

Distinguishing speech act roles from grammatical person features

Elizabeth Ritter
University of Calgary

Martina Wiltschko
University of British Columbia

What are the features that make up person? The category person has received numerous analyses in the generative tradition; differences among them raise the following questions: (a) Is there a [PARTICIPANT] feature that distinguishes 1st & 2nd person, on the one hand, from 3rd person on the other? (b) If [PARTICIPANT] is a formal person feature, what additional features are required to distinguish between 1st and 2nd person? (c) Are person features bivalent or monovalent? (d) Linguists use different labels for 1st and 2nd person features, including [SPEAKER] and [ADDRESSEE], or [1] and [2], or [AUTHOR] and [HEARER], or [EGO] and [TU]. Are these just notational variants, or are there interpretive differences between them? (See, for example, Noyer 1992, Harley & Ritter 2002, Bejar & Rezac 2009, Harbour 2017).

Grammatical person features vs. pragmatic speech act roles. We argue that the reason that the questions have not been resolved is that there are two distinct notions of person that are grammatically represented in different structural positions within the nominal spine. The first is **grammatical** person, which is defined via the binary features [+/-1], [+/-2] and associated with the head of a functional category in the inflectional layer of the nominal spine (e.g. D); the other is **pragmatic** person defined via speech act (SA) roles, *speaker* and *addressee*. These roles are realized in the specifier of a functional category in the speech act layer of the nominal spine. We argue that pronominal paradigms can be based purely on grammatical person or purely on pragmatic SA roles, or they can be split between the two. This contributes to variability and opacity in pronominal paradigms within and across languages.

Diagnosing SA roles and grammatical person. Distinctions of person, number, gender and formality serve as reliable diagnostics for pragmatic SA roles vs. grammatical PERSON.

Person: The person features responsible for grammatical person straightforwardly derive 3rd person [-1,-2]. In fact, it is the unmarked grammatical person. In the domain of SA roles 3rd person is much less straightforward to derive, since SA roles do not typically include a role for others. Hence, paradigms based on SA roles have either no 3rd person pronouns (Basque), or they have pragmatically marked 3rd person (Blackfoot). Moreover, a grammatical person paradigm with two binary person features can distinguish up to 4 grammatical persons; with only two SA roles, a pragmatic paradigm can have at most three. Thus, only grammatical person paradigms have inclusive [+1,+2] and exclusive [+1,-2] 1st person (Fijian, Mixteco).

Number: Grammatical person is compatible with additive plural (X+X+X+...) whereas SA roles are only compatible with associative plural (X+other). This is because SA roles define unique individuals whereas grammatical person imposes no constraints on the cardinality of the set.

Gender: SA roles are contextually determined and the pronouns that refer to the individuals who bear these roles may encode their biological gender (English). In contrast, pronouns with grammatical person may encode grammatical gender, which need not reflect biological gender.

Formality: Formality distinctions, such as French *tu/vous*, are based on the social status of the speaker relative to the addressee (or other). Hence, they are a property of SA roles only.

Consequences: Based on these diagnostics, we correctly predict that inclusive pronouns can never encode a formality distinction because formality is a property of SA roles, but inclusive pronouns can only be defined in grammatical person features [+1,+2].

We further predict that 1st and 2nd person pronouns used as impersonals are restricted to grammatical person since they lack a contextually determined referent. This is borne out in Dutch where 1st and 2nd person pronouns can be used as impersonals, but only in their weak form, which by hypothesis instantiates grammatical person.

References

- Bejar, Susana & Milan Rezac. 2009. Cyclic agree. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40.1: 35-73.
- Harbour, Daniel. 2016. *Impossible Persons*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Harley, Heidi & Elizabeth Ritter. 2002. Person and number in pronouns: A feature-geometric analysis. *Language* 78.3: 482-526.
- Noyer, Rolf. 1992. *Features, positions and affixes in autonomous morphological structure*. Ph.D. dissertation. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.