

## Information Packaging and the Expressive Contribution of Evaluative Adjectives

Following Kaiser & Wang (2021) and Delogu & Degaetano-Ortlieb (2025), who examined how information packaging influences participants' perception of opinion-based content and their agreement with controversial statements, the present study extends their findings by investigating whether information packaging also affects the semantics of subjective content. To this end, evaluative adjectives (e.g., *amazing* vs. *boring*, *brilliant* vs. *overestimated*) were combined with familiar referents (e.g., *the Pyramids of Giza*, *the singer Lady Gaga*, *the city of New York*) to yield statements expressing controversial versus non-controversial opinions (e.g., "The Pyramids of Giza are breathtaking/uninteresting."). By placing the adjective either in prenominal position within a definite noun phrase or in predicative position, the experiment also manipulated whether the evaluative content was presented as *topic/given* or as *comment/new*, respectively (Chafe, 1976; Reinhart, 1981). As a baseline, factually correct and incorrect information about the referent was also included (*veridical* vs. *non-veridical*). From these, the experimental setup resulted in a 2×2×2 design crossing the factors Veridicality (*veridical* vs. *non-veridical*), Opinion type (*controversial* vs. *non-controversial*), and Information structure (*topic/given* vs. *comment/new*). An example is illustrated below:

(1a) **Evaluative adjective in prenominal position:**

The [*amazing/boring*] Roman Colosseum was built [*in ancient times/recently*]  

*Topic/Given*
*Comment/New*

(1b) **Evaluative adjective in predicative position:**

The Roman Colosseum is [*amazing/boring*] and was built [*in ancient times/recently*]  

*Topic/Given*
*Comment/New*

As for (1), each test item included both evaluative and factual information, so that every sentence expressed two propositions, whose truth values were encoded according to the following mapping: *veridical* (TRUE), *non-veridical* (FALSE) *controversial* (FALSE), *non-controversial* (TRUE). The experiment consisted of two phases. In the **main trial**, participants evaluated conjunctive statements ( $p \wedge q$ ) as TRUE or FALSE. The **post-test** phase served as a diagnostic measure to assess participants' confidence regarding the factual content by allowing them to answer TRUE, FALSE, or DON'T KNOW for the veridical conjunct  $q$ , and to infer how each conjunct ( $p$  and  $q$ ) was evaluated individually (Figure 1).

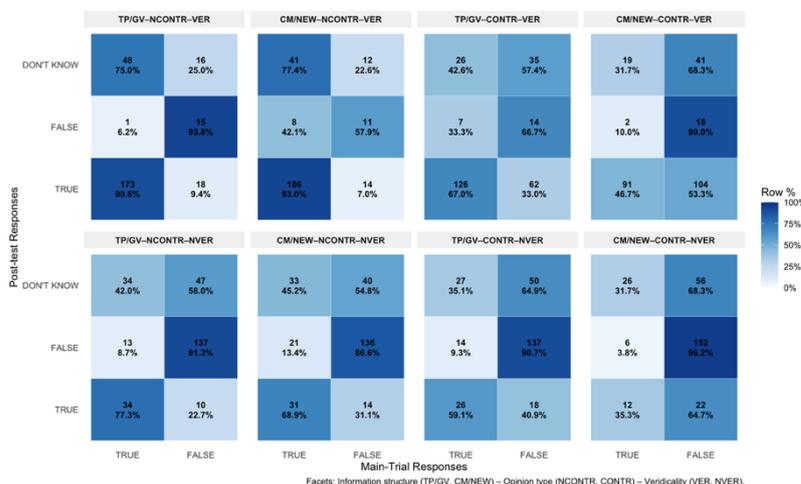


Figure 1: Condition-specific confusion matrices (**post-test**). Facets show VERIDICALITY, OPINION TYPE, and INFORMATION STRUCTURE. Rows correspond to **post-test** responses (TRUE, FALSE, DON'T KNOW), columns to **main-trial** responses (TRUE/FALSE). Cells display **counts** (top) and **row percentages** (bottom); darker shading indicates higher proportions. Row-wise patterns illustrate the **shift** in responses from **main-trial** to **post-test** within each condition.

Results indicate that syntactic structure systematically modulates how evaluative adjectives are integrated into truth-conditions: controversial content packaged within the *comment*, presented as new information, received more FALSE responses than when it was packaged within the *topic*, presented as *given*. In predicative position, however, responses showed an almost even 50/50 distribution (Figure 2).

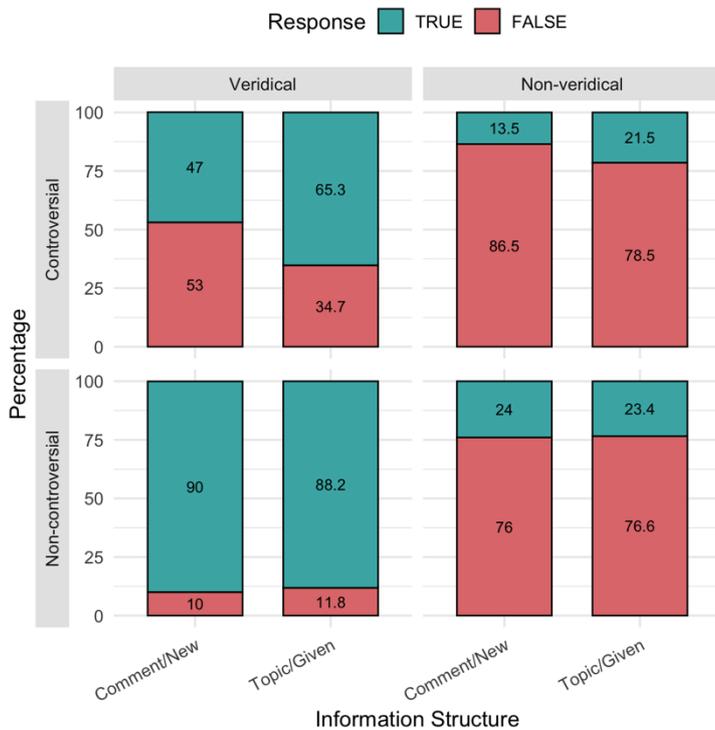


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of TRUE and FALSE responses across conditions. VERIDICALITY (veridical vs. non-veridical), OPINION TYPE (*controversial* vs. *non-controversial*), and INFORMATION STRUCTURE (*comment/new* vs. *topic/given*).

While previous studies have suggested that both *epistemic vigilance* and *attention allocation* (Lombardi Vallauri, 2021) may steer attention away from controversial content, allowing it to “slip through” unnoticed, we offer instead an *expressive-based* interpretation. Evaluative adjectives appear to pattern with *expressives* (Potts, 2005) when used in prenominal position, contributing non-descriptive and non-assertive content, whereas in predicative position they yield both expressive and assertive contributions. This, generates two propositions: (i) one reflecting the speaker’s attitude (e.g., “The speaker finds the Roman Colosseum boring”), derived by the expressive reading of the adjective (cf. Potts 2005, 2007; Schlenker 2007), and (ii) one concerning the propositional content itself (e.g., “The Roman Colosseum is boring”). In the former case, the proposition involves no perceived attempt by the speaker to enter the material into the common ground, whereas in the latter, it is perceived as such an attempt. Therefore, the higher rate of TRUE responses observed for controversial content, when occurring in prenominal position, is interpreted as reflecting agreement with the expressive-derived proposition. By contrast, we assume that the near 50/50 split observed for predicative structures reflects the fact that the assertive component is co-present with, and put forward as, a proposal for the common ground. This variation likely depends on which proposition listeners evaluate: those who hold a prior belief about the presented opinion tend to respond to the assertive component, rejecting

it when it conflicts with their beliefs, whereas those without a specific belief may instead respond to the expressive-derived proposition. Notably, since the syntactic packaging of evaluative adjectives appears to influence the interpretation of expressive content, this suggests that both character-based and content-based readings can co-occur (Gutzmann, 2016, p. 25), revealing the remarkable flexibility of subjective interpretation. These findings are crucial for discussions on *faultless disagreement* (Kölbel, 2004) and expressive accounts of language, such as *expressive relativism* (Berškýtė & Stevens, 2023) and *hybrid expressivism* (Gutzmann, 2016), and warrant further empirical and theoretical investigation. Overall, to our knowledge, this study is among the first to extend the findings of Kaiser & Wang (2021) and Delogu & Degaetano-Ortlieb (2025) to the semantic dimension, examining how information packaging shapes the perceived truth-conditional contribution of evaluative adjectives, and to propose that these adjectives may exhibit structural parallels with expressives.

**References** • Berškýtė, J. & Stevens, G. (2023) Faultless disagreement without contradiction: expressive-relativism and predicates of personal taste. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 46, 31–64 • Chafe, W. (1976) Givenness, contrastiveness, definiteness, subjects, topics, and point of view. In C. N. Li (Ed.), *Subject and Topic* (pp. 25–55). Academic Press • Delogu, F. & Degaetano-Ortlieb, S. (2025) Packaging opinions as given vs. new: Effects on plausibility, agreement, and processing. Manuscript in preparation. • Gutzmann, D. (2016) If expressivism is fun, go for it! In C. Meier & J. van Wijnbergen-Huitink (Eds.), *Subjective Meaning: Alternatives to Relativism* (pp. 21–46). Berlin: De Gruyter • Kaiser, E. & Wang, A. (2021) How information packaging influences perceptions of facts vs. opinions. Ms. • Kölbel, M. (2004) Faultless disagreement. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104, 53–73 • Lombardi Vallauri, E. (2021). Manipulative shallow processing induced by presuppositions and topics. *Frontiers in Communication* 6, 610807 • Potts, C. (2005) *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures*. Oxford University Press • Potts, C. (2007) The expressive dimension. *Theoretical Linguistics* 33 (2), 165–198 • Reinhart, T. (1981) Pragmatics and linguistics: An analysis of sentence topics. *Philosophica* 27 (1), 53–94 • Schlenker, P. (2007) Expressive presuppositions. *Theoretical Linguistics* 33 (2), 237–245