

Identity Display: another motive for metalinguistic disagreement

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1 Linguistic Autonomy

Two people metalinguistically disagree just in case they disagree about with which content a given word should be used (perhaps, in a particular context): one person believes that the content of the word should be one thing, another person believes that the content of the word should be another. They have this straightforward opposition in their beliefs.

Expression, and continued pursuit, of metalinguistic disagreements can seem inherently unmotivated. For one might assume (as some have (e.g. (Bloomfield, 1933), (Lewis, 1969) and (Stenius, 1967))), that nothing bears upon how you should use a given word other than how other users of the same word are using it. The only aim that matters for deciding with which content to use a given expression is communication, and communication requires only that different users assign the same content to the same expressions. Let's call this assumption "Linguistic Autonomy." Linguistic Autonomy implies that if there is no agreement amongst users of the word about with which content to use it, then there just is no fact of the matter about with which content the word should be used, and so no point debating the issue. Interlocutors should just agree on an arbitrary assignment of content and get back to communicating effectively. They should not enter an extended argument about with which content to use the word.

However, against Linguistic Autonomy, Plunkett and Sundell (2013), Plunkett and Sundell (forthcoming), Sundell (2016), and Sundell (2017) have provided compelling reason to believe that some metalinguistic disagreements are what they call "metalinguistic negotiations." Roughly speaking, in metalinguistic negotiations, participants are motivated to pursue a metalinguistic disagreement by the fact that one or more outcomes (about which they care) of a given practical activity will be different depending upon with which content a word is used. They pursue the disagreement in order to reach consensus on the outcomes.

The purpose of the current paper is to describe a further motivation (besides the drive to practically oriented consensus) for the pursuit of a metalinguistic dispute (section 3). The contents with which words are used are markers of the social identities of the persons using those words, and it is important to us that our social identities are seen and understood. Metalinguistic disagreement can function as a stage upon which to perform a contrast of social identities. This can make pursuit of metalinguistic disagreement both important and even enjoyable.

As we will see, the characteristic profile of those metalinguistic disputes that are driven by the motive of displaying one's identity can differ significantly from the profile of a metalinguistic negotiation (section 4). The difference between the motives for pursuing

metalinguistic disagreement expands the contextualist's arsenal against the relativist about the semantics of predicates of personal taste (section 5). Acknowledgement of identity display as a motive for pursuing metalinguistic disagreement also permits us to deal a second blow to Linguistic Autonomy (section 6).

2 Metalinguistic Negotiation

Before we turn to identity display, let's get clearly in view the phenomenon Plunkett and Sundell call "metalinguistic negotiation." Consider a context-sensitive predicate. It can be used to communicate that a given object has or doesn't have a given property—provided that interlocutors know how the context fixes the content of the predicate i.e. which property is its content in the context. But things can also go the other way. Given common knowledge of the properties possessed by the object spoken of, interlocutors can use the predicate to communicate about the context. Here's an example (cf. (Barker, 2013, pp. 243-245), (Plunkett & Sundell, 2013, pp. 13-14), (Sundell, 2011, pp. 278-279)). Suppose that you and I both know how tall John is. But you're new around here and you don't know what people consider to be tall around here. So I try to communicate to you information about what counts as tall around here using John, by saying, "John's tall." Given that you know what John's height is, you learn, from my utterance, that the threshold for qualifying as tall around here is lower than *that* (i.e. John's height).

Thus, with a context-sensitive expression applied to a given object, you can either use knowledge of the context to discern a property of the object, or you can use knowledge of the properties of the object to discern features of the context. The latter type of use of a context-sensitive expression is what Plunkett and Sundell call a "metalinguistic usage" of the expression. An exchange in which participants deploy metalinguistic usages of context-sensitive expressions, thereby expressing disagreement about with which content to use those expressions, is what they call a "metalinguistic dispute."

Plunkett and Sundell (cf. (Plunkett and Sundell 2013, 14–15), (Sundell 2011, 279) and (Sundell 2016, 803)) distinguish between two kinds of metalinguistic dispute. Firstly, there are what they call *descriptive* metalinguistic disputes. The interlocutors dispute what the features of the context are as a matter of fact. Secondly, there are what they call *normative* metalinguistic disputes. Regardless of whether there is an existing conventional usage for the context (Sundell 2016, 804, fn13), the interlocutors take different views on with what content an expression should be employed in the context. Plunkett and Sundell (cf. (Plunkett and Sundell 2013, section 4.1), (Sundell 2016, 812–13), (Sundell 2017, 94-98)) take a stand on just why it is that interlocutors are motivated to pursue disagreements about with which content an expression should be employed (thereby opposing Linguistic Autonomy). When a word is used in a given practice, then differences in the content associated with that word are likely to lead the practice to have different consequences. Assuming that the word, for instance, "torture" is embedded in laws governing the activities of soldiers and government agents, depending upon exactly which content is assigned to "torture" when applying those laws, we'll end up with different consequences for these soldiers and agents: in particular, whether such people will be incarcerated or otherwise punished. If one cares about such

consequences, then one will care about which content is assigned to the word in the practice. As Plunkett and Sundell put the point:

Given a certain social-historical setting—a setting in which certain words (largely independent of which specific concept they express) fill specific and important functional roles in our practices – participants might care a great deal (and genuinely substantive results could hang on) which concept/word pairings we employ in a given context. (Plunkett & Sundell, 2013, p. 20)

The aim of a metalinguistic disagreement about with which content an expression should be used—as is particularly salient in Sundell's (2016 sections, 3 & 4)—is to coordinate the use of an expression by two persons (i.e. to ensure that both users use it with the same content).

The phenomenon that Plunkett and Sundell call “metalinguistic negotiation” is then: metalinguistic disagreement about with which content a word should be used; which is pursued because the choice of content has practical consequences about which participants to the disagreement care; and finally, which is aimed at achieving consensus.¹

The phenomenon is not restricted to terms (like “torture”) that figure in legal texts. What’s required to set up the possibility of metalinguistic negotiation is that a sentence be used in a context whose outcome is contingent upon the truth of the sentence. In that case, differences to the content of the words in the sentence can affect its truth, and consequently that outcome. For instance, you’re making chilli con carne (Plunkett & Sundell, 2013, pp. 14-15). Comments about the level of chilli in the con carne will be used, in the course of cooking, to guide the amount of chilli in the con carne. The amount included has consequences about which those cooking care. A metalinguistic negotiation could well take place. But no legal texts need be in sight.

The existence of this breed of metalinguistic disagreement (embedded in such a motivational structure) is, thanks to Plunkett and Sundell, now quite uncontroversial. As I say, the current paper describes the contours of a rather different kind of metalinguistic disagreement (embedded in quite a different motivational structure).

3 Identity Display

Identity display through metalinguistic disagreement is a special case of giving off

¹ There are passages wherein Sundell shows a willingness to classify a broader range of circumstances under the label “metalinguistic negotiation.” See especially (Sundell, 2016, p. 805) and (Sundell, 2017). Nonetheless despite such passages, Sundell's focus on metalinguistic negotiation as described above is explicit, persistent and has clearly affected how his work is received. When he sets to work trying to convince his readers that language users can have intense motivations to argue the toss over how a bit of language is to be used, he repeatedly does so by belabouring differences in practical consequences that depend upon with which content that bit of language is used. Indeed, the choice of the word “negotiation” to describe what could motivate interlocutors to pursue a metalinguistic dispute focuses our attention squarely upon processes that are aimed at achieving consensus.

information through the way one performs an action in the presence of others. In order to make the nature of identity display more fully apparent, I first describe this more general phenomenon. I then describe how identity display can be done specifically through the use of polysemous or context-sensitive words in ways that parallel the general case. Finally, I explain why metalinguistic disagreement is an especially good conversational environment in which to do identity display through the use of polysemous or context-sensitive words.

3.1 Giving information and giving off information

We take ourselves to be certain kinds of person and the kinds of people there are to be are (to a great degree) distinguished not just by immutable traits of biology, brain and body-type, but by distinctive patterns of behaviour. Alluding to a study of conduct in 1940s USA (viz. (Komarovsky, 1946)), Erving Goffman, that great 'metaphysician of the banal' (Berger, 1986, p. xi), writes:

...when we observe a young American middle-class girl playing dumb for the benefit of her boy friend [sic], we are ready to point to items of guile and contrivance in her behaviour. But like herself and her boy friend [sic], we accept as an unperformed fact that this performer *is* a young American middle-class girl. But surely here we neglect the greater part of the performance. (Goffman, 1969, p. 81)

We don't have to be radical social constructivists in order to accept the importance of our conduct for our placement amongst social categories. Instead, just think for a moment about how one recognizes a person as a valley girl, a riot grrrl, a member of the nouveau riche, a rebel, a narcissist, a "dick", a creepy professor, a person "with an edge", a criminal, or indeed, an American middle-class girl—*not*, typically, by consulting government data. But instead, simply by registering the impressions created by the person through how he or she holds him or herself in particular situations.

Moreover, we care about our location amongst social categories. One cares about whether one is a rebel, a narcissist, a "dick" etc. But then, if we care about our location amongst these categories, and if membership of these categories is to a great degree a matter of conduct, then we have a strong motivation to regulate our conduct in such a way as to take control of our location amongst these categories. Borrowing a term from Hample and Irions (2015), I will call the management of the impressions we make upon others for the sake of controlling our location amongst social categories of persons "identity display."

How do we do identity display? Toward the beginning of his *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* Goffman draws the following distinction between two means by which an individual may communicate with those around him.

The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*. The first involves verbal symbols or their substitutes which he uses admittedly and solely to convey the information that he

and the others are known to attach to these symbols. This is communication in the traditional and narrow sense. The second involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way. (Goffman, 1969, p. 14)

When communication gets discussed by philosophers of language, the lion's share of discussion is about the first kind of 'sign activity': a particular action is performed with the intention of getting someone to form a particular belief by recognizing the intention. These are acts which have Grice's (1957) non-natural meaning. We, for instance, tell each other things. Needless to say, this method does not seem to be the predominant means by which others discern our location amongst social categories. The second kind of 'sign activity' is the wielding of Grice's natural meaning for the purposes of communication. This kind of thing does seem like the more likely candidate for the predominant way in which others discern which social categories we fall into. However, the very idea that one can exercise control over this second kind of 'sign activity' can seem a little paradoxical (as Goffman (1969, pp. 76-82, pp. 241-244) was wont to stress). It can seem this way because the presence of the wrong kind of intention destroys natural meaning (for discussion see (Moran, 2005) and (Ross, 1986)). For instance: the new secretary's repeated sniffing, the scratching of his nose, his abruptly improved mood, and the sudden absence of the sweats may well mean that his recent "bathroom break" included the snorting of cocaine—that he is a cocaine user. But if it turns out that these changes are all components of a concerted performance given to us specifically with the intention of getting us to believe that he has just snorted cocaine, then his actions do not mean he is a cocaine user. The secretary's actions can mean he is a cocaine user in the same way that the spots can mean measles (a case of Grice's (1957) natural meaning), but only if the actions haven't been done with the express intention of getting us to believe that he is a cocaine user. If those actions were performed with such an intention, then we have to engage in an assessment for which we would otherwise have no need: namely, of why he would want us to think he is a cocaine user.

Nonetheless, none of this means that actions cannot be performed with the intention of communicating the actions' natural meanings. Although that intention cannot be the overt intention with which one performs the actions, actions performed in ways that at least create the impression that they are being performed for *other* reasons can be performed with different (so to say) inflections, which affect the visibility of the natural meanings of the action performed: one can bring into focus (both in the sense of bringing to attention and of making less fuzzy) the actions performed, and consequently what those actions mean for one's location amongst social categories. These are ways of, in principle, *deliberately* doing identity display through the second kind of 'sign activity'. Borrowing from Goffman, I will now describe four of these ways.

First, what is done may be to some extent dramatized: i.e. given extra flourishes which make it more apparent what is taking place. For instance, Goffman (1969, p. 41) describes how a nurse doing rounds making observations of patients may seem to those around her to be

someone who is just having a chat—doing nothing medically important. The nurse may however exaggerate aspects of her examination in order to make it apparent that an examination is being performed, even though, strictly speaking, these exaggerations are not necessary to get the information that it is the purpose of the examination to retrieve.

Second, one may perform actions in a manner that fits the stereotypes and presumptions others have of you or your social kind in order not to distract and complicate the appearance of the action that one is performing—one makes one's action conform to the ideals of those watching it, so as not to raise questions, queries and distractions that take attention away from the action that one is performing. Here is another one of Goffman's examples. There is the 'ignorant, shiftless, happy-go-lucky manner' which African-Americans in the southern states of the U.S. in the past have 'felt obliged to affect during interaction with whites' (Goffman, 1969, p. 47). The idea being that if an African-American did not impute this into, for example, his buying of groceries, then it would disrupt the action of buying groceries in a store owned by a white man: to the white man it wouldn't look like an uncontroversial case of someone buying groceries. It would look like someone being confrontational. Although this would of course be a mistake on the part of the owner, if the African-American just wants to be seen as a man buying his groceries (nothing more, nothing less) without turning the exchange into a site of resistance, then he can conform to the stereotype to keep the exchange normal in the eyes of the owner.

Third, minor flaws which themselves do nothing to undermine the performance of an act *vis a vis* the achievement of a desired practical outcome, might nonetheless cause an audience to lose confidence in a given interpretation of what is taking place. For this reason, we seek as much as possible to avoid these minor flaws: an untucked shirt in a business meeting; a skirt stuck in a belt; a stutter; a mispronounced word; a stumble; a gesture that looks like something else etc. Such things don't necessarily make the doing of a given action worse (as measured by the achievement of a certain practical outcome), but if present, can thwart the clarity of the activity taking place by undermining confidence in a given interpretation of what is happening. We're aware of this, which is why doing something (e.g. building something, cooking something) can suddenly feel more stressful when someone who may well be sceptical about what is taking place begins to watch.

Fourth, impressions given off by actions done before others are often given off in virtue of *concerted* behaviour amongst several persons. One can make one's action obviously have the distinctive contours of a person buying a loaf of bread in a shop only if there is another person present discernibly doing the action of selling one the bread—otherwise it can begin to look like theft. This can have the effect that one is concerned with whom one is seen and their behaviour because the impression one creates will be in part a function of how others present their own actions. Suppose, for instance, that you sit in a bar attempting conversation about the politics of sex work, at one point citing a conversation you once had with a sex worker, which has informed your views about the selling of sex to this day. However, the impression that this is a political discussion is destroyed when your interlocutor begins expressing a prurient interest in the looks and services offered by the

aforementioned sex worker: “was she high class?” he asks loudly, a grin on his face. The conversation’s appearance now risks an inversion: looking like one between two “punters” comparing sex workers whose services they’re used to buying. The risks that others’ behaviour poses to the look of one’s own actions can require corrective measures (e.g. loud correction of the acquaintance with the prurient interest). It can even lead one to avoid being seen with persons who are liabilities in this respect.

All of these ways of inflecting one’s actions in the presence of others are tools for identity display because the actions one performs are the basis for others’ inferences about the kind of person one is, and the inflections affect the visibility and clarity of those actions.

3.2 Words, Criteria and Group Membership

Let’s turn our attention to our special case: the doing of identity display through how we use our words. Kate McFarland makes the following observation:

Speakers might identify as a member of a certain cultural heritage or subculture, or even as a person with certain idiosyncratic traits—and these facets of their identity can be reflected in the criteria by which they apply their words. (McFarland, 2015, p. 147)

The claim here is not that particular words are associated with particular identities—though a person’s capacity to switch dialect and register in order to promote one identity over another in different contexts inclines me to think that this is also true. The claim McFarland is rather making, and which we’re going to develop in what follows, is that when a word is context-sensitive or polysemous, and so permits use with one of several criteria, the choice of criterion adopted when using the word can mean that the user of the word falls within a given social category. I give four examples of such connections between word application criteria and social group membership.

Consider first a discussion by the sociologist (and student of Goffman) Harvey Sacks on what he calls the “revolutionary” category of the *hotrodder*. Hotrodders—as Sacks speaks of them—are persons from 1950s USA who modified their cars in various different, but observable, ways (for an overview of the sub-culture see (Balsley, 1950). If you’ve ever seen *American Graffiti* then you know what I’m talking about. While lecturing on the features of a transcript of a group of hotrodders in a counselling session that took place in the 1950s, Sacks (1992) proposes that the category hotrodder has the following features. It is such that members of the category have authority over who is a member of the category. This is because membership of the category requires that one knows how to assess car modifications in accordance with the standards of the hotrodder category:

The modification characteristics have some rather usual features for such kinds of categories, and that is, anybody can tell it’s a hotrod, but it is members who can tell if it’s a good one or a bad one, what rank it has, etc. (Sacks, 1992, p. 173)

Now if it's the case that what goes into deciding the rank of a hotrod is something that kids decide, then one can at least begin to see how it is that they're able to set up, and what are the kinds of things they would use to set up, machinery for social control over candidate members. That is, one is a member by recognition of others who are members. And thereby, to successfully get membership, you have to do what it is that they provide is the way to become a member. You don't ask your parents for permission, and then treat that as your entry card. Nor is it something you can do without a very considerable commitment. It is not something that you can do on an occasion, in any given apparatus. (Sacks, 1992, p. 174)

Suppose you engage in a conversation with hotrodders about the relative merits of different hotrods. If you use terms of assessment (e.g. "good") in application to the hotrods recognizably with criteria that are not the criteria that hotrodders use, then it will become apparent to the hotrodders present that you are not a hotrodder.

Consider, second, music categories. There are those who will insist that only a very narrow range of bands qualify as falling into the category industrial. Bands such as Nine Inch Nails do not qualify. But others might be quite happy to place Nine Inch Nails in the category industrial. Persons who differ in these ways fall into different social groups: "purists" and "non-purists", we might call them. Maintaining one's membership in the purist group comes with the need to deploy labels for denoting industrial music (in English "industrial") in a certain way (for discussion see McFarland (2015, p. 147)). Similar remarks apply to the use of labels of other music categories: black metal, prog and country. For each there is a musician or group (Dimmu Borgir, Styx, Taylor Swift) such that purists of the category will not count it as a member whereas those who are not purists, will be happy to count it as a member. Membership of the purist group is tied to the use of music category terms in appropriate ways. Again: walk into a conversation amongst a bunch of (English speaking) purists, and call Nine Inch Nails "industrial", and they'll know you're not a purist.

Third, consider the application of aesthetic predicates to food items. According to a popular conception of persons and food, what food one eats is related to the kind of person one is (e.g. Ahlgren, Gustafsson, & Hall, 2004), (Amiraian & Sobal, 2009), (Stein & Nemeroff, 1995), (Vartanian, Herman, & Polivy, 2007)). For this reason, terms of food classification can be used to indicate something about one's location amongst social categories. A person who insists on classifying ready-made meals and late-night kebabs as not tasty, may use "tasty" with a content on which those items really do not fall within the word's extension. She may do this, in part, to present herself as a healthy person. Yet, another person may use "tasty" with a content on which those items really do fall within the word's extension, in part, in an effort to project an easy-going and playful persona—a person who's not snooty about food.

Fourth, and finally, it has been documented that people change their interpretation of politically significant sentences depending upon both which groups they think agree with those sentences and whether or not those people identify with the groups in question. For example, speaking of previous work upon which they build by Asch ((1940), (1948)), Wood

et al. (1996) report the following example from Asch's work:

...Asch's (1940, 1948) Gestalt analysis, in which source groups do not directly impact recipients' attitudes but instead alter recipients' understanding of the object or issue under discussion. For example, when participants were informed that Karl Marx authored the statement "Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed two distinct classes," they were relatively unfavorable toward it (Asch, 1948), presumably because it was interpreted as communistic rhetoric, inciting rebellion and revolution. However, when respondents learned the true author was John Adams, they were more favorable, presumably because the statement then appeared to be part of capitalist ideology. Thus, "positions imputed to congenial groups produce changes in the meaning of the objects of judgment" (Asch, 1940, p.462). (Wood, Pool, & Purvis, 1996, p. 968)

What Asch found is not just that people reinterpret a sentence based upon their background knowledge of the group of people who say it. That would be unsurprising: if a sentence is ambiguous, but X said it, and people like X would probably mean p by uttering the sentence, then in all likelihood, X was saying that p. The point is rather that people are more likely to engage in reinterpretation if they don't want to affiliate with that group of people. Their desire to disaffiliate with the group motivates them to assign content to the sentence that allows them to disagree with it, and hence the group from which they want to disaffiliate. Pool et al. (1998) replicated Asch's finding for other sentences. For instance, "Economic prosperity in Texas is dependent on Mexico" could be understood to be a description of the purported fact that Texas exploits illegal migrant workers from Mexico, or it could be understood to be a description of the purported fact that there are trade agreements between Mexico and the US such as NAFTA. Interpreters would change their interpretation of the target sentence, depending upon both who they were told said it and whether or not their self-esteem was tied to distinguishing themselves from that group. This is indicative of another substantial connection between how people are willing to use words and where amongst social categories these people fall.

3.3 Identity Display using words with given contents

Let's put the observations of sections 3.1 and 3.2 together. Although, as we saw in section 3.2, the content with which one uses an expression can be used to place oneself in a given social category, the content with which one uses a given word may not be immediately apparent. Just as Goffman's nurse may have trouble making clear that she is engaged in an examination of a patient because the activity itself isn't inherently distinguishable from a mere chat, the application of "good hotrod", "country music", "dependent on Mexico", or "tasty" to an uncontroversial exemplar of the category may do very little to make recognizable that you're using the relevant expression with one content rather than another. However, the four techniques described in section 3.1 for inflecting an action to make its appearance unequivocal have application to the use of words with given contents.

Firstly, there are ways to make more apparent that one is using a word with one rather than

another content. One can find objects which clearly distinguish two possible contents of a given word and one can make clear which side of the extensional border one places the object. If one also makes clear that one is well informed about the properties of this object, then by applying the word (or a phrase with the word's complement as its extension) to this object, one makes most obvious with what content one is using the word. For instance, you prove that you are well acquainted with Taylor Swift's music by citing features of the music that only someone who has listened to it carefully could know yet, even so, you brazenly apply "country music" to it. Given your demonstrated knowledge of her music, your application unequivocally shows that you're using "country music" with a criterion that permits inclusion of Swift's music within the extension of "country music." Similarly, for a mere fenderless jalopy and "good hotrod", a late-night kebab and "tasty", and details of the damage that sudden removal of illegal Mexican migrants from Texas would have on the state's economy and "dependent on Mexico."

Secondly, one may, in speaking, conform to broader social norms and stereotypes, in order not to distract from a particular use one is making of the relevant expression. For instance, you may be really rather taken by your dad's very subtle adjustments to his own car. If those adjustments had been made by a teenager, the result would unproblematically be considered a good hotrod. But you may know hotrodders have biases against older persons—especially parents. So you don't ever apply the expression "good hotrod" to your dad's car, because it'll complicate how you're understood when you apply the expression to other cars. You may avoid even praising Nine Inch Nails (let alone classifying them as industrial) when in the company of purists, for fear that this will raise suspicions that when you use "industrial" you are employing a content that could encompass Nine Inch Nails.

Thirdly, in an obvious way, minor flaws in the application of a term may cast doubt upon whether one is really using a given expression with the particular content one wants to be seen to be applying the expression with. You have a momentary slip in classifying a car you didn't examine very carefully, but which definitely doesn't (even by your own lights) qualify as a good hotrod: you apply "good hotrod" to it. Although you quickly retract your claim, the damage may already have been done to others' confidence in your hotrodder status, because doubts have been raised about your ability to use terms with the aesthetic criteria characteristic of hotrodders.

Fourthly, whereas a conversation may provide an opportunity to use a given word with one's favoured content, some conversations are going to be structured in such a way as to afford more opportunities to demonstrate the word's use with one's favoured content than other conversations. Consider expressions of disagreement. Public disagreements (be they metalinguistic or not) are in any case a way of showing one's identity through a public defence of one's view—which itself is likely to locate one in some region of social space. As anthropologist Julie Lindquist notes in her study of argument in a Chicago bar, the expression of disagreements, which everyone knows there's no hope of ever resolving (e.g. (Lindquist, 2002, p. 153)), can nonetheless be used to act out differences. Thus:

In argument, Jack can persuade others (and himself) that he's not a supercilious egghead, like me; I can demonstrate that I'm not a small-minded reactionary, like him. (Lindquist, 2002, p. 172)

One can show who one is through a method of contrast using disagreement. When the disagreement is on a matter which permits repeated applications of a given word, as well as the explicit drawing of inferences which display the truth-conditional content of the word as one is using it, disagreement can be an especially good conversational genre for identity display through the criteria with which one uses one's words.

There are three identities that may be displayed through expression of disagreement (and consequently through expression of metalinguistic disagreement), the expression of each of which may serve as a motive for extended expression of the disagreement. Firstly, and most obviously, one may pursue the disagreement to show something about oneself. One does that by taking opportunities in the disagreement to make recognizable one's use of a word with a content that is an indicator of given group memberships. Secondly, one may also pursue the disagreement to give someone else a chance—wittingly or not—to showcase aspects of their identity. For example, a person may wish to showcase that a man eager to be seen as a feminist ally through his insistence that sexual harassment and sexual assault are common yet widely unacknowledged, has nonetheless repeatedly 'denied, minimized, trivialized, eroticized, or excepted as marginal or episodic' (MacKinnon, 1989, pp. 5-6) on all such events: i.e. he tends to use the words "sexual harassment" and "sexual assault" with contents that are gerrymandered to ensure that most events he ever explicitly considers fail to fall squarely within their extension. You want others to see—what you have known for a while, but others have refused to acknowledge—that this self-professed feminist is problematic. You may thereby use metalinguistic disagreement as the rope with which he may hang himself. Thirdly, there may be an identity that all parties to a disagreement have in common and which would be displayed in having the disagreement. The having of the disagreement may be a way of performing that shared identity. This too may motivate metalinguistic disagreement. Two young men sit in a student union bar attempting to leave the impression on others in the bar that, let's say, they are promising philosophers of the future. They may do this by together pursuing a metalinguistic disagreement that showcases their ability to make fine rhetorically compelling distinctions, to not get sucked into the slanted terms of his opponent, etc.

4 Five features of expressions of metalinguistic disagreement motivated by identity-display

Now we have a clear idea of what the use of metalinguistic disagreement to display identity is, let's take a step back, and note five features of such disagreements. In the process, we will see some significant differences between them and metalinguistic negotiation.

First, and most obviously, these disagreements are not aimed at consensus. Consequently, expressions of metalinguistic disagreement can be satisfying and fulfil their purpose if motivated by identity display even if everyone knows consensus is not in the offing. This

contrasts with metalinguistic negotiations. Since the aim of such negotiations is consensus, if consensus is known to be unlikely, the expression of this kind of metalinguistic disagreement is with little point.

Second, recall that, as we noted earlier, the lion's share of philosophers' talk about communication focuses upon acts performed with the express intention of getting the audience to do something by recognizing this very intention. Saying, just as much as implicating, something are commonly supposed to be linguistic acts of this kind. In recent work, speech acts which communicate metalinguistic information have been taken to communicate that information in just this way. Although Plunkett and Sundell (2013, pp. 15, fn42) remain officially neutral on the precise mechanisms by which metalinguistic information is communicated, their concern is with acts of advocacy performed by using words with given contents (*ibid*). If one uses a word with a given content with the intention of advocating its usage, recognition of this intention must surely be part of what is required for the act of advocacy to succeed: otherwise the use is just a use, left for observers to make of it what they will. Two other philosophers whose recent work is about metalinguistic acts are entirely explicit in their assumption that the actions they describe require recognition of a communicative intention in order to be successful. Firstly, Hansen (forthcoming, p. 2) defines a metalinguistic proposal as a special case of an advisory speech act: a speech act which expresses 'the belief that doing some action is a good idea, that it is in the hearer's interest' and the speaker's 'intention that H [the hearer] take this belief of [the speaker's] as a reason to act'. The speaker's intention in uttering the sentence that underlies the act's performance is thus supposed to be recognized. Secondly, Sterken (2019) describes the intentional use of a word with a meaning one wants the word to be used with, knowing that in the context of the conversation one's use may well not get recognized. Nonetheless, the act of interest to Sterken involves what she calls a 'diachronic communicative intention': an intention that the use, and its point, get recognized, even if only after the close of the conversation in which the act is performed.

All of this contrasts with the activity of displaying one's identity through the use of a word with a given content. Identity display doesn't work by getting others to recognize one's intention to get them to believe one has a certain identity. On the contrary, as we discussed in section 3.1, recognition of that intention is likely to *damage* the effectiveness with which one communicates that one has the relevant identity. For most acts which constitute the performing of an identity, it must at least look as though they are being performed in pursuit of some other purpose besides displaying the identity—namely, for a purpose that someone with that identity would have. Identity display—although something one can do through metalinguistic disagreement—is very much a kind of action that philosophers of language have historically neglected.

Third, identity display need not be deliberate. There are plenty of skilful actions, which we perform unthinkingly. Think for instance, of the distance one maintains from others in an elevator (Rietveld, 2008). If the elevator is spacious, and there's but one other person inside it, you neither stand so close that you're touching that person nor pressure yourself into the

corner of the elevator as you might were it crammed full of people. You may think through exactly where to stand, and so stand where you do deliberately. But in many cases you won't. Your conscious mind will be on something else. And if someone asked you what you were doing, you probably would not say (without further questioning) that you were maintaining appropriate distance from the other person in the elevator: your answer would pertain to taking the elevator to floor X, or to your goal in taking the elevator to floor X. Nonetheless, where you stand in the elevator is a (social) skill. If you do stand too close, or too far, you will make an impression that is perhaps not what you want: creepy, weird, odd. Which is precisely why there are times when some of us are prone to overthink these normally unthinking acts. The use of a word with a given content is similar. As we navigate the use of context-sensitive and polysemous words in different contexts, for the most part, we aren't deliberating about which are the best contents to use with such words. We rather adapt our uses unthinkingly. Of course, there are moments when we do explicitly deliberate about this. But they are the exceptions that prove the rule. One may well be motivated to adopt unthinkingly certain word-content pairings by the impressions one thereby makes, because one is skilled at doing so: just as one may be motivated to stand where one does in the elevator because of the impressions one makes on others, even if one is so skilled at this that most of the time one doesn't think about how to do it.

Fourth, one doesn't *need* an audience in order to engage in identity display through how one pairs contents with words (Goffman, 1969, p. 87). If it's important to one to be a gentleman, then one may well maintain the patterns of conduct of a gentleman even when no one's watching. There's nothing paradoxical about that. And the same applies to the use of words with given contents. If a hotrodder is on his own thinking about cars, he nonetheless has ample reason, given his commitment to that identity, to use terms of assessment in the hotrodder way.

Fifth, of course, situations can arise in which a person is driven in the content with which they use a word by both practical/consequentialist and identity display motives. In some circumstances those motives may collide: e.g. you are met with the practical challenge of directing a friend to the aisle where they can find the Nine Inch Nails records (the industrial section), and at the same time, maintaining your purist credentials, which dictate that you don't classify Nine Inch Nails as industrial. But alternatively, they may dovetail: as would happen if you were met with the same situation, but you're no purist. One should expect there to be a spectrum of contexts ranging from the purely practical to pure identity display cases, and one would expect that most real contexts fall in the middle of this spectrum. For instance, in Fine's (1992) detailed study of the factors guiding restaurant-working chefs' aesthetic judgements about the meals they compose, the motivating factors were a mixture of existential concerns about artisan identity and other concerns about profit making (pleasing the client).

5 A Response to An Objection to the Contextualist

On the contextualist analysis of the semantics of predicates of personal taste, the content of the predicate may be different for different participants to a disagreement. The notorious

explanatory challenge contextualists then face is how it is that a state of disagreement can be being expressed when each party to the purported disagreement is using the same word with a different content: as when, for instance, A says, “Paul Foot is hilarious” and B responds, “No, Paul Foot is not hilarious”, each using “hilarious” with a different content. One explanatory strategy that has been pursued by Plunkett and Sundell now for several years is to propose that in cases where disagreements are definitely present while the content of, for instance, “hilarious” diverges between participants, we are witnessing a metalinguistic negotiation.

One objection to this explanatory strategy has been the possibility of disagreements on matters of personal taste wherein the accoutrements of metalinguistic negotiation are absent: there is no broader activity whose outcome is importantly dependent upon the choice of content for a word in the current exchange (see (Marques, 2017), (Zeman, 2016) and (Zeman, 2017)). It is perfectly possible to apply aesthetic adjectives like “beautiful” to an object without at all being aware of any features of a conversational context that could introduce momentous consequences to some practical outcome about which one cares. It’s possible for one person to express her judgement that a statue is beautiful, while another person expresses her judgement that a statue is not beautiful, and for the two to be in a state of disagreement about whether the statue is beautiful without either being aware of any (further) conversational context, and consequently without there being need of any practical consequences which hinge upon with which content precisely “beautiful” is used (nor correspondingly, upon which content appears in the judgements these persons hold).

This objection does not (successfully) target Plunkett and Sundell’s account of the state of disagreement in the cases of interest: viz. that it is metalinguistic (for Plunkett and Sundell’s response to just such an objection see (Plunkett & Sundell, forthcoming)). For the absence of conversational context in no way implies that persons cannot disagree about with which content the word “beautiful” should be employed. If the objection (successfully) targets anything, it’s the motivation for expressing and pursuing such a disagreement. It draws attention to circumstances in which the stuff that, according to Plunkett and Sundell, makes expression and pursuit of metalinguistic disagreement a reasonable thing to do, is absent.

However, if we acknowledge identity display as a motive for expression of metalinguistic disagreement, and recall that the active presence of such a motive does not need the accoutrements of metalinguistic negotiation, then the objection loses whatever teeth it had. For the objection to continue to be compelling, despite the constant possibility of identity display, one would need not just to point to contexts in which disagreement is witnessed in the absence of any broader practical activity of the right kind, but to contexts in which persons are not driven by a desire to display, or a habit of displaying, their identities. Given that we are all so very human in this respect, that kind of context seems like it’ll be a hard thing to find—especially given that, as we noted in section 4, identity display requires neither deliberation nor an audience.

6 Another blow against Linguistic Autonomy

Recall what I earlier referred to as Linguistic Autonomy: nothing bears upon how you should use a given word other than how other users of the same word are using it. Language users are practical agents, guided by reasons and habit. Setting aside limitations of performance, we are to imagine that the only factors that guide these practical agents in the use they make of expressions from their shared language is how other members of the same linguistic community are using those expressions. Plunkett and Sundell have already dealt one blow against Linguistic Autonomy. The practical consequences that word-content assignments will have in a context can be reasons for or against particular word-content assignments, reasons which are not just a matter of what assignments others in the community are adopting.

We can now deal Linguistic Autonomy a second blow. For the deployment of certain contents rather than others is a way of locating oneself amongst social categories. Persons concerned about their location in social space will be motivated to prefer certain word-assignment combinations over others. Just as with the practical consequences of word-content assignments in a context, this can lead different members of the same linguistic community to fiercely diverge in their assignments of contents to given words—and not just in how they themselves want their own words to be understood, but in how they understand others' words. Recall, for instance, the findings by Asch ((1940), (1948)), Pool et al. (1998) and Wood et al. (1996) reported in section 3.2: if my self-esteem will drop if I find out that I agree with members of a group from which I strongly disaffiliate, then in defence of my self-esteem, if I find a sentence with which members of this group agree, I am likely to unthinkingly seek out interpretations of the sentence that allow me to more easily disagree with it.

If identity display is a perennial concern for language users, then failures of linguistic autonomy are the norm. And if that's right, it is then quite possible that we are *normally* faced with circumstances in which we are motivated to diverge in the criteria with which we use (including, in how we interpret others' uses of) the words of a shared language. Despite it not being conducive to successful overt communication, speakers might *normally* face motivation to (seemingly) wilfully misunderstand one another (Pohlhaus, 2012). A theory of overt communication would then have to describe what needs to be in place in order to avoid this kind of predicament not as a marginal phenomenon, but as something central. Most appeals to theories of overt communication do not proceed in such a manner (e.g. (Carston, 2002), (Neale, 2005), (Predelli, 2010), (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), (Stanley, 2007)). Their communication takes place in a social vacuum. But if linguistic autonomy is false, perhaps that should change.

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