

A direction effect on taste predicates

Alexander Dinges and Julia Zakkou

The recent literature abounds with accounts of the semantics and pragmatics of so-called predicates of personal taste, i.e. predicates whose application is, in some sense or other, a subjective matter. Relativism and contextualism are the major types of theories. One crucial difference between these theories concerns how we should assess previous taste claims. Relativism predicts that we should assess them in the light of the taste standard governing the context of assessment. Contextualism predicts that we should assess them in the light of the taste standard governing the context of use. We show in a range of experiments that neither prediction is correct. Which taste standard people choose in evaluating a previous taste claim crucially depend on whether they start out liking the food in question and then come to dislike it or *vice versa*. We argue that no extant theory predicts this *direction effect* and go on to suggest what we call *hybrid relativism* as a possible solution. On this view, sentences of the form “F is/isn’t tasty” have a relativist and a contextualist reading, where the relevant reading is selected by an independently motivated pragmatic principle to interpret speakers as negatively as possible.