Separating interlocutor phenomena from grammatical person

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that not everything that involves speakers or addressees falls under a person system of first, second and third person. Rather, there is an additional grammatical category of interlocutors with the speech-act roles speaker, addressee and outsider. With this knowledge we can make a split in phenomena: spatial deixis (*here* and *there*), for example, is a person phenomenon, while the vocative (*John* in *That's great, John*) is not a person phenomenon but an interlocutor phenomenon. Furthermore I present the theory that interlocutor phenomena are universal, while person phenomena may differ between languages.
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1. Introduction

The grammatical category of person is ubiquitous in language. English examples are the first-person pronoun *I* and the third-person verbal ending -*s* in a verb like *sings*. Obviously, person is closely tied to the speech-act roles of speaker and addressee. Does this mean that everything that involves a speaker is grammatically first-person, and that everything that involves an addressee is grammatically second-person? Take for example the English spatial deictic adverb *here*, which designates a place close to the speaker. My question is whether *here* is first-person at some grammatical level. These and other questions will be answered in the course of this paper.

The main point of this paper is that we should make a distinction between what I call *interlocutor* phenomena on the one hand, and person phenomena on the other. This distinction seems to correlate with universality: interlocutor phenomena are universally uniform in language, while person phenomena will differ between languages.

In addition, the distinction I make is one between simplex systems (interlocutor) and complex systems (person), which is a novel way to look at person and speech-act roles. I think that other grammatical categories (number, gender, tense) may also benefit from such a distinction. Thinking in terms of simplex and complex systems may improve our understanding of the workings of grammatical categories.

In Section 2 I will present the argument for a distinction between an interlocutor system and person. In the following two sections I will show which linguistic phenomenon falls on which side of the distinction. Section 3 features phenomena that really involve person – spatial deixis turns out to be one of them. Section 4, in contrast, features simplex speech-act phenomena. Section 5 will deal with the universality of simplex speech-act phenomena and person phenomena. In Section 6 we will look at the extension of the division between simplex and complex phenomena to other grammatical categories. Section 7, finally, will provide the conclusion of this paper.

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2. The distinction between person and interlocutor

In this section I will draw a distinction between the grammatical category of person and interlocutor systems. This distinction will be the basis for the remainder of this paper. In Section 2.1 I provide the motivation for the distinction. The different types of interlocutor system can be found in Section 2.2, and the different types of person system in Section 2.3.

2.1. The need for a interlocutor category

The grammatical category of person is a rather complex system. To appreciate the complexity of person one has to look at the plural. We can use the three speech-act roles – speaker, addressee and outsider (i.e. non-speaker, non-addressee) – to describe the individuals in a group, see Cysouw (2011) for a more elaborate discussion. This gives us the person system for a language like English in (1). Before we can discuss the overview in (1), a number of things must be pointed out. An S stands for speaker, an A for addressee and an O for outsider. The plus sign means 'one or more' and parentheses mean optionality. The distinction between singular and plural, though important, is ignored; groups can also consist of a single individual for present purposes. A group may, however, only have one speaker, see Section 4.2.

(1)

first person	S(A+)(O+)
second person	A+(O+)
third person	O+

If we look at the descriptions of first, second and third person in (1), we see why person may be considered a complex system. First-person, for example, can be described as 'a group with a speaker, zero or more addressees and zero or more outsiders'. The main advantage of this complex system is that we can distinguish between different kinds of mixed groups, i.e. group with individuals with different speech act roles. Some of these groups are first-person, others are second-person. In a simpler system, mixed groups are bound to be lumped together in a big residual category.

Nevertheless, there are linguistic phenomena that have such a system with a big residual category. I will call this an *interlocutor system*. An example of a phenomenon that has an interlocutor system – rather than the complex speech-act system known as person – is the vocative. What matters for a vocative is whether the group referred to by the vocative consists of solely addressees. If this is true the vocative is felicitous, otherwise it is not. The sentence in (2), for example, is not felicitous if only Alice is addressed and Bob is absent, i.e. if *Alice and Bob* refers to an AO group. The sentence is only felicitous if *Alice and Bob* refers to an AA group.

(2)   My husband and I enjoyed ourselves; did you enjoy yourselves as well, Alice and Bob?

The personal pronoun *you*, on the other hand, *is* allowed to refer to an AO group, see (3), where Alice is the addressee and her significant other is an outsider and may be absent. Note that *you* has to refer to more than one individual here because of plural *yourselves*.

(3)   My husband and I enjoyed ourselves; did you enjoy yourselves as well, Alice?

Since pronoun *you* may refer to AO groups as well as AA groups it is a *bona fide* second-person element as described by (1). In other words, for personal pronouns a simplex speech-act system does not suffice.

To sum up, the vocative is an interlocutor phenomenon (i.e. it involves a simplex speech-act system), while the personal pronoun paradigm is a complex speech-act phenomenon, and more specifically a person phenomenon.

2.2. Types of interlocutor system

Three types of interlocutor system occur in the languages of the world: *speaker-only* (4a), *addressee-only* (4b) and *outsider-only* (4c).

(4)   a.   speaker-only
            S versus all other groups