



## Two types of the 3rd person feature in English?!



Kaori Furuya

University of North Texas, 1155 Union Circle #311127, Denton, TX 76203-5017, USA

### HIGHLIGHTS

- This paper aims to investigate the morphosyntactic properties of 3rd person in English.
- The paper argues for the dissociation of the semantics of person and its morphological realization.
- 3rd person is always the default feature and yet it has a feature specification.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the morphosyntactic properties of the person feature in the English imposter construction studied by Collins & Postal. In this construction, the same definite DP can select a 1st person reflexive or a 3rd person reflexive. Moreover, despite of the distinct person feature value, a 3rd person (non-reflexive) pronoun can have the reference to a speaker in the given contexts like a 1st person pronoun. This use of a 3rd person argument differs from that of a 3rd person argument that refers to the 3rd party. The present paper analyzes the mechanism of the person feature and its morphological realization (particularly 3rd person) in English, and proposes the dissociation of notional person (the semantics of the person feature) and grammatical person morphological realization. Both notional and grammatical person are not always uniquely associated with each other nor always equally encoded into a definite DP as well as a pronominal DP. The paper also argues that 3rd person is always a neutral/invariable form in English. Despite of it, a 3rd person argument is shown to have a feature specification. This paper demonstrates that the morphosyntactic variation associated with 3rd person agreement in English pronoun-antecedent relations is attributed to the lack of the uniform relation between the semantics of the person feature and its morphology, not to the syntactic operations.

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E-mail address: [kaori.furuya@unt.edu](mailto:kaori.furuya@unt.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Two remarks are in order. First, Collins & Postal (2012: 55) report that they accept only examples with a 3rd person reflexive when the referent is singular, although many other such examples found on the internet accepts both a 1st person and a 3rd person reflexive. This suggests that the number feature appears to be relevant in the imposter construction. However the number restriction is beyond the scope of this paper. I leave the distinct acceptability of the number feature for future research.

Second, Collins & Postal also report that a definite DP can also be used to refer to an addressee, whose binding relation also exhibits the alternations, as in (i).

- (i)
- Your Majesty (=addressee) and the Defense Minister should portray themselves/yourselves more favorably. (Collins & Postal [16]:75)
  - Do Madam and that official consider yourselves friends? (Collins & Postal [16]: 107)

For simplicity, I focus only on a DP that is used to refer to a speaker (1st person) in this paper.

### 1. Introduction

A definite DP such as *the present author* is generally considered referentially independent in the given contexts. It refers to the 3rd party (grammatically 3rd person) and does not denote speaker (1st person) or hearer (2nd person). However, Collins & Postal [16] report that a definite DP can be used to refer to a speaker, as in (1) [19,35,52,55,26] <sup>1</sup>

- (1)
- In this reply, the present authors (= the writers of the reply) attempt to defend ourselves/themselves against the scurrilous charges which have been made.
  - This reporter (= speaker) and his son are proud of ourselves/themselves. (Collins & Postal [16]: vii)
  - This reporter (= speaker) sent myself to cover Bill Clinton's lecture at the Dorothy Pavilion.

- d. This reviewer (= speaker) found frustrated at times with the various storylines. (Collins & Postal [16]: 20)

The definite DP in the subject position is used to refer to a speaker or a speaker's group. Interestingly the binding relation exhibits 1st person agreement since the DP can select *myself/ourselves*, like a 1st person pronoun. In addition, the relation also shows 3rd person agreement even though the reference is to a speaker.<sup>2</sup> According to Collins & Postal (2012:20), the pronominal alternations in (1) are not accompanied by differences in truth conditions.<sup>3</sup> These particular kinds of expressions, which may exhibit notionally and syntactically distinct person properties simultaneously, are what Collins and Postal call *imposters*. An imposter DP that is used to refer to a speaker appears to be able to have two person feature values (i.e., 1st and 3rd person) as a binder in (1).

A definite DP can also be locally bound by a personal pronoun of distinct person. The definite DP in (2) is anteceded by a 1st person pronoun clause-internally, like a 1st person reflexive *myself*, without inducing a violation of Binding Theory (Condition C).

- (2)
- $I_i$  respect the present reporter $_i$ .
  - $I_i$  like Daddy $_i$ .
  - $I_i$  am talking about Daddy $_i$ . (Collins & Postal [16]: 243)
  - $I_i$  plan to vote for yours truly $_i$ . (Collins & Postal [16]: 243)

Furthermore, a 1st person pronoun in (2a,b) can be replaced with a 3rd person pronoun while maintaining identical truth conditions in the given contexts, as in (3a,b) respectively.

- (3)
- (What do you mean the present reporter $_i$  (=speaker) respects no one?) He $_i$  respects the present reporter $_i$ .
  - (What do you think of Daddy (=speaker)?) He $_i$  likes Daddy $_i$ . (And you, Ken?)

The *present reporter* and *Daddy* are locally bound by a 3rd person pronoun and coreferential with the pronoun, like a 3rd person reflexive *himself*. This 3rd person pronoun is referentially dependent on the first occurrence of the definite DP that is used to refer to a speaker in the previous sentence. It means that the 3rd person pronoun as well as the definite DP locally bound by the pronoun has the reference to a speaker.

The pair of examples in (2) and (3) seems to be compatible with the pronominal alternations in (1) in that the definite DPs have a reference to a speaker/speaker's group. Moreover, 1st person and 3rd person agreement are equally possible in the imposter construction. If a 3rd person form is used for the reference to a speaker, 3rd person does not appear to be uniformly linked to the reference to the 3rd party that is talked about. I note that the pronominal alternations in (1) and the same references by pronouns of distinct person in (2) and (3) are not a case of 'accidental' coreference (pragmatically determined) since the coreferential interpretations of these examples are not merely in the extensional sense [16,23]. The pronouns of distinct person with the same references in these examples are also not an instance of indexical shifting as well since

these phenomena are observed in matrix clauses not in the complement clauses of attitude predicates [3,50,51]. They are not a deletion of the person feature value in LF [37] because they do not change thesmo meanings. They are likewise not an example with the presence of a phonologically invisible personal pronoun inside definite DPs [8,16,33]; and footnote 7) as in the pronoun-noun construction such as *we linguists* [1,25,47] with a pronoun in the construction phonologically null.

This paper looks to dissociate notional person and their morphological specification by examining the morphosyntactic variation of the person feature exhibited by an English imposter DP. It argues that 3rd person is always the default/neutral form in English. Yet a 3rd person argument has a feature specification (cf. [2,6,40,41,24,31,7]).

The structure of this paper is as follows. In section 2, I briefly review two major perspectives of the person feature in the linguistic literature and present the necessity of the dissociating notional and grammatical person in the English imposter construction. In section 3, I analyze the morphosyntactic variation in the construction. I argue that notional and grammatical person are neither uniquely associated with each other nor uniformly always linked to a definite DPs or a personal pronoun. I propose the mechanism of 3rd person that plays a role in the morphosyntactic variation in pronoun-antecedent relations. Section 4 is the conclusion.

## 2. The two types of the person feature

The person feature is a property of lexical elements, listed in the lexical entry. Theories of syntax make use of such features as formal in the generalized or head-driven phrase-structure grammar (LFG, GPSG, and HPSG).<sup>4</sup> In Chomsky's [61] minimalist program, the person feature is a morphosyntactic feature and accessible in the course of syntactic computation. However, linguists do not agree in light of the definition of person feature values. While the person feature values are often classified into three categories based on morphological distinctions (i.e., 1st, 2nd and 3rd person), some linguists maintain that the values of the person feature are associated with [participant], [speaker], [addressee] and [non-participant]/[Ø],<sup>5</sup> based on the semantic notions of discourse participants in the speech act and nonparticipants [7,31,34,40–42]; a.o.). Yet both perspectives would accept a one-to-one relation between notional person (that distinguishes the denotations of the speaker(s), the addressee(s), or none of those entities) and grammatical person (that refers to morphosyntactic properties regularly

<sup>2</sup> The use of a definite DP in (1) is different from that of an epithet in that the latter refers to the party talked about that is not the speaker or the addressee [16,22]; Chapter 11, and footnote 19).

<sup>3</sup> The native speakers that I consulted also accept the pronominal alternations. Some speakers report that a 3rd person reflexive sounds more stylistic and/or formal although both 1st person and 3rd person forms may be interchangeable.

<sup>4</sup> In HPSG, GPSG and LFG, agreement features are divided into *Concord* and *Index*. In these frameworks, Concord features correspond most closely to the grammatical/morphological information on the noun, whereas Index features correspond most closely to the semantic information of the noun. As far as the person feature is concerned, there are few if any languages in which Concord includes person among its features, as noted by Lehmann [39] and Kothol (1999). In HPSG, Wechsler & Zlatić [58] and Wechsler & Hahn [59]; and in LFG, Wechsler [57] extensively discuss the phenomenon of hybrid agreement in light of number and gender, but not person, where a hybrid of contrasting syntactic and semantic features triggers a different type of agreement on a different type of target. In these studies person features are also considered to exist as Index features and never taken as grammatical features of the sort that are involved in Concord features, as opposed to number and gender. Even if English exceptionally had the person feature as a Concord feature, however, the reference to a speaker by an argument that exhibits 3rd person agreement would not be accounted for. Moreover, typologically it has been noticed that DP-internal concord never involves person features. The reference to a speaker by an imposter that shows 1st person agreement would also not be explained since the person feature cannot be specified on the noun itself [4], unlike number and gender. This would have been an unexpected morphological gap if person was an abstract feature of a noun or a functional projection below DP.

<sup>5</sup> [Ø] represents the lack of grammatical person.

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