

Tamil allocutive agreement, unexpected number marking, and the determination of person

Thomas McFadden, Leibniz-Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft, Berlin

Consider the phenomenon of ‘allocutive agreement’, e.g. in the Souletin dialect of Basque, where the form of verbal agreement chosen depends not only on the subject and object of the clause, but also on the gender, number and status of the addressee. The two examples in (1) mean ‘Peter worked’, but would be used in speaking to different people (see Oyharçabal, 1993, for additional data):

- (1) a. Pettek lan egin dik. *To a male friend*
Peter.ERG work.ABS do.PRF aux-3.S.ABS-2.S.C.MSC.ALLOC-3.S.ERG
‘Peter worked.’
b. Pettek lan egin din. *To a female friend*
Peter.ERG work.ABS do.PRF aux-3.S.ABS-2.S.C.FM.ALLOC-3.S.ERG

Haegeman and Miyagawa (2016) and Miyagawa (2017) analyze this pattern, along with honorific agreement in Japanese and certain particles in West Flemish and Romanian, as evidence for a syntactic Speech Act layer in the left periphery. The allocutive marker is simply direct syntactic agreement with the representation of the addressee in this layer. In this talk, I will present novel data on a type of allocutive agreement from Tamil, which supports the basic thrust of Miyagawa and Haegeman’s analyses, but sheds additional light on important details due to certain crucial properties that distinguish it from what is found in the other languages, including the role of the Speech Act phrase (SAP) in determining person values. The marker in question, *-ngæ*, frequently appears in short utterances lacking an actual verbal form, and indicates that the speaker would use the plural form of the 2nd person pronoun *niingæ* with the addressee, which is also used to show politeness. In other words, the allocutive agreement suffix marks the utterance as being directed toward either a plural addressee or a singular one towards whom the speaker wishes to show politeness. E.g. it can appear on *illæ*, ‘no’ (as a response to a yes/no question), yielding a polite or plural-directed version *illæ-ngæ*, and we similarly find *thanksü-ngæ* ‘thank you’ and *særi-ngæ* ‘ok’. Based on its formal properties, it is particularly easy to make the case that what we are seeing is a type of agreement with the addressee, rather than a sui generis honorific marker or specialized vocative (along the lines of ‘sir’ in military registers of English). First, unlike Japanese, Tamil has straightforward subject agreement on finite verbs, including a distinct 2nd plural form *-iingæ*, as seen in (2), which is clearly related morphologically to the allocutive suffix, making it easy to identify the latter as ϕ -agreement.

- (2) niingæ engæ poo-r-iingæ?
you.FRM where go-PRS-2PL
‘Where are you (pl/pol) going?’

Second, allocutive agreement appears on top of and easily segmentable from subject agreement, as in (3):

- (3) Naan jaangiri vaang-in-een-ngæ.
I Jangri buy-PST-1SG.SBJ-ALLOC
‘I bought Jangri.’ (to a plural or polite addressee)

These facts strengthen considerably the contention of Miyagawa and Haegeman that there is a syntactic representation of the hearer/addressee in these utterances that is triggering a normal agreement operation. The Tamil pattern also lets us glean more information about the representation of the hearer/addressee via its interactions with other material in the left periphery. In Basque, allocutive agreement seems to be ruled out in contexts where C is overtly realized, specifically in embedded clauses (which have an overt complementizer) and in matrix questions (which include an overt question marker, arguably in C). This can be argued to indicate that allocutive agreement is itself realized in C, and is competing for a single slot with the complementizers and question markers (Oyharçabal, 1993). In Tamil, on the other hand, allocutive agreement can co-occur and interact with certain C elements, e.g. with the polar question marker *-aa*, as in (4b), contrasting with (4a).

- (4) a. indæ biitfũ peerũ Marina, illæj-aa?
this beach name Marina, no-Q
‘This beach’s name is Marina, isn’t it?’

- b. indæ biitfũ peerũ Marina, illæ-ngæ[-aa?
 this beach name Marina, no-ALLOC-Q
 ‘This beach’s name is Marina, isn’t it?’ (to a plural or polite addressee)

Interestingly enough, the allocutive suffix appears *inside* the question marker here, arguably the inverse of what we might expect based on the semantics of such utterances. Clearly, the question is part of a speech act with a plural or polite addressee. The question semantics does not take scope over that information about the addressee, which is what the order of affixes might have led us to believe. This strengthens the case that what we are seeing in the allocutive suffix is not a direct realization of the representation of the addressee in the SAP, but rather a lower functional head agreeing with it. Furthermore, Tamil allows allocutive agreement under certain circumstances even in embedded clauses, where it shows a fascinating interaction with the phenomenon that Sundaresan (2012) dubbed ‘monstrous agreement’, demonstrated in (5). Here the embedded verb bears 1st singular agreement, even though the embedded subject is notionally 3rd person, just when it is an anaphor, bound by the subject of a matrix speech predicate.

- (5) Maya_i [taan_{i,*j} poo[ti-læ jeykkæ-poo-r-een-nnũ] so-nn-aa
 Maya ANAPH contest-LOC win-go-PRS-1S-COMP say-PST-3FS.SBJ
 ‘Maya_i said that she_i would win the contest’

Sundaresan argues that this is a case of shifted indexicality, where person is interpreted in the embedded clause relative to the matrix speech verb, not the context of utterance. This crucially involves a SAP in the embedded clause, with Maya represented as the speaker, against which the shifted first person indexical is interpreted. Now, if allocutive agreement really reflects the representation of the addressee in such a syntactic SAP, then it should interact with shifted indexicality if they co-occur. Indeed, (6) shows us that the two phenomena are found together and pattern as we would predict.

- (6) Maya_i [taan_{i,*j} poo[ti-le jeykkæ-poo-r-een-nga-nnũ] Venkat-ki[æ so-nn-aa
 Maya [ANAPH contest-LOC win-go-PRS-1SBJ-ALLOC-COMP] Vekat-LOC say-PST-3FS
 ‘Maya_i said to Venakat that she_i would win the contest.’

In particular, the allocutive agreement in such a case can only be interpreted relative to the embedded speech context. I.e. if (6) is uttered by Joe to Sue, the embedded allocutive agreement can only indicate Maya’s politeness toward Venkat, not Joe’s toward Sue. Crucially, allocutive agreement in an embedded clause *without* monstrous agreement can reflect properties of either addressee.

Finally, note that if allocutive agreement really reflects the representation of the addressee in the SAP, then we can explain an otherwise puzzling fact about its morphological make-up. The suffix itself again has the form *-ngæ*, while the 2nd plural subject agreement suffix is *-iingæ*. It can be shown from other facts about the morphological system of the language that the *-ngæ* part simply marks plural (and/or politeness), independent of person. Now consider from the discussion of shifted indexicality above that what the SAP does is set the identity of the speaker and addressee, which serve as the points relative to which person features are interpreted in their scope — 1st person means co-referent with the speaker, 2nd co-referent with the addressee, and 3rd disjoint from both. The representation of speaker and addressee cannot *have* person features themselves. We can thus say that the allocutive agreement suffix is not e.g. a pronoun, which could bear a 2nd person feature and thus be interpreted as coreferent with the addressee. Rather, as agreement with the representation of the addressee it can only bear features that it inherits from that representation. Thus it can show plural number, but no person.

References

- Haegeman, Liliane, and Shigeru Miyagawa. 2016. The syntax of participants. Talk presented at GLOW 39, Workshop on Representation of Speech Acts.
 Miyagawa, Shigeru. 2017. *Agreement Beyond Phi*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
 Oyharçabal, Beñat. 1993. Verb agreement with non arguments: On allocutive agreement. In *Generative studies in basque linguistics*, ed. José Ignacio Hualde and Jon Ortiz de Urbina. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
 Sundaresan, Sandhya. 2012. Context and (co)reference in the syntax and its interfaces. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Tromsø (CASTL)/Universität Stuttgart.