

## **Semantic Relativism about Perspectival Expressions: A Reassessment and Defense**

Description for the general public

Natural languages are replete with expressions for the interpretation of which appeal to perspectives is needed, such as “tasty”, “beautiful”, “good”, “might” or “knows”. Such perspectival expressions play a crucial role in our lives: they describe how parts of reality are experienced or judged from our own perspective, as well as give us insight into how they are experienced from other people’s perspectives.

But what exactly is the meaning of such expressions? The branch of philosophy and linguistics that deals with the meaning of expressions is semantics. For a semantic theory purporting to give the meaning of perspectival expressions, capturing their perspectival character is a major desideratum. The challenge for such semantic theories is to account for the whole range of data in a theoretically sound, formally accurate, economic and elegant way.

In this project I focus on the debate between two main contemporary theories: *contextualism* and *relativism*. Each view has its own way of capturing perspectival character by locating perspectives in the theory’s formal apparatus: contextualism in the content of utterances, relativism in the circumstances against which such utterances are evaluated. Thus, according to contextualism, for example, a sentence like “Licorice is tasty” will express a content that is perspective-specific – that is, *Licorice is tasty for Anne*, if Anne is the person uttering it. According to relativism, on the other hand, the same sentence will express a content that is perspective-neutral – that is, *Licorice is tasty*, period. This difference in postulated content (and in the meaning of the term “tasty”), in turn, has consequences for the way we think about such issues, for the manner we communicate using the expressions at stake, the way we coordinate or disagree in solving related practical issues and so on.

This project has two main aims: 1. to thoroughly investigate all the arguments used in the debate about the semantics of perspectival expressions in the literature; 2. to offer a concerted defense of relativism about such expressions. Fulfilling the first aim will amount to the first large-scale systematization and reassessment of the arguments in the literature. Fulfilling the second aim will provide, both by reviving old arguments and by providing new ones, the most comprehensive defense of relativism to date. By way of achieving these aims, hitherto little discussed phenomena (cross-domain variation in retraction and disagreement, perspectival plurality, various syntactic aspects of perspectival expressions etc.) will be opened for future research. The expected results, in concrete terms, are: writing several scientific articles on the issues pertaining to the project (which will be brought together in a monograph offering a novel defense of semantic relativism), presentation of the work at international scientific events and the organization of seminars, workshops and colloquia at the host institution.