, heavier, wetter, emptier, tastier, painless, beautiful.}\]
2.1. The menagerie of gradable adjectives

(1) a. full, fuller
   b. tall, taller
   c. expensive, more expensive

In contrast, non-gradable adjectives (NGAs henceforth) like dead vs. alive, prime, nuclear do not admit comparative forms, as illustrated below.

(2) a. (?) nuclear, more nuclear
   b. (?) digital, more digital
   c. (?) dead, more dead

Gradable adjectives can be modified with intensifying adverbs commonly known as degree adverbs like almost, very, really, fairly. These are a few examples from the British National Corpus:

(3) a. The moon was almost full.
   b. The rootstock is a fairly tall plant.
   c. It’s a very expensive undertaking.

Note that not all combinations are equally fine: John is slightly tall and The towel is almost wet are not easily interpreted; this is one of the clues suggesting that the landscape of gradable adjectives is rather complex. Meanwhile, NGAs do not easily co-occur with the intensifying adverbs we listed above.

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good, better; bad, worse in that family. We will argue then in favour of leaving these aside as a methodological choice.

5Here and elsewhere in this dissertation we mention examples and observations made on data coming the British National Corpus (100 million words, 1980s-1993, with good coverage of everyday conversation) [Burnard 2000]. Our queries were run through the online site [http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/]. Where NGAs are found in comparative form in the BNC, these are often cases in which more operates in quantifier phrases on a noun which is modified by the adjective, as in this example: Despite the changes taking place in Europe, it plans to station even more nuclear weapons here in Britain. Note, however, that in the construction be/look more dead than alive, the adjectives seem to work gradably, likewise for other literary resources, as in this other quotation from the BNC: For several years we have been leaning over backwards to avoid the use of the forbidden word, instructing the population at large that it is more dead than the dodo and deleting it from our titles with abandon.

6We write here question marks in order to mark an oddity, without making a claim of ungrammaticality. This is partly related to the mechanisms by which NGAs can function as gradable ones discussed below.

7We prefer to avoid this label in order not to suggest an endorsement of the degree-based view on gradability. The arguments for this come in chapter 3 and the following ones.

8The string “slightly tall” shows no occurrences in the BNC, and only one occurrence is found for “almost wet”. (But in the excerpt the construction is actually almost wet through, meaning roughly “almost completely wet”.)

9As a simple illustration of this claim, we can observe that the strings “almost nuclear” and “really digital” do not occur in the BNC. But one can see that modifications of, e.g., dead with very do occur, mostly as an emphasiser modifying inanimate nouns, as in, e.g., A very dead subject or Malls have become very dead places.
Gradable adjectives can occur not only in attributive position, as in example (4-a), but also in predicative position, as in example (4-b).

(4) a. John is a tall man.
    b. John is tall.

Some NGAs admit the two positions, as digital in This is a digital watch or This watch is digital, some do not, as exemplified below:

(5) a. The former president of the board was here today.
    b. (?) The president is former.

Some NGAs like former or alleged admitting both positions are known as privative. Special about privative adjectives is that like gradable adjectives, they are non-intersective, while NGAs like pregnant, Dutch, married, plastic are intersective. An adjective $A$ is intersective if the following argument form is valid:

$$\begin{align*}
\text{Intersectivity of the positive form} & \\
\text{premise 1} & x \text{ is an } A \ N \\
\text{premise 2} & x \text{ is an } M \\
\text{conclusion} & x \text{ is an } A \ M
\end{align*}$$

But from Alf is a tall jockey and Alf is a man you should not infer Alf is a tall man. Note that for some gradable adjectives the corresponding comparative is intersective, as for instance with tall. From If Alf is a taller jockey than Bert and Alf and Bert are men, you infer Alf is a taller man than Bert. But for some gradable adjectives like skilful the comparative is non-intersective: from If Alf is a more skilful pianist than Bert and Alf and Bert are carpenters, you cannot infer Alf is a more skilful carpenter than Bert.

Privative adjectives differ however from gradable adjectives like tall, expensive, skilful, heavy, in that only the latter are subsective. An adjective $A$ is subsective if the following argument form is valid:

$$\begin{align*}
\text{Subsectivity of the positive form} & \\
\text{premise} & x \text{ is an } A \ N \\
\text{conclusion} & x \text{ is an } N
\end{align*}$$

Last, most gradable adjectives come with a clear antonym, a polar opposite:

(6) a. full vs. empty
    b. tall vs. short
    c. expensive vs. cheap

This allows us to say, for instance, that someone is neither tall nor short, that something is neither tasty nor disgusting, etc. For some pairs of polar opposites,

\[^{10}\text{The term comes from Kamp and Partee }1995, \text{ see further discussion in Partee }2001.\]
there seems to be no gap left, for instance with *open*, *closed*: if a door is not open, then it is closed (and vice-versa). Of course, this idea of antonymy is a rather narrow one. One can consider antonymy to be a broader linguistic phenomenon, one occurring as well among NGAs like *dead*, *alive*, nouns like *day*, *night*, verbs like *to lift*, *to drop*, etc. Together with the features listed above, antonymy should be considered part of the characterisation of gradable adjectives, but not a defining feature by itself.

Note that many gradable adjectives have non-gradable uses, e.g., *short vowel*, *light artillery*, *the baseman is safe*, *an old friend*. These fixed expressions do not admit, in principle, comparatives or adverbial modifications:

\[(7) \quad \begin{array}{l}
a. \quad (?) \text{ a shorter vowel} \\
b. \quad (?) \text{ a baseman who is very safe}
\end{array}\]

NGAs can work as gradable adjectives by at least two mechanisms. First, loose talk can allow an adjective like *hexagonal* to function as being gradable, e.g., when we say that France is more hexagonal than Spain. The second mechanism relates to prototypicality for instance when marked with an intensifier, as in *This is a very English habit* or *My sister is very pregnant*.

Such remarks suggest that actually the distinction between gradable adjectives and NGAs is not absolutely clear-cut. In any case, NGAs do not admit comparison and intensification, as gradable adjectives do. This seems to be supported by the impossibility of suffixation of these adjectives with *-er* to form a comparative in English.

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13 See, e.g., Austin 1962 and discussed in the context of vagueness and imprecision in Lewis 1979. But here we do not need to commit to any particular theory.
14 Although prototype theory has been mainly discussed with respect to nouns and concept formation (see, e.g., Kamp and Partee 1995, Sassoon 2007), it is interesting to think of the case of NGAs because given their intersectivity, they denote a simple property in the extensional sense, and in this respect they are in a sense on a same standing as nouns.
15 But as announced in the introduction to this chapter (and see fn. 1), we are not going to start a discussion on what the literal meaning of an NGA like *hexagonal* is.
16 An interesting case is that of ‘extreme’ adjectives like *exhausted* (extreme of *tired*), *huge* (extreme of *big*), or *delicious* (extreme of *tasty*) which do not co-occur with *very* but where the comparative seems to be unproblematic, as in, e.g., *House A is even more huge than house B*. This raises a question on the status of the grammatical criteria presented so far, given that an adjective may fail to fit in the grammatical patterns but may still have gradable uses. These extreme cases have been considered to be a sort of covert superlatives (see Cruse 1986, p. 216) which would explain the oddity of modifying them with *very*, just as one would be surprised by *very tallest*. But then, the same question may be raised with respect to more typical examples of NGAs, like *pregnant*, for it is possible to find examples from actual use in the BNC, like *She looked more pregnant now than the last time he had seen her*. (But one may argue that *more* here modifies *look pregnant* rather than *pregnant.*
2.1.2 The relative vs. absolute typology

We have already hinted at the fact that the class of gradable adjectives is not fully uniform. Various typologies have been proposed which do not partition the class in exactly the same way. The relative vs. absolute typology has a long story, one mostly rooted in the degree-based accounts of gradability which assign a central explanatory role to scale structure, as we shall see in chapter 3. However, as a linguistic phenomenon it is theory-independent, to the extent that it can also be accounted for in delineation-based models which do not make assumptions concerning degrees or scales, presented later on in chapter 3. Here we wish to introduce this taxonomy without making a commitment to a specific theoretical view on the matter. Our description is not meant to be an exhaustive list of features that set relative and absolute gradable adjectives apart but just a first means to cut down our object of study.

Canonical examples of RGAs are tall, heavy, expensive. Typical absolute gradable adjectives (AGAs hereafter) are flat vs. bumpy; full vs. empty; open vs. closed. They align with RGAs in being gradable, but they are to some extent context-insensitive, which has led some semanticists to discuss the proximity of AGAs to NGAs. RGAs allow explicit qualification to a set of comparable objects with a for-prepositional phrase, as in example (8).

(8) a. Alf is tall for a basketball player.
   b. Alf is tall for a jockey.

AGAs come with strict and loose uses. If you consider an AGA like closed, the addition of an explicit comparison class is infelicitous:

(9) (?) Compared to Door #1, Door #2 is closed.

When a comparison class restricting an AGA is made explicit, as illustrated in example (10-a), an imprecise interpretation of the adjective is forced which becomes explicit when modified by an intensifier as given in example (10-b). In interaction with focal stress, some of them admit no comparative, as given in case (10-c):

(10) a. For a Friday, the dentist’s schedule is full.
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b. For a Friday, the dentist’s schedule is very full.
c. (?) The pavement is FLAT, but the desk is flatter.

Example (11) shows how a positive claim involving RGAs always leaves room for a comparative difference. Somewhat schematically, let $G$ be an RGA. Then if an object $x$ is $G$, then it should be logically possible for there to be an object $y$ that is $G$-er than $x$, and an object $z$ that is less $G$ than $x$.

(11) That film is long, but it could be longer.

For AGAs, this is not always possible, as illustrated in the examples below.

(12) a. (?) If a tank is full then it could be fuller.
b. (?) If a drawer is empty, then it can be emptier.
c. If a window is dirty, then it can be dirtier.
d. (?) If scalpel, then it can be cleaner.

The distribution of intensifying adverbs also gives clues about the distinction being made here. While generally gradable adjectives admit modification with an intensifier like very, this is not possible with certain AGAs:

(13) a. (?) The door is very closed.
b. The door is completely closed.

Meanwhile, RGAs generally do not co-occur with adverbial modifiers such as perfectly, almost, completely:

(14) a. (?) perfectly expensive
b. (?) almost tall
c. (?) completely heavy

Last, RGAs can lead to the Sorites paradox. Here is an example of how it goes:

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22One could imagine saying this of a glass of wine which has been poured without much generosity, but then here full works via the prototype for a full wine glass.
23Here the noun we choose is meant to force a very rigorous interpretation of clean.
24As observed by Rotstein and Winter [2004] and Kennedy and McNally [2005]. These patterns show no occurrences when searched for in the BNC.
25There are further features of the RGA vs. AGA distinction we have not discussed here because our own goal is more limited, for we choose to zoom into RGAs. One of these features is the fact that it is possible to use RGAs to distinguish between two individuals in a two-element comparison class when they appear in a definite description, as when we say looking at two containers Pass me the tall one, even if none of them is remarkably tall. This is not as easy to do with AGAs, since if none of the containers is completely empty, then it is not as easy to use the definite description Pass me the empty one to single out one of them. (As observed by, e.g., Kyburg and Morreau [2000], Kennedy [2007], Syrett et al. [2006], Burnett [2012].) Another feature we do not list in our minimal description are inference patterns concerning the relation between the comparative and the positive form. Normally, it is thought that for RGAs, the positive does not imply the comparative, that is, from Alf is taller than Bea one cannot conclude...
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**Sorites reasoning**

Premise 1: Everybody shorter than 1.60 m, is short.
Premise 2: Everybody who is 2 mm taller than somebody short, is short.

Conclusion: Everybody is short.

All you need to construct a Sorites argument is an adjective $A$, the use of which is guided by the *Tolerance Principle*:\(^{26}\) If there is no significant difference between two objects with respect to $A$, then either $A$ applies to both or to neither.\(^{27}\)

This principle does not extend to AGAs, for there is a specific transition from which we pass from a door’s being closed to a door’s being 1mm open.\(^{28}\)

Our aim is to investigate differences among RGAs concerning their evaluativity and subjectivity, rather than to offer a fully encompassing theory of gradability, so in the sequel of this investigation we leave AGAs aside and focus on RGAs. This is, as indicated earlier, a methodological choice made for the sake of brevity and clarity in our exposition. To some extent we regret this, and we believe that further research extending this one should definitely contemplate AGAs.

Before ending this section, we mention two issues which are orthogonal to the RGA vs. AGA typology, but which will remain in the background of subsequent discussions. The first one concerns different antonymy relations in which gradable adjectives stand, and the second concerns multidimensionality.

Polar opposites can stand in contrary or contradictory relation.\(^{29}\) RGAs normally form contrary pairs:

(15) If John is tall then John is not short.

But *tall vs. short; cheap vs. expensive; heavy vs. light* are not contradictories. If John is not tall, then it does not necessarily follow that he is short.

Meanwhile, some AGAs form contradictory pairs, but some do not:

that either Alf or Bea are tall. This is different for AGAs because from *Glass 1 is emptier than glass 2.* one infers *Glass 2 is not empty*, and from *Table 1 is dirtier than table 2* one infers *Table 1 is dirty*. For similar methodological reasons, we also leave aside here cross-polar anomalies (see \cite{Kennedy1997}) and interadjective comparisons (see \cite{vanRooij2011c}).

\(^{26}\)This analysis owes much to Veltman’s notes on the Sorites paradox, originally appearing in Veltman \cite{Veltman1987} and more recently published in Veltman \cite{Veltman2013}.

\(^{27}\)Cf., Dummett \cite{Dummett1975}.

\(^{28}\)But well, the paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise seems to push precisely this point.

\(^{29}\)These remarks are related to the work of Cruse \cite{Cruse1976} and Burnett \cite{Burnett2012}. Other classifications of antonyms are available, going back to the early work by Sapir \cite{Sapir1944}. Interestingly, Cruse introduces the three subtypes of antonymy: what he calls polar antonyms like *tall vs. short* are typically evaluatively neutral and objectively descriptive; those he calls overlapping antonyms, like *beautiful vs. ugly* have an evaluative polarity (approving or disapproving) as part of their meaning; equipollent antonyms like *nice vs. nasty* denote subjective sensations or emotions, or evaluations based on subjective reactions. We do not investigate these distinctions further only for reasons of time and space, but they are certainly interesting.
2.1. The menagerie of gradable adjectives

(16) The door is closed if and only if it is not open.

However, if a room is not empty, it is not necessarily full. From this, we conclude that contrariness vs. contradictoriness does not crop out the same distinction as RGAs and AGAs. We will keep this difference in the background but we will not thematise over the issue in the sequel.

The second issue we want to mention here concerns multidimensionality. Some gradable adjectives have been called unidimensional because, for some of them like tall vs. short; bald vs. hairy, it is easy to associate their interpretation with values along a unique scalar dimension, e.g., height for tall and quantity of hair for bald. Along this dimension we can order elements we compare, for instance we can easily order students in a class by height if we are interested in finding out who is taller than who. However, many (or most) adjectives are multidimensional, in the sense a plurality of aspects of an object are taken into account to evaluate whether the adjective can be applied. The defining feature here is that one can get different orderings of the objects under comparison as a consequence of there being a plurality of different dimensions involved. So for instance, if we ask Alf and Bea to order objects according to the bigger than comparative, the resulting orderings may differ because for Alf the height of the objects dominates the comparison whereas for Bea it is width, or depth, or the relative standing of all these features what dominates the ordering she produces.

Interestingly, views differ about how to understand this plurality. The first way is best illustrated when thinking of an adjective like clever, where “the adjective is associated with a number of criteria, and these fail to constitute a necessary and sufficient set of conditions for cleverness.” Under such view, the set of possible criteria determining the extension of the adjective is essentially open-ended, so that no finite list of dimensions and specification of relations thereof could suffice to fully capture their meaning. A different view assumes that we only take a limited set of dimensions into account when using these terms. On such grounds, it is thought that one can specify the relative weights of the finite set of dimensions that are involved in specific utterances involving multidimensional adjectives.

Sassoon [2013] provides several tests intended to facilitate the identification of multidimensional adjectives. For instance, the specification of one or more

31 Note that uni- vs. multidimensionality is not a distinction that holds just for gradable adjectives. Take for instance the case of colour adjectives, which can be analysed along the dimensions of brightness, hue, and saturation. See for instance Gärdenfors [2000]. For a degree-based approach to colour terms, see Kennedy and McNally [2010].
32 This may give rise to “intransitivities of a kind familiar in social choice theory”, as noted by Egré and Klinedinst [2011], and as explored further by Grinsell [2012].
33 Klein [1980], p. 7.
34 Cf., Klein [1980], fn. 8.
35 Cf., Sassoon [2013], Van Rooij [2011c].
dimensions via prepositional phrases like *with respect to* is admissible only for multidimensional adjectives, which also allows to quantify over multiple dimensions and to make explicit exceptions, as in the following examples:

(17) a. John is healthy with respect to his blood pressure.
    b. Elena is healthy in every/some/most respect(s).
    c. Ruth is healthy except with respect to her cholesterol.

The uni- vs. multidimensional distinction is orthogonal to the RGA vs. AGA one because, as Sassoon [2013] argues, a multidimensional adjective may align with RGAs or with AGAs, depending on how judgments of membership in all the dimensions together determine membership in the adjective. So for instance *typical, atypical* would more easily align with RGAs, while *identical, different* would more easily align with AGAs.

The uni- vs. multidimensional distinction will remain in the background in the sequel because multidimensionality leads to phenomena which are similar to the evaluativity and the subjectivity phenomena we will present in section 2.3.

Now that we have seen how complex the landscape can get, we zoom in further. We will now focus on PPTs, to see how they fit in the picture we have so far.

2.1.3 PPTs in the menagerie

In recent years, semanticists and philosophers have paid a lot of attention to a kind of gradable adjectives, the so-called PPTs. These are adjectives like *tasty, fun* and related adjectival phrases like *funny, tasteful, taste good* which can express an experience, a sensation, a feeling, or a sentiment. The general idea is that judgements as illustrated in the following example are evaluative, concerning matters of what one should do rather than matters of fact.

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36 Sassoon [2013] distinguishes between different ways in which the different dimensions can be bound, conjunctive binding is the case where an object ought to qualify in all dimensions in order to belong to the extension of the multidimensional adjective. In contrast, disjunctive binding refers to the opposite case, where an object may qualify in just some dimensions in order to belong to the extension of the multidimensional adjective. There are also mixed cases like that of *intelligent* where, according to her, “pragmatics determines whether, e.g., being intelligent in but one dimension (say, mathematics) suffices to count as intelligent, or every contextually relevant dimension counts,” (p. 5).

37 This is the label given by Lasersohn [2005], where he develops a relativist system to account for their semantics. We present his analysis in chapter 3, subsection 3.2.2.

38 A perhaps surprising fact is that *tasty*, the central example in the discussions within semantics and philosophy literature on PPTs, is not a very frequent adjective in actual language use, as indicated by the fact that it does not appear in the BNC frequency lists compiled by Leech et al. [2001] (see list 2.1 at http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/bncfreq/flists.html). Such frequency lists contain all words with a minimum lemma frequency of 160 per million words in either the written or the spoken sections of the BNC.

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(18) a. This cake is tasty.\footnote{PPTs can modify nouns. They can be predicated of individual items, but also to sorts of objects given by mass nouns, bare plurals, etc. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, he focus on predications on individual items.}

b. It was a fun movie.

c. That is painful.

What evaluativity actually amounts to is of course an issue, one that we start discussing in section 2.2. The basic intuition given by most authors is that PPTs are related to an agent’s subjectivity. Again, how one conceives of subjectivity is another complex issue. Fleshing that out is partly the goal of this dissertation, and the discussion begins in in section 2.3 below\footnote{Of course, there is a more specific formulation, for instance, to say that the truth or falsity of these judgements depends not only on a state of affairs but also on whose opinion is being expressed. Or one may also define these as judgements where a standard or threshold for what counts as tasty or fun is subjective. As we shall see below, such formulations presuppose that one endorse truth-conditional semantics, or a semantics for such adjectives which relies on standards. Both ideas will be questioned in subsequent chapters.} and then show that PPTs are gradable (even if it is a bit obvious), and that they can be classified as RGAs in the typology presented in the previous subsection.

To try to flesh out what this idea of experience which seems to be involved in PPTs, let us observe that taste experience, in particular, involves a complex interaction of our senses, where flavour is but one element in what is at stake in taste evaluations. In wine tasting and beyond, taste is seen as a fusion of taste, smell, and texture (tactile sensations), often called mouthfeel.\footnote{Cf., Lehrer 2009, Smith 2007, 2009} That is, gustatory stimulus is only part of the manifold of sensations that are relevant to the experiences involved in tasting, and our regular uses of PPTs like tasty do not apply strictly only to the gustatory aspect. Moreover, an adjective like tasty does not necessarily expresses a hedonic appraisal. “Aesthetic disgust”, an emotive reaction signaling appreciative regard and understanding but which involves a negative valence in the experience, has been argued\footnote{In Korsmeyer 2002, 2011} to be aroused by certain works of art but also by food. Although there is biologically triggered repulsion (e.g., to vomit, to rotting substances, to cruelty),\footnote{While cruelty can be thought to immediately produce disgust, this is not a strict correlation. Think for instance of ortolan, a tiny bird which is drowned in Armagnac, plucked, roasted and served whole, wings and legs tucked in, eyes open. Cf., Korsmeyer 2002.} there are also culturally modulated food practices in which something prima facie repulsive becomes appreciated.\footnote{Like casu marzu (a traditional Sardinian sheep milk cheese containing live insect larvae) or sannakji (Korean live octopus).} This gives an idea of how there is no simple criterion to determine tastiness, for something producing repulsion to lots of people might be a delight to some.
In the existing literature, adjectives like *good* *vs.* *bad* are usually thought to fall under the PPT label, but are left out of consideration, given the fundamental issues they raise in metaethics. In the sequel, we will follow this methodological choice for the sake of simplicity, for it would take a whole dissertation (actually, much more) to do justice to the interesting and intricate debates concerning the meaning of moral terms. We do not wish to claim here, however, that there are principled reason why one should cut off these often called thin concepts\(^{45}\) from the broader family of PPTs. Note, however, that non-ethical uses of terms like *good* *vs.* *bad* abound, where the adjective expresses approval, as in the adjectival phrase *tastes good*. So where relevant, these adjectives will be considered explicitly.

The same reasoning could be repeated here to leave aside paradigmatic aesthetic adjectives like *beautiful*. Until recently, aesthetic terms like *beautiful* and adjectives like Sibley’s aesthetic concepts, e.g., *lifeless, balanced, moving*\(^{46}\) or others having strong descriptive content, like *sour, fruity, complex*, were either put aside for the same reason as for the case of ethical terms\(^{47}\) or were simply assimilated to PPTs. Recent discussions suggest how to keep PPTs and aesthetic adjectives apart\(^{48}\). We will not advocate for a complete assimilation of PPTs and aesthetic adjectives, but we want to suggest that aesthetic adjectives are a close next of kin of PPTs, sufficiently close ones so as not to draw a distinction here.

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\(^{45}\) Cf., Hare [1952]. Williams [1985].

\(^{46}\) Cf., Sibley [1959].

\(^{47}\) As in Lasersohn [2005], p. 645.

\(^{48}\) McNally and Stojanovic [2014] provide an interesting discussion of how aesthetic adjectives appear in the adjectival domain. We think that it is important to study the differences between *tasty* and *beautiful* from a linguistic point of view, but we do not adopt their demarcation for reasons given later on in the dissertation, although we will not discuss their view explicitly in the sequel. For that reason, we briefly gather them here, with pointers to the relevant chapters. One of the reasons given by McNally and Stojanovic to keep PPTs and aesthetic adjectives apart is, they claim, that the semantics of PPTs entails an experiencer (following Bylinina [2014]) while the semantics of aesthetic adjectives does not (or need not). Along with others in the field, they conceptualise the experiencer argument as “a sentient individual who perceives the property in question.” (sec. 2.4, p. 6). But to claim that an individual perceives the property of, e.g., tastiness when she says *This cake is tasty (to me)* is to take a stance regarding the semantics of PPTs that we will reject in chapter\(^{5}\). One should not think of *tasty* as describing a property that a sentient individual perceives. Another reason given by McNally and Stojanovic is that, if one takes the felicitation of a to/for prepositional phrase as a test for there being an experiencer argument, then one can see that (some) aesthetic adjectives do not admit it. McNally and Stojanovic point at the scarcity of occurrences of such cases in the BNC, and indicate that the infelicitation of a sentence like *Miró’s work looks beautiful to me* “suggests that we do not, as a rule, attribute beauty or goodness based on perceptual experience.” (sec. 2.4, p. 9). In chapter\(^{4}\) we will actually claim the opposite, along with Kant. In spite of the infelicitation of the sentence above, one can ask: can something look beautiful or good to a non-sentient being? Our answer, in chapters\(^{4}\) and\(^{5}\) will be that this is not possible. Maybe the linguistic notion of experiencer argument is not entailed, but a more general condition of sentience underlies these adjectives.
2.1. The menagerie of gradable adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>freq. per million words</th>
<th>% per adjective type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>long</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>89.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>longer</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>longest</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harder</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardest</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>funny</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>98.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>funnier</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>funniest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nice</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nicer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nicest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Sample frequencies for the positive, comparative, and superlative forms of PPTs (funny, nice) and of ordinary gradable adjectives (long, hard) per million words in the spoken section of the BNC, according to the BNC frequency lists by Leech et al. [2001].

Perhaps other adjectives that can be considered to be PPTs emotion adjectives like sad vs. happy, maybe also words which relate to existential feelings or modes like estranged, detached, and also adjectives related to moods like sarcastic, supportive, and to feelings like dreadful, hopeful. Although we will not pay special attention to these adjectives in the sequel, we do not see strong reasons to leave them aside here, so they will remain in the repertory of cases we refer to by the name of PPTs.

Now, are all these PPTs gradable adjectives? It is not hard to convince the reader that one can say, for instance, Bordeaux wines are tastier than Basque wines, This vase is more beautiful than that jar, or Your solution is more elegant than mine. As a concrete indicator of the markers of gradability in PPTs, we list here some general data concerning actual use. A source where one can look at this are BNC frequency lists. In table 2.1 we present frequencies of PPTs as compared with other gradable adjectives. One can see that although the comparative and the superlative occur in spoken use of PPTs, they are less frequent than the comparative and superlative forms of seemingly less special gradable adjectives.

As for adverbial modification, it is easy to find examples with very, really, fairly as in these examples from the BNC:

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49Cf., Stojanovic [2012].
50Cf., Ratcliffe [2009].
51See in fn. 38 a technical description of these lists.
Chapter 2. Gradability, evaluativity, subjectivity

(19) a. It’s a play that’s got some very very funny bits in it.
   b. The cupboards are fairly nice.
   c. This is a really happy ending to your story.

Concerning attributive and predicative position, here is an example from the BNC illustrating these.

(20) a. Oh that’s funny, isn’t it.
   b. But the funny thing is by the time I got home I still remembered it.

Most PPTs come with at least one neat antonym: *tasty vs. disgusting*, *nice vs. nasty*, *happy vs. sad*. They usually stand as contraries. This allows us to say, for instance, that something is neither tasty nor disgusting, that someone is neither happy nor sad, that something is neither nice nor nasty.

It seems easy to place PPTs under RGAs, for they allow explicit qualification with a *for*-PP introducing a set of comparable objects as illustrated here.

(21) a. Chateau Bon Ami is tasty for a supermarket wine.
   b. This place is fine for a three-star hotel.
   c. Compared to Chateau Bon Ami, this Chateau Lamothe is tasty.

The following example shows how a positive claim involving PPTs leaves room for a comparative difference, although one can also recognise an extreme character in some PPTs as given in example (22-b).

(22) a. This dish is tasty, but it could be tastier.
   b. She couldn’t be any more beautiful!

Concerning the distribution of intensifying adverbs, it is easy to find examples featuring *very tasty* or *really funny*. We should note however that although examples with *slightly*, *almost*, *perfectly* are rare, they can be found in the BNC.

(23) a. There was something slightly comic about her appearance.
   b. He was almost fun to be with at times.
   c. If you don’t have any spare rooms we’ll be perfectly happy to sleep together.

\(^{52}\) Notice that actually lots of the examples of predicative uses found in the BNC of, e.g., *happy* come in complex verbal constructions like *happy to meet you*, which so far have not been discussed in the literature on PPTs.

\(^{53}\) The more nuanced *unappetising* is also available as a polar opposite. We will mostly stick to *disgusting* in the sequel. See the subsequent comment about the multiplicity of antonyms for PPTs in the text below.

\(^{54}\) From McNally and Stojanovic [2014], p. 11, ex. 20-c.

\(^{55}\) If one holds that this is a decisive criterion to classify an adjective as being an AGA (as one could perhaps read, e.g., Kennedy and McNally [2005] and others following Rotstein and Winter [2004]), then this observation could challenge our decision to put PPTs under RGAs.
2.1. The menagerie of gradable adjectives

Finally, some PPTs can be argued to lead to the Sorites reasoning, in particular those like sweet, salty which have a descriptive component associated to quantities of substances like salt or sugar which one can theoretically count. For instance if we consider grains of sugar added one by one to a cup of tea, the first few trials would lead to a negative judgement like The tea is not sweet. The Tolerance Principle telling us that between indistinguishable perceptions one should make equal judgements could lead us to say that the cup of tea is never sweet.

Before closing this section, a note about multidimensionality. While it is true that in the semantics literature PPTs as beautiful, pretty, brave are given as examples of adjectives which involve a plurality of criteria for their application, the multicriterial character of PPTs seems to go beyond a simple claim of there being \( n + 1 \) dimensions which are composed to reach a judgement of, e.g., largeness, or a multiplicity where one criterion alone can dominate a judgement, as in healthy with respect to blood pressure. First, because when it comes to taste or beauty, every collection of dimensions one could specify could be contested as being an arbitrary selection. But well, perhaps this vindicates the view concerning the plurality of dimensions involved in multidimensionals which sees this as an open-ended set, where no set of necessary and sufficient conditions can be given that exhaustively define the adjective. Second, when considering tests for multidimensionality, such as the co-occurrence with phrases like with respect to, except for, in some/all/no respects, we see that PPTs do not pass them. If one says something like The cake is tasty with respect to X, what seems to be implied is that the cake is actually not tasty tout court, the same goes for beautiful. If this is given in a description of the various aspects of the cake’s overall tastiness, then this can work, but only as a highlight and not as a sufficient condition.

All in all, it seems that we can align well PPTs to RGAs. We do not wish to hereby claim a full inclusion, that all PPTs are RGAs. But in the sequel, we will mainly focus on PPTs the use of which fits patterns for RGAs.

So we now turn our discussion to the features of PPTs that seem to make them stand out among other RGAs. Much discussion in recent years has revolved around two interrelated phenomena: evaluativity and subjectivity. In the coming two sections we introduce these, which requires a sharpening of each notion, and we discuss how these spread among different RGAs. As it seems, RGAs like, e.g., tasty, skilful, tall are not all evaluative in the same way, and they are not all subjective in the same way.

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56 Theoretically, we say, because one should not overlook that the fact that salt, sugar are uncountable nouns, and that it would be rather insane to try and count grains this way.

57 Those proposed by Sassoon [2013] mentioned above.

58 One could guess that PPTs are conjunctive (this notion comes from Sassoon [2013]), i.e., that PPTs require that an object is positively assessed in all respects. The problem is that, given the difficulty noted above in coming up with a satisfactory set of aspects or dimensions involved, the conjunction would not be finite.
Chapter 2. Gradability, evaluativity, subjectivity

2.2 Evaluativity in RGAs

The first reason to focus on RGAs is that these are evaluative. As it stands, this claim does not say much given that in recent years, semanticists have discussed evaluativity naming with this label different phenomena. A few keywords are arguably shared in these different uses, for what is evaluative tends to relate to norms, to stand in contrast to matters of fact, and to somehow show people’s preferences instead of independent states of affairs.

We briefly reconstruct three different ways in which evaluativity as a concept has been discussed in semantics — as non-measurability, as metalinguistic change, as positive or negative valence — before we introduce our own take on the matter. For us, evaluativity is mainly related to a change in our expectations, expectations about things and about others. As we shall see, this way of understanding evaluativity is connected to the existing ones but also differs from them at a conceptual level, and at the level of what adjectives one ends up calling evaluative. It will be a first take only, it will be our task in the rest of the dissertation to work out this notion.

2.2.1 The dimensional/evaluative typology

Bierwisch [1989] coins the term “evaluative” to designate a subset of gradable adjectives, namely those like charming, industrious, lazy, ugly [61] to set these apart from other gradable adjectives like tall vs. short, expensive vs. cheap for which he reserves the term “dimensional”. While this typology is strongly motivated by, and buttressed in, a specific theoretical approach to gradability [62] a few general traits identify those adjectives he calls evaluative.

First, Bierwisch’s dimensional adjectives can be characterised in general terms as being associated with an objective scale along some dimension, e.g., height, cost, etc., which often has units of measurement, e.g., centimeters, cents, etc. Evaluative adjectives are not associated with such scales and do not have units of measurement — what would a unit of charm or industriousness be? Second,
for evaluative adjectives antonymous pairs have a less obvious relation to each other — is ugly or unfriendly the antonym of charming? — than dimensional antonymous pairs. Third, unlike dimensionals, evaluative adjectives are not per se gradable; they become gradable after we order individuals within a class relative to each other regarding the degree to which they fulfill a certain property. Fourth, the interpretation of dimensional adjectives like tall or expensive is always related to a comparison class that one has to decode. We proceed differently when interpreting evaluatives: adjectives like charming, industrious do not require us to take into account a specific comparison class. In Bierwisch’s own words, “[f]or some people to be tall there must be short people too, but for some to be industrious there do not need to be any lazy ones.” This means that two distinct processes are involved in the interpretation of dimensional vs. evaluative gradable adjectives.

We believe that Bierwisch’s notion of evaluativity is definitely interesting, and it will remain in focus in the sequel. However, we will not endorse this notion of evaluativity as such. Besides the fact that as the typology is partly rooted on a theoretical approach to gradability we will contest, the degree-based approach, this notion of evaluativity does not apply to an adjective like heavy unless we accept that heavy is ambiguous or polysemous. Given that distinct interpretation processes and lexical specifications characterise dimensionals and evaluatives, if we consider Alf finds this suitcase heavy where what matters is not the suitcase’s weight as measured in kilograms but how it feels, here heavy has evaluative and not dimensional meaning. Thus, it seems, the meaning of this adjective when it is simply related to how we order individuals within a class relative to each other differs from when used when we order individuals within a class relative to, e.g., a centimeter. As we see it, the latter is actually

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64 Rett 2008’s notion of evaluativity is actually another name for what Bierwisch 1989 calls norm-relatedness. Dimensionals and evaluatives can have norm-related readings, in the sense that their interpretation may require a comparison with a contextually determined standard of the relevantgradable property. So Rett calls evaluative all adjectival constructions in which reference is made to a threshold depending on a comparison class. Her use of the term is somewhat confusing, given that norm-relatedness is not the same as what Bierwisch 1989 calls evaluativity. More on her view below in subsection 2.2.4.
65 Bierwisch 1989, p. 89.
66 As Toledo 2011 also notes.
67 Plus, this notion of evaluativity comes back in several of the proposals we examine in the next chapter, for instance in Kennedy 2013 and in Umbach 2014.
68 To be more precise and careful, one should speak of ‘underspecification’ instead of ambiguity or polysemy, partly because this is actually how the issue is introduced by Bierwisch (as underspecification of the dimension of evaluation of a gradable adjective), partly because linguists still disagree what exactly is at issue with adjectives like heavy (polysemy, lexical ambiguity, shifts in basic meanings due to generative rules, etc.) We will refer to the issue as polysemy in the sequel because this is how it has been picked up in the literature on PPTs (in particular by Kennedy 2013) which we will further discuss in subsequent chapters.
a refined instance of the former, and for that reason we think one should not simply postulate a case of polysemy for this leaves the relation unexplained. Our discussion of this notion of evaluativity will be continued in subsequent chapters, given the role it has played in recent semantic analyses of PPTs.

2.2.2 Evaluativity as metalinguistic usage

In recent years, it has been claimed that vague adjectives, and among those RGAs like *tall* and like *tasty*, are evaluative in that they have metalinguistic effects. That is, if one says *Alf is tall*, one may be either describing Alf as regards his height, or one may be telling one’s interlocutor what counts as being tall in a given context. In this way, *tall* can be used to fix the meaning of the term, to signal that appropriately using this adjective requires that its denotation encompasses individuals whose height matches Alf’s.

We do not follow this view on evaluativity. On the one hand, we think that the separation of these two effects or uses is theoretically interesting but somewhat artificial, for these expressions carry both effects or uses at once. On the other hand, we believe this is a feature that is, in a sense, rather ordinary. Not only can RGAs, PPTs and non-PPTs alike be seen as evaluative in this guise. Identity statements can also be used in this way, to fix the meaning of one term in terms of the meaning of the other and so can any regular description like *This is a chair* whenever the denotation of the noun *chair* is under debate.

So while we do think that metalinguistic effects are present for RGAs, we also think that this is not a special trait of this family of adjectives. In subsequent chapters such effects will sometimes enter our discussion, but this will not be the notion of evaluativity we will adopt in this investigation.

2.2.3 Evaluativity as valence in attitude

We reconstruct here yet another way in which evaluativity has been recently understood in semantics. Certain terms are evaluative, it is thought, because they express the speaker’s attitude towards the thing she is assessing or the information she is conveying. They show the speaker’s positive or negative attitude, her appreciation. In this sense, adjectives like *good vs. bad* would be perhaps the most obvious cases, along with aesthetic adjectives like *beautiful, great, mediocre* and

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69 This use of the term ‘evaluative’ can be traced back to the role of Stalnaker’s diagonal proposition. It is also discussed by Kyburg and Morreau, 2000, Barker, 2002, Krifka, 2012, and adopted for PPTs by Barker, 2013.

70 As Barker, 2013, himself argues.

71 As Van Rooij, 2011b, sec. 3 notes.

72 Cf., Umbach, 2014, p. 11.

73 This notion has been used in particular by McNally and Stojanovic, 2014 but one could speak of evaluativity in this sense in quite an intuitive way.

74 McNally and Stojanovic, 2014.
2.2. Evaluativity in RGAs

adverbs like remarkably, surprisingly, unacceptably.\footnote{Cf., Morzycki 2004, De Vries 2012.}

We believe this notion is quite intuitive but it has its shortcomings as characterised here. On the one hand, this definition restricts the attitude to that of the speaker, where it is clear that, e.g., in questions such as Do you think that Picasso is beautiful? and in many other contexts, the attitude that one is interested in is the addressee’s. On the other hand, it is not clear how this definition can work as a criterion. It may be easy to accept that, e.g., tall does not have a distinct valence in attitude associated to it. But why, for instance, would an adjective like helpful not be evaluative? Can’t one speak of an entailment of approval or commendation towards anything qualified as helpful?\footnote{McNally and Stojanovic 2014 in particular exclude helpful from their list of evaluatives.}

Given these shortcomings, we will not endorse this notion of evaluativity as such, but rather elaborate it further, to see what it means for certain expressions to come with an appreciation. This notion of evaluativity also makes it most patent that this phenomenon and that of subjectivity, to be discussed in section 2.3 are related. Of course, how is it that they are related is an issue, one that we investigate in the sequel.

2.2.4 Evaluativity and what we (don’t) expect

Now that the reader sees how evaluativity has been conceived of so far, we wish to introduce a different notion of evaluativity. The core of this idea comes out the following observation: when using RGAs such as tall, expensive, fast, one does something else than just make imprecise qualifications.\footnote{This idea comes from Veltman 2002, who finds his inspiration in Themerson 1974.} If I am told, for instance, that Alf completes a marathon in less than three hours, I may wonder whether Alf is fast as a runner. So I may ask: Is that fast? My question shows that I am not sure about what one should expect of a marathon runner, I do not know what is normal in this case. And this normality is not always related to a threshold set by a comparison class. As Fara 2000 suggests, an exclamation like Wow, you are so tall! or How tall you are! is appropriate when something deviates significantly from what we expect, even if the person we judge is actually short for her age, i.e., below a threshold issued by the comparison class she belongs to. So we can use RGAs like tall and fast, and not only more obviously valence-laden adjectives like skilful and tasty, in wh-exclamatives. This is something we cannot do with NGAs, and which is quite difficult for some AGAs, unless we force them into to a relative interpretation (as in example f):

(24)  
\begin{itemize}
\item a. What a tasty dessert you prepared!
\item b. What a stupid man he is!
\item c. How tall you are!
\item d. (?) What a digital watch this is!
\end{itemize}
Chapter 2. Gradability, evaluativity, subjectivity

e. (?) What a closed door this is!
f. How dry the cake was!

Of course, one may wonder whether appearing in wh-exclamatives is a test of evaluativity. We believe it can work for evaluavity as we understand it here. There seems to be some consensus about how exclamatives express that something challenges or modifies our pre-existing expectations.\(^{78}\) In this guise we wish to say, all RGAs are evaluative, including those which Bierwisch calls ‘dimensional’, like tall or expensive and those he calls ‘evaluative’ like industrious, lazy or skilful. But are all RGAs evaluative in the same way?

The preliminary distinction we want to draw here concerns the comparative form, and at this point Bierwisch’s observations come in handy. Those RGAs he calls dimensional like tall, expensive are easily associated with a public, conventionalised method of measurement, like using a meter or counting cents or dollars. In this sense, we have a means to agree on whether, e.g., Alf is taller than Bea which is not available when it comes to comparing whether a cake is tastier than a pie. We will call adjectives like tall weakly evaluative, and those like tasty strongly evaluative. We will not claim that adjectives belong essentially to one or other category, this will turn out be a matter rooted in epistemological rather than in linguistic considerations, a discussion we will offer in chapter \(^\[4\]\). Here we just sketch the basic idea, and briefly indicate where we meet and where we depart from the notions sketched in previous subsections.

For weakly evaluatives like tall, we may say that, e.g., Alf is tall when Alf is is taller than we expect. One may want to assume, as many do\(^{79}\) that what we expect is given by a standard or threshold. However, as Fara’s example shows, some evaluations are fine even when what we assess does not instantiate a property beyond a standard. What we expect as normal and what we recognise as a standard value need not always coincide. Weakly evaluatives, in this sense, resemble non-evaluative claims as characterised by the valence view: that something is above or below the height we expect it to have does not mean much in terms of how we appreciate that, what attitude we have. Is it good or bad that Alf is tall? No entailments of this sort seem to be made here. Still, in a sense, Alf is tall is evaluative: it tells you something about how Alf stands with respect to our expectation patterns.

For strongly evaluatives like tasty or beautiful, we believe expectations also play a crucial role, but one which is different to noticing that something changes our pre-existing expectations as for weakly evaluatives. Expectations here play a normative role, not in shaping our epistemic attitude towards the world in terms of changing what we know about it, but rather by shaping our interlocking with others, what we expect of our interlocutors. When we say This dessert is tasty or This Picasso is beautiful, we expect other people to partake in our


\(^{79}\) For instance, Rett 2008.
judgement. This sanctionative role is marking that something stands out, not because of its abnormality, but because it poses certain demands on others that binds us together, that is there for us all. We do not expect cakes to be normal or paintings to leave us indifferent. When we are not indifferent, our judgement has a certain valence but, furthermore, we expect others to align with our judgement. This is something we do not necessarily do when we say that something is heavy or expensive, for a very strong or a very rich man are naturally not expected to judge as we do.

Now is is skilful weakly or strongly evaluative? How about intelligent? The question whether an adjective is weakly or strongly evaluative is not one we can systematically answer. We can associate points in a scale, e.g., in a piano competition, or points in an IQ test. In the end, this is not so different from assigning points to different features of a wine when using a specific scoring system, and then asking whether such systems are part of the meaning of the adjective tasty or good. We will not attempt to answer this question here, but rather indicate that doing so would require that a difference in such scores could settle a dispute about whether Alf is more skilful or intelligent than Bea, something which we discuss further in the coming section.

Anyway, much more will be said in subsequent chapters about this distinction between weakly and strongly evaluatives, and in that way we hope the reader shall see that we are not just inventing new labels to rename Bierwisch’s dimensional vs. evaluative typology, and she will see why evaluative judgements, i.e., claims featuring RGAs which are evaluative in the sense sketched here, are not simply concerned with the denotation of a predicate of the language. It is now time to turn our attention to subjectivity.

### 2.3 Subjectivity in RGAs

Besides giving a few examples, what we said above is that PPTs can express an experience, a sensation, a feeling, or a sentiment. Here we put together three features (this is not meant to be an exhaustive list) that are meant to be markers of an adjective’s subjectivity, and discuss to what extent these are characteristic of PPTs or whether they also concern other RGAs. We are, as it is to be expected, not the first who enumerate features of subjectivity. Our discussion, however, deviates at certain points from what the reader will find in the existing literature, and we shall point that out where relevant.

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80 For instance, the Davis 20-point scoring method.
81 An interesting feature left aside here for reasons of space is what Bylinina [2014] calls purpose-relativity, i.e., the fact that one can say “War and Peace” is a slightly long book to read in one week. The to-prepositional phrase here introduces a purpose or goal which can be seen as being, in some sense, subjective.
82 A small digression. In Japanese, there is a grammatical subdivision between subjective and objective adjectives. (Cf., Backhouse [1994]) Subjective adjectives have a syntactic feature: in
The first feature we will consider concerns so-called faultless disagreement, discussed in subsection 2.3.1, the situation in which two interlocutors contradict each others’ judgements, where none of them seems to have arguments at her disposal to prove the other one wrong. We shall agree with others who have claimed that faultless disagreement can take place for PPTs in positive and comparative form, but only extends to those adjectives we have called weakly evaluative when they are in positive form. The second feature relates to embeddings under attitude predicates like the English find, presented in 2.3.2. These are uses of the verb to find where a non-finite clause is embedded, as in I find this cake tasty or She finds this suitcase heavy. For our own ease we will call sentences of this sort restricted judgements, in contrast to unrestricted judgements like This cake is tasty or This suitcase is heavy. We will disagree here with those who exclude the comparative form of adjectives like long from restricted judgements. Our point in subsection 2.3.3 will be to touch upon the relation between unrestricted and first-person restricted judgements. While for strongly evaluatives like tasty, unrestricted judgements seem to entail first-person restricted judgements, this is not the case for weakly evaluatives like long.

declarative sentences they may be predicated directly only of first-person experiencers. Thus, (b) and (c) below are marked as ungrammatical:

(i)  
(a) Boku wa samui.  
I am cold.  
(b) *Kimi wa samui.  
* You are cold.  
(c) *Ano hito wa samui.  
* She is cold.

To express the second and third person cases, one needs to employ presumptive or evidential constructions, reported speech, or the use of a derived verb formed by the suffixation of -GARU:

(ii)  
(a) Kimi/Ano hito wa samui-daroo/samusoo da.  
You/he/she must be cold/look(s) cold.  
(b) Ano hito wa samui to itte iru.  
He/she says that he/she is cold.  
(c) Ano hito wa samugatte iru.  
He/she is showing signs of feeling cold.

According to Backhouse, Japanese PPTs oishii, umai (tasty, good-tasting) and mazui (unpalatable, bad-tasting) fall under this category. This means that it is not grammatical to say She finds this tasty or This is tasty to her, and one should make explicit reference to the agents’ external manifestations, using the derivational morphology: oishigaru, umagaru (show signs of finding good-tasting) and mazugaru (show signs of finding bad-tasting). PPTs in English do not have similar grammatical constraints. We would like to note at this point that unlike Japanese, where the subjective adjectives form an identifiable category, English does not come with a standard classification of adjectives as being subjective. The diagnostics we give below are not intended to specify criteria for identifying such a class.
2.3. Subjectivity in RGAs

2.3.1 Faultless disagreement

One of the core features identifying adjectives which are in some sense subjective is a certain species of disagreements, dubbed in the recent literature in semantics “faultless disagreements”. These are exchanges ending up in dead-ends, where speaker and addressee contradict each other but where none of them can be proved to be wrong by his interlocutor. Typical examples are:

(25) a. Alf: This cake is tasty!
   Bea: No, it’s not!

b. This cake is tastier than this pie!
   Bea: No, it’s not!

c. Alf: This Bordeaux is tasty for a supermarket wine.
   Bea: No, it’s not.

It seems such disagreements are special because Alf and Bea are both in some sense right, hence the faultlessness, even though Bea asserts the negation of the proposition asserted by Alf, hence the disagreement. (We said “it seems” because, as we shall see in chapter 3, there are those who think that these disagreements are only apparently special or faultless. For now, the description given above suffices to single out a distinction between these disagreements from those we may have with NGAs, or when comparing two definite amounts, e.g., weight or time measurements:

(26) a. Alf: This woman is pregnant.
   Bea: No, she’s not!

b. Alf: This morning you arrived later than yesterday.
   Bea: No, I didn’t!

In these examples, Alf or Bea can in principle be proved to be wrong by his interlocutor, they just need to perform a blood test or check time stamps.

Note that for weakly evaluatives like long, heavy, rich one could also run into similar disagreements. RGAs can be associated with a measurable dimension like length or weight but they can also express an experience, a sensation, a feeling, or a sentiment.

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83 The label comes [Kölbel 2004], although the notions also features in [Wright 1992, 2006]. It was applied to the case of disagreements about taste by [Lasersohn 2005] because in examples such as those in (25) apparently neither party to the dispute is at fault.

84 Among others, [Stojanovic 2007, Moltmann 2010, Smith 2010, Umbach 2014], who claim that in such disagreements, like in any other disagreement, one of dialogue participants says something true and the other one something false. According to them, the diagnoses of faultless disagreement are due to a misconception due to a bird’s eye perspective on the exchange, and it is normally explained away by appeal to pragmatic or otherwise non-semantic mechanisms. See chapter 3, subsection 3.2.1.

Chapter 2. Gradability, evaluativity, subjectivity

(27) a. Alf: That’s a long trip!
   Bea: No, it’s not!
   b. Alf: This suitcase is heavy!
   Bea: No, it’s not!

One may want to argue that the apparent faultlessness can be removed if one discovers that Alf and Bea have in mind different comparison classes, i.e., the trips or suitcases they have in mind when making such judgements. But as example (28) from actual use shows, an adjective like old can lead to a dead end, just like evaluative disagreements concerning taste:

(28) G: ... but it’s not bad for an old lady.
   C: You’re not old, Grandma ... 

The dialogue participants may have opposing views even if they agree on all facts, i.e., on grandma’s age and on the relevant comparison class (old ladies). So for the positive form, RGAs like old can lead to faultless disagreements. Grable adjectives in comparative form may, for a while, lead to similar dead ends, as when Alf reports her experience of lifting two different objects, or when Alf and Bea are food critics discussing about two desserts, and Bea openly disagrees:

(29) a. Alf: The box is heavier than the suitcase.
   Bea: No, it isn’t!
   b. Alf: The cake is denser than the pie.
   Bea: No, it isn’t!

However, after a measurement of the weight of the box and the suitcase, or of the relation of the mass divided by volume of the cake and the pie, either Alf or Bea will have to give in, so the faultlessness phenomenon disappears here. What Alf may do is retreat to a restricted judgement, to a statement of how they find things instead of how they are, as in Well, I find the box heavier than the suitcase.

So contra Kennedy [2013], we claim that the comparative form of these adjectives does not lead to faultless disagreement. Even if one distinguishes two different interpretations for heavy or dense, one related to measurement and another one related to experience, along the lines of Bierwisch [1989].

Now, can faultless disagreement arise with adjectives like skilful or intelligent?

We might want to apply to these cases the lesson we learned for weakly evaluatives and say that this may only happen for the positive, and not for the comparative form. However, here we see that even if someone tries to get out of a dead end in an argument as in example (30) by bringing up an IQ score, Alf may just retort that IQ scores are a partial and limited means to measure performance related to analytic skills and which ignores all sorts of traits of intelligence that fall outside of the scope of such tests.

2.3. Subjectivity in RGAs

(30)  a. Alf: Abe is more intelligent than Bert.
      Bea: No, he isn’t! He scored lower in the IQ test!

So could this be the end of a potential faultless disagreement? This very much depends on context, it would only work if it is clear beforehand that Alf and Bea are discussing intelligence as rendered by IQ scores.

One may want to call faultless disagreement a situation where different values and relative precedence are assigned to the different components of a multidimensional adjective, as when Alf and Bea disagree whether a box is big (see the example given at the end of 2.1.2). In such cases, both for the positive and the comparative, it seems that it is not hard to get out of an apparent cul-de-sac, namely, by making explicit which dimensions one gives precedence to. This option seems simply unavailable in the cases involving tasty or old given above.

So faultless disagreements are disputes involving PPTs or other RGAs that are very difficult to resolve, and resolving them in any case takes more than discursive persuasion, more than explaining one’s own understanding of the dimensional composition as one could perhaps do for multidimensionals.

2.3.2 Embeddings under find

It has been noticed that attitude verbs like find in English admit embedding non-finite clauses featuring PPTs, for instance:

(31)  a. I find this cake tasty.
      b. She finds Gouda a boring town.

Special about restricted judgements, where the verb is stative, is that they seem to convey the sentiment or view of a specific agent or group thereof, the matrix subject, and in this sense they seem to work as a test for subjectivity. In this sense, NGAs cannot be embedded. It is widely claimed that AGAs cannot be embedded either, but this is not true for all of them:

(32)  a. (?) I find this watch digital.
      b. (?) She finds Alf Bald.
      c. Bea finds Budapest dangerous.

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87Since Sæbø [2009] many authors call these “subjective attitude verbs” because these are believed to select for subjective predicates understood as being judge-dependent. Because we will contest judge-dependence as the right view on subjectivity in subsequent chapters, we believe it is safer not to follow the standard label for these verbs to avoid possible confusion.

88Similar to trouver in French, vinden in Dutch, or finden in German. Some authors also include the English verb consider, but we can say for instance I consider the Earth flat but not I find the Earth flat.

89See Stephenson [2007], Sæbø [2009], Kennedy [2013]. Here we are not discussing these authors account of why PPTs can be embedded under find. We will discuss that in chapter 3.
In contrast, find as achievement verb means roughly declare or discover:

(33)   a. The jury finds the defendant guilty.
       b. I found the drawer empty.

One may think that that restricted judgements mean the same as judgements in which an experiencer argument is made explicit by way of a prepositional complement for/to:

(34)   a. This cake is tasty for me.  \(\equiv\) I find this cake tasty.
       b. This joke is offensive to us.  \(\equiv\) We find this joke offensive.

However, such phrases have a more limited distribution among RGAs than embeddings under find. We can say I find Alf smart but Alf is smart to me is not ok\(^{90}\) or I find this painting beautiful but not This painting is beautiful for/to me.\(^{91}\) Why do we focus on find rather than focus on prepositional complements for/to introducing an experiencer argument? Because one can surely consider that smart or beautiful involve an opinion or a feeling held by the matrix subject when embedded under find.

While one may think that find is a propositional attitude of a specific sort,\(^{92}\) it is instructive to see that I find this tasty is not simply equivalent to I find that this is tasty. Think of a newborn baby, Anna. One can easily say: Anna finds infant formula tasty. But not: Look! Anna finds that infant formula is tasty. While the latter implies the former, the reverse is not true.\(^{93}\) We shall argue in the sequel that the attitude verb find seems to relate the matrix subject to a non-propositional object which is an extralinguistic entity.

Note that the case of an outright denial of a restricted judgement as in (35)

(35)   Alf: I find this cake tasty.
       Bea: No, you don’t!

Even if such an exchange could take place in a very specific setting\(^{94}\) it is very hard to make something out of it. However, when the restricted judgement reports

\(^{90}\)See Bylinina \citeyear{Bylinina2014}.
\(^{91}\)As McNally and Stojanovic \citeyear{McNallyStojanovic2014} indicate.
\(^{92}\)As proposed by Sæbø \citeyear{Saebo2009} and Stephenson \citeyear{Stephenson2006, Stephenson2007}. This is partly suggested by the fact that, e.g., the French attitude verb trouver very easily accepts that-clauses to express one’s opinion, as in Jean trouve que Paul a une belle voiture.
\(^{93}\)This is in contrast to apparently similar cases which are in fact independent, as that of perception verbs embedding small clauses vs. embedding that-clauses: John heard Mary loose her voice does not imply John heard that Mary lost her voice nor does the latter imply the first.
\(^{94}\)As Umbach \citeyear{Umbach2014} notes.
\(^{95}\)This could happen if Alf suffers from frontotemporal dementia, which has been found to bring about alterations in aesthetic and gustatory judgements (as claimed in M. Simpson’s work at the Berkeley Psychophisiology lab, p.c.)
on a third-person’s opinion like in (36), the oddness goes away:

(36) Alf: Abe finds this cake tasty.
    Bea: No, he doesn’t!

This case may naturally arise when the dialogue participants have different evidence concerning Abe’s preferences.

Now consider RGAs which are not clearly PPTs, like long, hot, heavy. Attitude verbs such as the English find also admit embeddings with such RGAs, both in positive and in comparative form.

(37) a. Alf finds that house expensive.
    b. I find the box heavier than the suitcase.
    c. [Looking at fig. 2.1] I find the segment in the image above longer than the one in the image below.

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{Figure 2.1: The Müller-Lyer illusion.}
\end{array}\]

In these examples, the assessments run independently of what the fact of the matter may be. These assessments do not describe physical properties. They are not made in virtue of a measurement or otherwise conventional procedure. We may be surprised by the weight of the suitcase being much less than we expected, we may discover that the box and the suitcase have equal weights, or that the segments in the Müller-Lyer arrows are equally long. Our assessments in the examples in (37) say something about how things feel or look, how they are presented to us.

It is relatively common among semanticists to make room for such comparative statements only when one endorses the polysemy suggested by Bierwisch’s work.\footnote{In Bierwisch [1989], followed by others Kennedy [2013], Bylinina [2014], Umbach [2014]. See our provisos and warnings concerning the use of the expression ‘polysemy’ here given in fn. 68 above.}

We want to keep this chapter as descriptive as possible, and for that reason we think that this is not the point where that hypothesis should be discussed. All we want to say here, pointing at some of what we said in the previous subsection, is that if it turns out that, e.g., the box and the suitcase have equal weights, then...
we have to retreat to a restricted judgement like *I find the box heavier than the suitcase*. So even if we can distinguish a sense of *heavy* associated to a scale with the one saying that something requires lots of effort to move or lift, these two are not independent. Moreover, the fact that certain multidimensional adjectives whose separate dimensions can be measured may be embedded in comparative form under *find*[^68] like *find bigger* or *find larger*, indicates that non-measurability is not the criterion deciding what can be embedded under such attitude verbs.

Is a first-person restricted judgement an explicit form of something which remains hidden in an unrestricted one? How one accounts for the subjectivity of unrestricted judgements may lead some to believe this. But consider the following examples:

(38) a. This wine was tasty, now it isn’t.
   b. I found this wine tasty, now I don’t.

In [38-a] it is implied that something about the wine has changed. Suppose *This wine was tasty* is actually just a shorthand for *I found this wine tasty*. The one would expect the same implication in example [38-b] but it is more or less clear that this is not implied. Something has changed in how the agent assesses the situation, a change which may be explained by, e.g., her having eaten chocolate in between her sips of the wine. This explanation is unavailable for example [38-a]. In the sequel we will not really focus on matters of tense, but the examples above show that one should be skeptical of any claim to the equivalence of unrestricted and first-person restricted judgements.[^49]

### 2.3.3 Implications and contradictions

The following observations point at a specific connection between restricted and unrestricted judgements, one that does not spread equally among all RGAs. The point is that for strongly evaluative gradable adjectives, and not just for PPTs, unrestricted judgements seem to imply first-person restricted judgements.

[^49]: Conversational analysts have studied unrestricted and restricted judgements as they are used in actual eating practices. (They call these sorts ‘objective’ vs. ‘subjective’ respectively. Pomerantz [1978], Potter [1998], Wiggins and Potter [2003]. According to Wiggins and Potter [2003], for instance, objective evaluations suggest describing a feature of the referent (*That sandwich is very tasty*), whereas subjective ones index a privileged preference or dislike towards the referent. Here we stick to our own terminology to avoid confusion.) Their work provides insights into the type of dialogue practices in which they occur. Wiggins and Potter [2003] analyse a corpus of family mealtime dialogues and show that unrestricted and restricted judgements are used to perform different types of acts when evaluating food. Unrestricted assessments can be perceived as compliments and can be used as attempts to persuade. In contrast, restricted assessments are not used for complimenting or persuading but function well as, e.g., refusals to offers. See Crespo and Fernández [2011] for a preliminary formal approach to the semantics of PPTs and to the use of these in dialogue inspired by this line of work.
2.3. Subjectivity in RGAs

This asymmetry between first- and third-person restricted judgements is remarkable, as shown in the acceptability of a sequence like (39-b). It is apparent that the unrestricted judgement comes with a first-person commitment of the speaker. There is here a requirement that the speaker has had relevant experiences, which would be precisely what first-person restricted judgements would express. As Pearson put it: “If I have good reason to believe that shortbread is tasty, say because a reliable expert has told me so, I might say, Apparently, shortbread is tasty, but not, Shortbread is tasty.” As she notes, this requirement goes beyond PPTs, applying for instance as well for adjectives like tired.

Note that the contradiction disappears if we prefix the unrestricted judgement with Presumably, as in Presumably, the cake is tasty but I don’t find it tasty, or if we replace the unrestricted judgement with a generalisation via a restricted judgement, as in People find this cake tasty, but I don’t find it tasty. This shows that This is tasty and People find this cake tasty are not equivalent, just in case one thinks that example (39-a) is not a contradiction because Alf may be reporting the results of a survey.

This seeming implication between unrestricted and first-person restricted judgements, and the experience requirement, does not extend to RGAs like expensive, heavy, long. We need not have lifted a suitcase to say That’s heavy, for instance if we consider its weight as measured by a scale. Having relevant experiences is thus not always needed in order to make a sincere judgement of this sort. The contradiction in example (39-a) does not arise for weakly evaluatives, as illustrated in example (40).

(40) a. It is an expensive house but Alf doesn’t find it expensive.
   b. The box is not heavier than the suitcase but I find it heavier.
   c. [Looking at fig. 2.1 on p. 37.] I find the segment in the image above longer than the one in the image below, but in fact it isn’t.

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100 Pearson [2013a] makes a similar remark but focusing on a slightly different example:

(i) Alf: The cake that Mary and I ate was tasty, but...
   a. (?) I did not like it.
   b. she did not like it.

We prefer to keep our own example because the presence of past tense in Pearson’s creates some unnecessary noise. Still, the point she draws from it is the same as ours.

101 Cf., Pearson [2013a], Moltmann [2010], Egan [2010].

102 This is also related to Stephenson [2006, 2007]’s requirement of having “direct evidence”, an idea we will question later on because of the status of evidence of experience.

103 Pearson [2013a], p. 15/52.
No major conflict arises here, although a certain awkwardness is felt, a mismatch between experience and facts.

There might be some hesitation as to whether the contradiction in example \ref{39-a} is semantic or pragmatic in nature.\footnote{Pearson herself makes a comment in this respect in her fn. 13.} A clue pointing in the direction of a semantic phenomenon here is shown by the fact that when embedded in the antecedent of a conditional the incoherence remains, similar to what we see in epistemic contradictions and in contrast to a regular Moore sentence:

\begin{enumerate}
\item If this is tasty but I don’t find it tasty, then I’ll miss a great dessert.
\item If it is raining and it might not be raining, then I’ll get wet.
\item If it is raining and I don’t believe that it is raining, then I’ll get wet.
\end{enumerate}

Once more, one may think that example \ref{41-a} is actually acceptable, but this works only if one is tempted to take \textit{This is tasty} and \textit{People find this cake tasty} to be equivalent. We will systematically refrain from this temptation in the sequel.

We conclude with a brief recap. Three features of subjectivity have been presented. First, while PPTs among other strongly evaluatives run into faultless disagreements in the positive and comparative form, this only happens in the positive form for weakly evaluatives. Second, we can embed under the attitude verb \textit{find} RGAs in the positive and in the comparative form, regardless of whether they are strongly or weakly evaluative. Third, an unrestricted judgement seems to imply a first-person restricted judgement for strongly evaluatives only.

\section{Conclusion and work ahead}

Upon closer look, PPTs seem to share a number of features with other RGAs. PPTs and RGAs which are not primarily associated with our experiences or opinions, at least not for semanticists, fit some of the diagnoses for subjectivity. An account of subjectivity in gradable adjectives needs to make room for this complex connections. In the following chapter, we will discuss some of the main theories on gradability and on PPTs, and the idea of subjectivity they develop. The phenomena in the present chapter serve as an initial benchmark.

\footnote{Cf., \textcite{Yalcin2007}.}