

Tamil allocutive agreement and the syntax of the SpeechAct Phrase

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Consider the phenomenon of ‘allocutive agreement’, 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 Souletin Basque 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 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 3.S.ABS-2.S.C.FM.ALLOC-3.S.ERG

Haegeman and Miyagawa (2016); 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 (adding to Amritavalli, 1991), which supports the basic thrust of Haegeman and Miyagawa’s analysis, but sheds additional light on details of the structure due to its more varied interactions with other C elements and embedding.

The marker in question, *-ngæ*, frequently appears in short utterances lacking an actual verbal form and indicates that the speaker would use the 2nd plural/polite pronoun *niingæ* with the addressee. In other words, the allocutive agreement suffix marks the utterance as being directed toward either a plural addressee or a singular one with whom the speaker uses polite forms. 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 easy to make the case that this is 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*, which is clearly related morphologically to the allocutive suffix, making it easy to identify the latter as ϕ -agreement.

Second, allocutive agreement appears on top of and easily segmentable from subject agreement:

- (2) 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 the contention of Miyagawa and Haegeman that there is a syntactic representation of the 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 addressee via its interactions with other material in the left periphery. In Basque, allocutive agreement is ruled out in contexts where C is overtly realized, specifically in embedded clauses (which have an overt complementizer) and 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 (3b), contrasting with (3a).

- (3) 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 suggests 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 (4). 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.

- (4) Maya_i [taan_{i,*j} poo[t̪i-læ jey-t̪-ee-n-nũ] so-nn-aa
 Maya ANAPH contest-LOC win-PST-1S-COMP say-PST-3FS.SBJ
 ‘Maya_i said that she_i won 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. If allocutive agreement reflects the addressee represented in such a syntactic SAP, then it should interact with shifted indexicality if they co-occur. Indeed, (5) shows us that the two phenomena pattern together as we would predict.

- (5) Maya_i [taan_{i,*j} poo[t̪i-le jey-t̪-ee-n-nga-nũ] Venkaṭ-kitt̪æ so-nn-aa
 Maya [ANAPH contest-LOC win-PST-1SBJ-ALLOC-COMP] Vekat-LOC say-PST-3FS
 ‘Maya_i said to Venakat that she_i won the contest.’

In particular, the allocutive agreement here can only be interpreted relative to the embedded speech context. I.e. if (5) 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.