

Embeddability and performativity in markers of speaker-addressee relation

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Languages have several ways of grammatically marking the social relation between the speaker and addressee. While there might be several ways to classify them, one important distinction is between content-oriented markers, exemplified by second person pronouns with multiple levels of “politeness”, and utterance-oriented markers, exemplified by allocutive agreement and speech-style particles. A fundamental theoretical question in this domain is whether these two types of elements can be given a unified theoretical analysis.

In previous work, we have presented a unified analysis (Portner, Pak, and Zanuttini 2019). Here we discuss several challenges to this treatment: differences in performativity between content-oriented and utterance-oriented markers, differences in embeddability among utterance-oriented markers, mismatches within a sentence between markers, and the challenge of extending the approach to third-person honorifics. In each case, we attempt to clarify what is at stake in making the moves that would allow us to maintain a unified analysis.