

Relativism, taste discourse, and retraction data: a reassessment

Jeremy Wyatt and Joe Ulatowski



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato



KO TE TANGATA
FOR THE PEOPLE

The PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Discourse involving *predicates of personal taste (PPT)*—e.g. ‘delicious,’ ‘disgusting,’ ‘fun,’ and ‘cool’—has been a focal point in a large, interdisciplinary body of research over the past 20 years
- This research has shown that PPT are connected to numerous topics, including: disagreement, meaning, context-sensitivity, subjectivity/objectivity, truth, aesthetic/gustatory taste, evaluation, speech acts, etc.

The PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Researchers involved in the PPT debates have developed many subtle and inventive analyses of PPT
- Despite the massive amount of work on the topic, a *methodological* question about PPT remains underexplored
 - *The question:* What sorts of evidence should be used in evaluating an analysis of PPT?

The PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- So far, most researchers have operated from the armchair, using their own intuitions about various linguistic phenomena to evaluate analyses of PPT
- However: certain philosophers and linguists have recently found this method wanting, noting that hypotheses about PPT are *empirical*, and thus need to be evaluated empirically

The PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato



Plan for the talk



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- In this talk, I'll focus on one important empirical diagnostic, which involves *retraction*
- After rehearsing the major analyses of PPT, I'll turn to a foundational question about retraction: why are retraction data significant within the PPT debates?
- John MacFarlane offers the most popular response to this question, but I'll argue that MacFarlane's response is problematic and propose a better one
- To close, I'll draw on this improved understanding of the significance of retraction data in reviewing the extant data on retraction and PPT

Analyses of PPT



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- At present, there are five major analyses of PPT
 - Some of these come in different varieties, and it may be possible to combine some of them
 - However: I'll focus only on the most basic versions of the analyses
- To distinguish these views, we can consider the responses that they deliver to two central questions:
 - What sort of *content* does an assertion involving a PPT have?
 - For what sort of *truth* (if any) are such assertions apt?

Analyses of PPT



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- An illustrative case:

Maria is visiting Australia and wants to sample some local foods. She's heard that many Australians like to eat something called 'Vegemite' by spreading it on toast. Maria buys some Vegemite, spreads it on a piece of toast, and takes a bite. She is immediately repulsed, finding Vegemite's flavour far too salty and yeasty. Expelling the toast from her mouth, Maria says:

(1) Vegemite is disgusting! (How could anyone like it?)



Analyses of PPT: indexical contextualism



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Maria assertively uses the sentence ‘Vegemite is disgusting’ at a context of use c , and we’ll take ‘(1)’ to stand for this assertive use
- *Indexical contextualism* about PPT (*IC*) entails that (1)’s content is the *relativised proposition* \langle Vegemite’s flavour is displeasing to Maria’s tastes at c
 - This proposition is relativised in the sense that it refers specifically to Maria’s tastes at c
- IC also entails that this proposition is either *absolutely true* or *absolutely false*—i.e. simply true or false, rather than true or false, relative to something like a taste or a standard of taste
 - Specifically: IC entails that \langle Vegemite’s flavour is displeasing to Maria’s tastes at c is true iff Vegemite’s flavour is displeasing to Maria’s tastes at c

Analyses of PPT: non-indexical contextualism



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- By contrast: *non-indexical contextualism* about PPT (*NIC*) entails that (1)'s content is the *absolute proposition* ⟨Vegemite is disgusting⟩
 - This proposition is absolute in the sense that it doesn't refer to any particular taste, taster, or group thereof

Analyses of PPT: non-indexical contextualism



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- NIC also entails that this proposition should be evaluated for truth or falsity *relative* to Maria's tastes
 - The initial idea is that we can think of (1)'s *context of use* c as containing a parameter that encodes Maria's tastes at the time of c
 - The non-indexical contextualist takes the *circumstance of evaluation* e for (1)'s content—the tuple of parameters relative to which its truth-value is determined—to be *the circumstance of the context*
 - In this case: that means that $e = c$
 - Accordingly, the non-indexical contextualist holds that when determining the truth-value of (1)'s content, we must consider whether this proposition is true, relative to Maria's tastes at c/e
 - This means that: $\langle \text{Vegemite is disgusting} \rangle$ is true, relative to Maria's tastes at c/e iff Vegemite's flavour is displeasing to Maria's tastes at c/e

Analyses of PPT: assessment-relativism



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Like NIC, *assessment-relativism* about PPT (*AR*) takes (1)'s content to be ⟨Vegemite is disgusting⟩
- Regarding this proposition's truth-value, *AR* is also fairly similar to *NIC*
 - Like the non-indexical contextualist, the assessment-relativist holds that (1)'s content is apt only for relative, rather than absolute, truth
 - The key difference between *NIC* and *AR* has to do with how the circumstance of evaluation for (1)'s content is determined

Analyses of PPT: assessment-relativism



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- According to the assessment-relativist, no possible circumstance of evaluation for (1)'s content is privileged, over and above any other
- Rather: AR entails that (1)'s content can be evaluated from indefinitely many *contexts of assessment*, each of which includes a parameter that encodes the tastes of the agent of that context of assessment

Analyses of PPT: assessment-relativism



- Moreover: AR entails that each context of assessment a determines a circumstance of evaluation e for (1)'s content
 - So for instance: if Nathaniel likes Vegemite's flavour and he is the agent of context of assessment a , then we should say that (1)'s content is false, relative to the circumstance e_a that is determined by a
 - By contrast, if Maria is the agent of context of assessment a^* , then we should say that (1)'s content is true, relative to the circumstance e_{a^*} that is determined by a^*
- In short: NIC entails that (1)'s content has exactly one circumstance of evaluation—the circumstance of the context—whereas AR entails that (1)'s content has indefinitely many circumstances of evaluation

Analyses of PPT: absolutism



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- The fourth major analysis of PPT is *absolutism*
- Like NIC and AR, absolutism also entails that (1)'s content is $\langle \text{Vegemite is disgusting} \rangle$
- However: absolutism aligns with IC concerning the truth-value of this proposition, entailing that it is either absolutely true or absolutely false
- Thus, according to absolutism:
 - If Vegemite is in fact disgusting, then (1)'s content is true
 - If Vegemite is in fact not disgusting, then (1)'s content is false



Analyses of PPT: expressivism

- The final major analysis of PPT is *expressivism*
- The simplest version of expressivism has it that we use unembedded, subject-predicate indicative sentences containing PPT to express our *conative attitudes*, e.g. our preferences, desires, likes, and dislikes
 - Accordingly: expressivism entails that (1)'s content isn't a proposition, but is rather a conative attitude—say, Maria's preference to not experience Vegemite's flavour, rather than experiencing its flavour, other things being equal
- Given that conative attitudes aren't truth-apt, the expressivist maintains that (1)'s content isn't truth-apt, though it may be evaluable in other terms, e.g. as rational or irrational

Analyses of PPT: summary



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Analysis of PPT	Content of assertion involving PPT	Truth-value of assertion involving PPT
<i>Indexical contextualism</i>	Relativised proposition	Absolute
<i>Non-indexical contextualism</i>	Absolute proposition	Relative to circumstance of context of use
<i>Assessment-relativism</i>	Absolute proposition	Relative to circumstances determined by contexts of assessment
<i>Absolutism</i>	Absolute proposition	Absolute
<i>Expressivism</i>	Conative attitude	N/A

MacFarlane on retraction



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- *A pressing question:* how can we empirically differentiate these analyses of PPT?
- Focusing on AR and NIC, John MacFarlane has argued that we can do this using considerations involving *retraction*



MacFarlane on retraction



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- MacFarlane’s core argument runs basically as follows (2014, pp. 114-115):

“[W]e [can] make sense of the distinction between an assessment-sensitive and an assessment-invariant theory that [agree] on the intensions of propositions only by considering norms for retraction (or commitments to retract). Retraction [is] the key to making sense of assessment sensitivity, because in retraction there are always two significant contexts: the context in which the retraction is being considered and the context in which the assertion whose retraction is being contemplated was made. This gives both the context of assessment and the context of use a job to do in a norm for retraction.”



MacFarlane on retraction



- It is particularly useful to consider *taste shift cases* here, which have the following trajectory:
 - An individual A enjoys/doesn't enjoy the flavour of a particular (kind of) food or drink f at time t_1
 - A makes an assertion at t_1 that they know to be caused (in part) by their enjoyment/non-enjoyment of f 's flavour
 - If A enjoys f 's flavour at t_1 , then they assertively utter the sentence ' F is delicious/tasty,' knowing that this assertion was caused (in part) by their enjoyment of f 's flavour
 - If they don't enjoy f 's flavour at t_1 , then they assertively utter the sentence ' F is not delicious/tasty,' knowing that this assertion was caused (in part) by their non-enjoyment of f 's flavour
 - At a later time t_2 , A doesn't enjoy/enjoys f 's flavour
 - Both the shift in A 's tastes and the fact that they made the relevant assertion at t_1 are brought to their attention at t_2

MacFarlane on retraction



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- MacFarlane's hypothesis about taste shift cases is:
 - (MH) When presented with a taste shift case, ordinary, competent speakers will tend to agree that A is required to retract at t_2 the assertion that they made at t_1

MacFarlane on retraction



- He argues that the non-indexical contextualist can't explain why (MH) is true
 - Consider, for instance, a taste shift case in which A enjoys f 's flavour at t_1
 - NIC entails that at t_1 , A asserts $\langle f \text{ is delicious} \rangle$, which is true, relative to the circumstance e that is determined by the assertion's context of use c
 - As a competent speaker, A should know this proposition's truth-value
 - Accordingly: when A recognises at t_2 that their tastes have changed and that they made this assertion at t_1 , it seems that A has no reason to retract
 - As a result: NIC looks to entail that in a taste shift case, A isn't required to retract

MacFarlane on retraction



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- By contrast: MacFarlane takes the assessment-relativist to have a ready explanation for why (MH) is true
- The explanation involves the Retraction Rule (ibid., p. 108; cp. 2005, p. 320), a norm which MacFarlane takes to be operative over our discourse about taste
 - *Retraction Rule (RR)*: An agent in context c_2 is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of p made at c_1 if p is not true as used at c_1 and assessed from c_2

MacFarlane on retraction



- Using the running taste shift case, the idea is that at t_2 , A shifts from enjoying f 's flavour to not enjoying f 's flavour
- This means that $\langle f$ is delicious \rangle , which A asserted at t_1 , is false, as assessed from A 's context of assessment a at t_2
- RR thus entails that at t_2 , A is required to retract their assertion
- Given AR and RR: ordinary, competent speakers should be aware of these facts—which suggests that when coupled with RR, AR delivers a straightforward explanation for why (MH) is true
- We can call this argument for AR the *retraction argument*

Two problems with the retraction argument



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Despite its initial pull, I think that the retraction argument is problematic in at least two respects
 - i. It is *incomplete*: it fails to consider how retraction data bear on all of the major analyses of PPT
 - ii. It is *inaccurate*: MacFarlane is incorrect in claiming that retraction data can provide a reason for favouring AR over NIC
- To spell out these problems, we first need to consider a foundational question: what is retraction?

What is retraction?



- Retraction is standardly taken to be a kind of speech act—namely, a speech act wherein one ‘takes back’ a prior speech act (Caponetto (2020, pp. 2408, 2413), Ferrari (2016, p. 521), Ferrari and Zeman (2014, §§ 2.4, 3-5), Knobe and Yalcin (2014, p. 17), Krabbe (2001, p. 142), Kukla and Steinberg (2021, § 2), MacFarlane (2011a, p. 148, 2011b, pp. 83-84, 91, 2014, p. 108), Marques (2018, p. 3356), Rescorla (2009, p. 100), Rudolph (2020, p. 198), Santos (2017, p. 77), and Vermaire (2020, § 3))
- In particular: the retraction of an assertion consists in scratching the deontic updates that it generated from the communicative scoreboard
 - The initial idea here is that when one performs an assertion, one makes certain commitments that are, as it were, recorded on the communicative scoreboard (cp. Brandom (1983, p. 646, 1994, ch. 3), Krabbe (2001, p. 142), Lewis (1979), Kukla and Steinberg (2021, p. 238))
 - In making these commitments: one incurs an *illocutionary/ discursive obligation* to honour them unless one relinquishes the commitments via retraction

What is retraction?



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- To illustrate, consider the following taste shift case (Kneer (2021, § 2.1); cp. MacFarlane (2014, pp. 109-110)):

John is five years old and loves fish sticks. One day he says to his sister Sally: ‘Fish sticks are delicious.’ Twenty years later his taste regarding fish sticks has changed. Sally asks him whether he still likes fish sticks and John says he doesn’t anymore.



What is retraction?



- Following MacFarlane, we can take five-year-old John to have made the following commitment in assertively uttering ‘Fish sticks are delicious’ (cp. MacFarlane (2003, p. 334-336, 2005, pp. 317-322, 2007, pp. 28-29, 2011b, § 4)):
 - The commitment to provide adequate reasons, if appropriately asked to do so, for believing that the proposition that he asserted is true/that it was correct for him to express the attitude that he expressed
 - Call this the *justification commitment*
 - *Note:* This commitment is *pro tanto*
- If twenty-five-year-old John retracted, he would thereby relinquish this commitment and would no longer be required to honour it

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- With this basic understanding of retraction in hand, we can consider how retraction data bear on AR, NIC, and the other analyses of PPT
- There are two relevant hypotheses about retraction here:
 - (Permissible) When presented with a taste shift case, ordinary, competent speakers will tend to agree that it is permissible for A to refrain from retracting at t_2 the assertion that they made at t_1
 - (Required)/(MH) When presented with a taste shift case, ordinary, competent speakers will tend to agree that A is required to retract at t_2 the assertion that they made at t_1
- Suppose that our studies turn out to confirm (Permissible) and to disconfirm (Required)—would this be good or bad news for the various analyses of PPT?

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- It would certainly be good news for IC
 - Focusing on the fish stick case, call five-year-old John *Young John* and call twenty-five-year-old John *Old John*
 - Given IC: Old John knows that he asserted a true proposition
 - Also, given IC: ordinary, competent speakers should know (implicitly) that Old John has this knowledge
 - Accordingly: indexical contextualism entails (Permissible)

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Non-indexical contextualists should endorse (Permissible) for similar reasons, as MacFarlane correctly indicates in the retraction argument
 - Given NIC: Old John knows that he asserted a proposition that is true, relative to the circumstance of the context of his assertion
 - Also, given NIC: ordinary, competent speakers should know (implicitly) that Old John has this knowledge
 - Accordingly: non-indexical contextualism entails (Permissible)

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Expressivists should likewise endorse (Permissible), though for somewhat different reasons
 - Given expressivism: Old John knows that he expressed a pro-attitude towards the flavour of fish sticks and that he was justified in doing so
 - Also, given expressivism: ordinary, competent speakers should know (implicitly) that Old John has this knowledge
 - Accordingly: expressivism entails (Permissible)

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Absolutists, on the other hand, should reject (Permissible) in favour of (Required)
 - Given absolutism: Young John commits himself to providing adequate reasons to believe that ⟨fish sticks are delicious⟩ is true
 - Also, given absolutism: Old John believes that ⟨fish sticks are delicious⟩ is false
 - Accordingly: Old John (implicitly) believes that there *aren't* adequate reasons to believe that ⟨fish sticks are delicious⟩ is true
 - For this reason: Old John should retract his prior assertion, thereby relinquishing his prior commitment
 - Moreover, given absolutism: ordinary, competent speakers should know (implicitly) these facts about Old John
 - Accordingly: absolutism entails (Required)

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- In light of MacFarlane's retraction argument, assessment-relativism is the trickiest case here
- Contra MacFarlane, I suggest that the assessment-relativist should endorse (Permissible), rather than (Required)
 - My argument for this suggestion is basically that the construal of the justification commitment that the assessment-relativist should adopt commits them to (Permissible)

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- In spelling out the justification commitment, the assessment-relativist has two basic options (let p be a taste-related proposition like ⟨fish sticks are delicious⟩):
 - *Use-centric justification commitment (UC)*: In asserting p at context of use c , A makes a commitment to provide adequate reasons, if appropriately asked to do so, for believing that p is true, as assessed from c
 - *Assessment-centric justification commitment (AC)*: In asserting p at context of use c , A makes a commitment to provide adequate reasons, if appropriately asked to do so, for believing that p is true, as assessed from any present or future context of assessment a whose agent is A

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- The assessment-relativist has a strong reason to endorse (UC), rather than (AC)
 - The reason: given a plausible background assertoric norm, (AC) generates a counterintuitive entailment
- The background assertoric norm:
 - *Commitment norm (CN)*: If at time t , A (implicitly) knows that A probably cannot fulfil all of the commitments that A would make were A to assert p at t , then it is impermissible for A to assert p at t

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- To see the plausibility of (CN), consider:
 - A case in which A knows that they probably can't provide adequate reasons to believe that p is true, as they lack requisite background knowledge and can't easily acquire it (e.g. p is a proposition about classical mereology and A has never heard of classical mereology)
 - A case in which A knows that p is false (e.g. $p = \langle$ the Moon's surface contains many active volcanoes \rangle)
- In both of these cases, it would be impermissible for A to assert p , and (CN) neatly explains why this is so
 - In both cases: A knows that if they asserted p and were then appropriately asked to provide reasons for believing that p is true, then they probably would be unable to do so

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- It is easy to see that when combined with (CN), (AC) entails that many ordinary taste-related assertions which seem permissible are in fact impermissible
- A relevant phenomenon: *age-related taste loss*
 - That we experience age-related taste loss is common knowledge
 - Age-related taste loss has also been extensively studied by scientists working on taste—a recent meta-analysis by Methven, et. al. (2012, p. 557) indicates that “[age-related] thresholds for salt and sour tastants increase in more than 80% of studies.”

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Consider the following case involving age-related taste loss:

Paul is 20 years old. Early one morning, Paul baked some bagels. He brought them to his 80-year-old grandfather Harold, who lives in an assisted living facility, so that Harold and his friends could enjoy them. Paul made sure to add extra salt on top of the bagels, as he knew that Harold and his friends, like many elderly people, have trouble detecting salt in food. Paul then went to lunch with his girlfriend Tanya. Paul and Tanya enjoy fast food, so they talked about whether to have lunch at Burger King or McDonald's. Paul said to Tanya, 'I think we should eat at Burger King. Their burgers aren't as good, but McDonald's fries are really salty!' As a matter of fact, Paul finds McDonald's fries really salty.



Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- It seems clear that given his current tastes, it is permissible for Paul to make the assertion that he does
- However: (CN) and (AC) jointly entail that Paul's assertion is impermissible
 - (AC) entails that in assertively using 'McDonald's fries are really salty,' Paul makes a commitment to provide reasons, if appropriately asked to do so, for believing that \langle McDonald's fries are really salty \rangle is true, as assessed from any present or future context of assessment a whose agent is Paul
 - Since Paul knows that at some point, he will probably have trouble detecting salt in food, he knows (implicitly) that he probably cannot fulfil this commitment
 - For this reason: (CN) entails that Paul's assertion is impermissible

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- We could construct many other cases like this one, which indicates that given (CN), the assessment-relativist should reject (AC)
- By contrast: when combined with (CN), (UC) clearly avoids (AC)'s counterintuitive consequences
 - In particular: it doesn't entail that Paul's assertion is impermissible
- This constitutes a strong reason for the assessment-relativist to endorse (UC)

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- How do these considerations bear on the assessment-relativist's choice of (Permissible) or (Required)?
- Returning to the fish stick case: an assessment-relativist who endorses (UC) will take Young John, who is the agent of the context of use c , to make the following commitment:
 - A commitment to provide reasons, if appropriately asked to do so, for believing that \langle fish sticks are delicious \rangle is true, as assessed from c

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- In his later context c' , Old John knows that he made this commitment and that he no longer enjoys fish sticks' flavour
- However, given (UC): Old John isn't *ipso facto* required to retract his earlier assertion
 - Rather: it is perfectly acceptable for Old John to retain his earlier commitment, given that it pertains to c , not to c'
- This shows that contra MacFarlane, the assessment-relativist should endorse (Permissible), rather than (Required)

Retraction data and the PPT debates



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Summarising these proposals:
 - Contra MacFarlane: retraction data cannot provide a reason for favouring AR over NIC
 - This is because: an advocate of AR should endorse a use-centric account of the justification commitment, and thus (Permissible), which should also be endorsed by advocates of NIC
 - More generally: our findings concerning retraction and PPT should push us in either of two directions
 - If they confirm (Required): they should push us towards absolutism
 - If they confirm (Permissible): they should push us towards IC, NIC, AR, and expressivism

Retraction data and the PPT debates



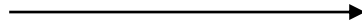
THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

(Required)



Absolutism

(Permissible)



IC

NIC

AR

Expressivism

Extant retraction data



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- To close: I'll review the extant data on retraction and PPT in light of this improved understanding of why retraction data matter
- Our current data come from Markus Kneer (2021), who aimed to test MacFarlane's hypothesis (MH) = (Required)

Extant retraction data



- Kneer used vignettes such as the following, with each participant seeing only one of [A] and [B]:

Fish sticks: John is five years old and loves fish sticks. One day he says to his sister Sally: ‘Fish sticks are delicious.’ Twenty years later his taste regarding fish sticks has changed. Sally asks him whether he still likes fish sticks and John says he doesn’t anymore.

[A] Sally says: ‘So what you said back when you were five was false.’

[B] Sally says: ‘So you are required to take back what you said about fish sticks when you were five.’

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Sally’s claim?

Extant retraction data



- Kneer's contention was that if (Required) is true, then mean agreement with the statement in [B] should be above the midpoint of his 7-point scale
- However, mean agreement with the statement in [B] was well below this midpoint ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 2.10$), which seems to disconfirm (Required)
 - Kneer obtained similar results in connection with the Sandcastle vignette, which involved the PPT 'fun' ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.92$)

Extant retraction data

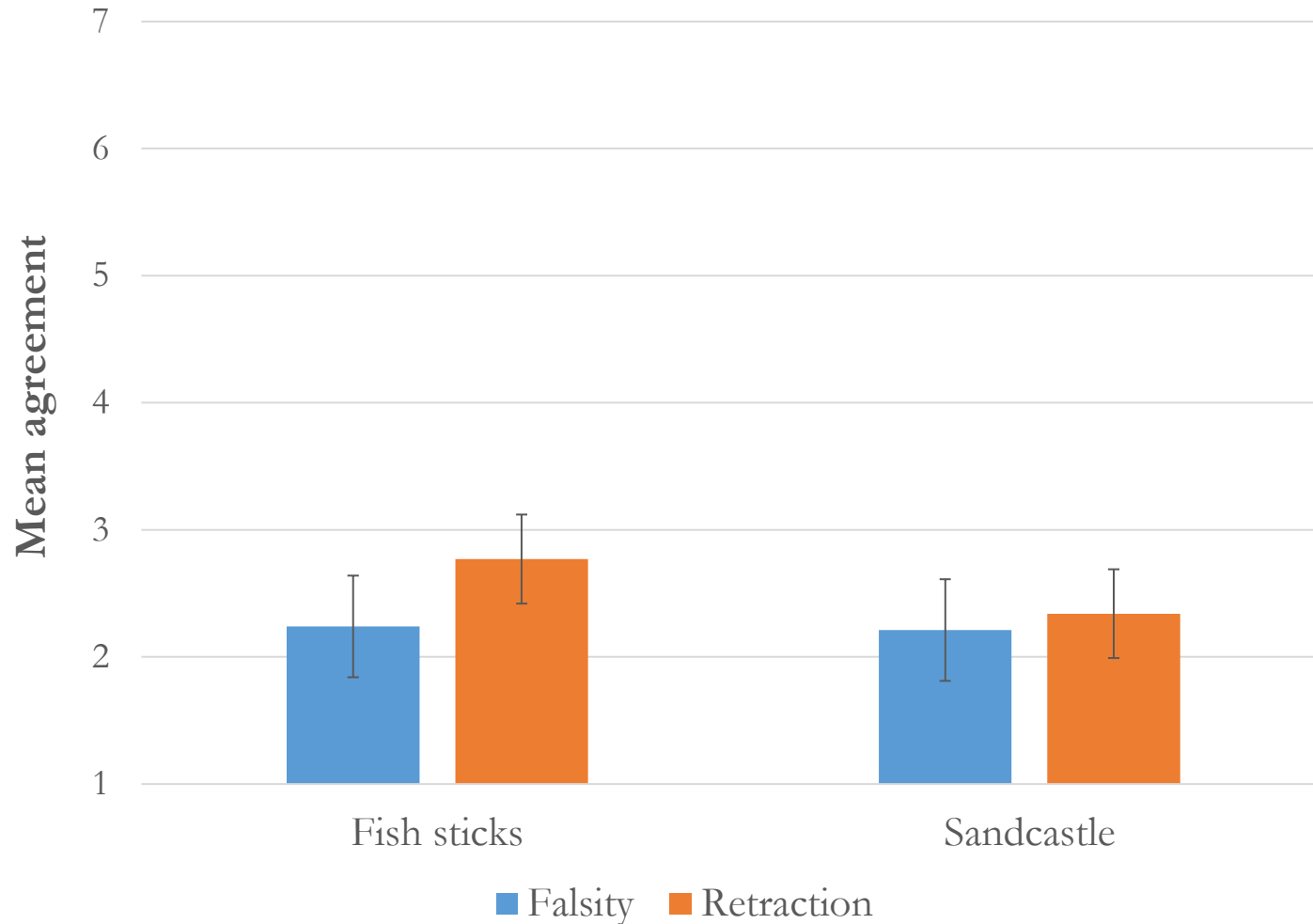


Figure 1, reproduced from Kneer (2021)

Extant retraction data



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

- Given that MacFarlane endorses (Required), Kneer took his findings to cast doubt on AR
- However: we can now see that Kneer's findings actually disconfirm absolutism, rather than AR
 - This means that these findings are good news for advocates of IC, NIC, AR, and expressivism

Summing up



- In sum:
 - Retraction studies should undoubtedly be part of the battery of empirical diagnostics that we use in trying to understand the meaning of PPT
 - In conducting retraction studies, we need to be clear about why retraction data matter in the PPT debates
 - My proposal is that they matter because they should push us towards either absolutism or the other major analyses of PPT
 - Current data speak against absolutism, thereby favouring IC, NIC, AR, and expressivism
 - Going forward: we should also draw on other relevant empirical diagnostics, and we should apply these across as many languages as we can

Stay tuned...



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato





THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Kia ora!