1. Relativistic discourse
“Tasty”, “might”, “ought”, “good”, “if P, Q”
Concerns of judges and speakers seem best characterized relativistically.
Explicit relativizations and contextually sustained counterparts

2. Contextualist accounts, examples

TASTY-C: An utterance of a sentence of the form \(X \text{ is tasty}\) is true if and only if \(X\) accords with the standard of taste that is relevant in the context of utterance (cf. Glanzberg 2007; Schaffer 2009).

MIGHT-C: An utterance of a sentence of the form \(P \text{ might be the case}\) is true if and only if \(P\) is compatible with the body of information that is relevant in the context of utterance (cf. DeRose 1991, 1998; Bach 2008; Schaffer 2009).

- Corresponding accounts for judgments to the effect that \(X\) is tasty / \(P\) might be the case

3. Problem with contextualist accounts
Intuitions of understanding w/o knowledge of contextual variable
Not too worrying: linguistic understanding might not be articulate
Intuitions of sameness
Not too worrying: abstractions to relevant similarities
Apparent “non-relativity of [expressions attributing] semantic value”
A: “I am hungry.” B: “A said that she [not I] was hungry.”
A: “Fish sticks are really tasty.” B: “A said that fish sticks are tasty.”
Not too worrying: unarticulated constituent might be suitably adjusted
Intuitions of disagreement
Clashes of attitudes, conflicts in interest (ought, good), semantic disagreement
Intuitions concerning the felicity of insensitive semantic assessments

4. Insensitive assessments

Might: Alice has asked whether anyone has seen her keys. Bill, who left them in the car, answers:
(1) “The keys might be in the car.”
Unknown to Alice and Bill, the neighbourhood girl, Emily, has just stolen the keys from the car and is hiding behind a bush, listening to the conversation. Two possible thoughts of hers in response to Bill’s utterance:
(2) “No, they can’t be, because I have them here.”
(3) **“That’s true, but I have them here.”

Tasty: Sam, seen by the dining table in a television documentary:
(4) “Fish sticks are really tasty!”
Two possible comments by little John, who is watching the documentary and really dislikes fish sticks:
(5) “No, they are disgusting!”
(6) **“Yes, but they are disgusting!”

Insensitive Assessments: Semantic assessments where the assessor’s concern departs from speaker/thinker concern (concerns characterized with explicit relativization).
- Apparently, assessments of utterances do not follow speaker concerns, and hence do not follow contextualist analysis capturing such concerns.

5. Why insensitive assessments?

A. We make mistakes / these are not serious semantic assessments
- Explicit negative semantic assessments (“false”, “not true”) tend to be less natural.
  - Leaves question of “no”. Different intuitions. “False / not true” morally loaded
- Possible to reply by explicit relativization when facing disagreement (Schaffer).
  - Just shows that we can retreat to a different claim.
- Perhaps insensitive assessments are due to presumption of common value of contextually determined variable?
  - Doesn’t explain eavesdropping cases.
  - If not mistaken, the problem for contextualism remains.

B. Assessor-relativistic semantics (“The new relativists”)

MIGHT-R: An utterance of a sentence of the form \(P \text{ might be the case}\) is true relative to a context of assessment if and only if \(P\) is compatible with the information available in that context (cf. MacFarlane 2005; Egan 2007)

TASTY-R: An utterance of a sentence of the form \(X \text{ is tasty}\) is true relative to a context of assessment if and only if \(X\) accords with the standard of taste of that context. (cf. Lasersohn 2005).

Seems to straightforwardly account for insensitive assessments
C. Contextualist accommodation of felicitous insensitive assessments (Almér&Björnsson)

S-ASSESSMENT / C-ASSESSMENT: When we assess utterances using various assessment phrases (“yes”, “no”, “that’s true”, we normally, barring confusion, misunderstanding, etc) assess the satisfaction of [their truth-conditions / the conditions that are made most salient by the utterances in the context of assessment].

(7) A: “I [wonder if / believe] that it is going to rain?”
(8) B: “No, it won’t, I just checked the forecast.”

- C-Assessment makes IA compatible with contextualism if the semanticists truth-conditions have a different theoretical basis than intuitive semantic assessments
- Makes room for exactly the evidence in favour of assessor relativism (trivially!)
- But why are those satisfaction conditions made salient by those very expressions?
- The assessor relativist has the very same problem!

6. Why would we have an assessor relative semantics in certain areas?

MacFarlane (2007): designed to foster controversy, affecting attitudes
- Might be the case for deontic modals and evaluative judgments
  - Seem to have practical conversational functions: advice, prescriptions, commands.
- Not clear that this holds for taste predicates
  - Not clear that this is a communicative purpose that reinforces use and brings conventionalization.
- Not clear that it holds for epistemic modals
  - Eavesdropping and retraction cases do not involve this feature. So: not operative in cases that support relativism over contextualism.
- Problem: relativism makes communication unintelligible
  - Conventionalized communication is typically a cooperative enterprise where both producer and consumer have something to gain. Relativism seems incompatible with this.
- Egan’s (2007) reply: Relativistic semantics possible in those areas because communication typically tends to take place between people with the same, or sufficiently similar, location relative to the assessor relative parameter
  - That just seems to suggest that in the cases that count, there is no pressure towards a relativistic semantics.

7. A new proposal: two pragmatic conditions

A. Cognitively and conversationally uninteresting to assess the satisfaction of the condition that the speaker was concerned with.
B. Cognitively and conversationally interesting to assess a neighbouring condition.

Can be satisfied for different reasons, as illustrated by:
- (7) & (8) Sensitive assessments possible!
- Taste: “Infallibility”, subjective expression. SA possible!
- Deontic modals: Less important vs. more important. SA possible!
- Epistemic modals: Cognitively insignificant; cognitively significant for planning.

Sensitive assessments possible!
- Conditionals: Cognitively insignificant; cognitively significant for hypothetical thinking

What are neighbouring conditions?
- Conditions the representation of which are already largely activated by the uptake of the utterance or representation of the thought.

8. A further, lexical, condition

Two questions:
A. Why are paradigmatic indexicals and some other context-dependent or perspective-dependent expressions different?
  - Personal pronouns, demonstratives, spatiotemporal adverbs, right/left
  - A: “I’m hungry.” B: * “No, I’m starving”

B. Why does explicit relativization block insensitive assessments?
  - A: “That’s good for Tottenham fans.” B: * “No, it is bad [for Arsenal fans].”
  - A: “That accords with my taste.” B: * “No, I don’t like it.”

Involve expressions with the dedicated linguistic function of causing identification the relevant value of the parameter. Keep the truth-conditions / proposition expressed salient in spite of the pragmatic pressures.

9. Assessor-relative semantics or assessor-relative pragmatics?

With C-ASSESSMENT and the pragmatic story in place, there is no need for a new semantics.