

Who shares that opinion? Testing effects of adjective valence and group diversity with predicates of personal taste

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Here are some of the aliens.

Exp 2: uniform aliens (otherwise like Exp 1)

Introduction

How do humans reason about the extent to which subjective opinions generalize to people other than the attitude-holder?

Predicates of personal taste (PPTs, e.g. *fun*, *frightening*) express a **social generalization** about people the speaker 'identifies with' (e.g. Moltmann'10, Pearson'13)

- What guides the perceived generalizability of opinions expressed with PPTs?

Egocentric projection

Our perception of others' opinions is egocentric

- Humans rely too much on their own opinions when making predictions about others
- *egocentric attribution* (Heider'58), *projection* (Holmes'68), *egocentric bias* (Epley et al.'04), *false consensus* (Ross et al.'77), etc

Valence in opinion generalization

In egocentric contexts, **valence (positive/negative)** matters

- People are more likely to over-attribute their own opinions to others when it comes to their own *likes* (positive attitudes) than their *dislikes* (negative ones; Gershoff et al. 2007).

We take egocentrism out of the equation

- By minimizing effects of egocentric bias => gain a clearer view of the factors that modulate the extent to which we interpret one person's opinion as shared by others.
- use subjective adjectives to investigate these issues & strive to inform theories of subjectivity

Semantics of subjective adjectives

Predicates of personal taste express an individual's subjective opinion (e.g. *fun*, *tasty*, *frightening*, *irritating*)

- linked to an attitude holder (Lasersohn 2005: 'judge'), by default the **1st-person speaker**
- Moltmann 2010 and Pearson 2013: Contrary to what is often assumed, PPTs **go beyond a 1st-person interpretation** (also Snyder 2013, Collins 2013 i.a.).

"PPTs such as *tasty* are used to make statements about whether something is tasty to people in general, based on first person experience" (Pearson 2013, italics added).

- Pearson: PPTs are used to make statements about individuals that the speaker *identifies with*
- *identify with* "is intended to model a notion of empathy."
- Pearson and Moltmann formalize the generalizing force of PPTs with a generic operator, but Lasersohn'05 opposes a *people-in-general* approach.

Research questions

When someone says "Rollercoasters are fun", to what extent is she making a statement about herself vs. other people as well?

Does an opinion's perceived generality (how many others share than opinion) depend on

- 1. PPT's valence (positive/negative)** (cf. social psychology)
 - In egocentric contexts, people over-project their positive opinions to others more than their negative opinions
 - See also Kaiser & Lee (2019) GLOW
- 2. extent to which group is perceived as uniform/diverse**
 - people generalize traits from one group member to other members more with *uniform* than *diverse* groups (e.g. Crawford et al. 2002).
- 3. linguistic context** (main clause, embedded under *think* / *find*)
 - Kaiser & Lee (2019, GLOW): opinions expressed as main clauses have higher perceived generalizability than ones embedded under *think/find* (see also Lee & Kaiser 2020 SuB)

Exp 1 and 2

We are visiting an alien planet. You overhear one of the aliens say: **Exp 1: n=42; Exp 2: n=36.**
30 targets (15 + 15 -) 51 fillers
Nonce words to avoid real-world biases

"I find harsts boring."

If we randomly select 100 aliens from this planet, how many of them do you think **share this alien's opinion** about harsts?

Exp 1: diverse aliens

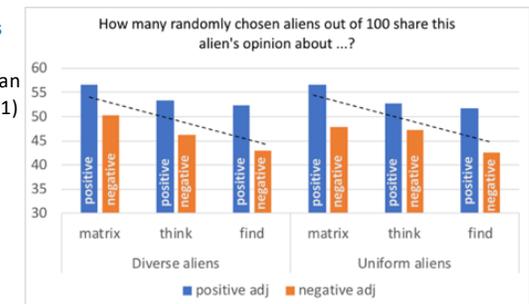


Here are some of the aliens.

Main clause	Embedded: <i>think</i>	Embedded: <i>find</i>
Hixes are fun.	I think hixes are fun.	I find hixes fun.

(We also manipulated tense and number, which is irrelevant here so conditions are collapsed.)

- #1. Valence: pos PPTs more generalizable than neg PPTs** ($p's < .01$)
- #2. No effect of group diversity** ($p's > 0.1$)
- #3 Linguistic context: main > think ≥ find**



- Even in non-egocentric contexts, **valence** guides perceived generalizability.
- Linguistic theories of PPTs do not predict a valence effect
- **an extra-linguistic effect**, linked to domain-general processing?
- Nevertheless relevant for theorizing, to avoid inaccurate conclusions
- Anchoring an opinion to an explicit attitude holder (*think/find*) decreases generalizability (see also Saebo 2009 on 'find')

Take-home: Evidence of valence guiding the generalizability of PPTs in *non-egocentric contexts*, but group uniformity does not in this context modulate perceived level of generality of subjective claims.