THE PRAGMATICS OF SHIFTED REFERENCE

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WHAT'S UP?

Indexical shift (IS) is a pervasive phenomenon across languages that allow indexicals in speech reports to be *shifted*, i.e. to refer to the context of the embedded clause rather than the context of utterance. Some of these languages exhibit unexpected behavior with respect to predictions made by standard accounts of indexical shift (e.g., the monster operator approach of Anand 2006 and Deal 2020). We propose here a different theory, the *context unspecification theory* of Blunier (2023), that can account for this seemingly unpredicted behavior using relatively conservative tools from work on pronouns and anaphora resolution.

INDEXICAL SHIFT

Indexicals are context-dependent elements such as *I, here* and *now* that rigidly refer to the utterance context (Kaplan, 1989). However, some languages seem to allow such elements to refer to some other attitude context, e.g. in speech reports:

(1) Kidane kə-xɛyəd dɛliɛ
Kidane COMP-IMPF.leave PRF.want.1SG
ʔallɛxu ʔɨlu (nɛyru)
AUX.1SG say.3SG.M AUX.3SG.M
'Kidane$_i$ said that he$_{i,*spk}$ wanted to leave'
[Erithrea Tigrinya, personal fieldwork]

Indexical shift obeys various constraints, chief among them ***shift together***: within a attitude-context domain, indexicals must pick up reference from the same context. This is illustrated below:

(2) vɨzeri Rojda Bill-ra va kɛ ɛz
yesterday Rojda Bill-to say.PST COMP 1SG
to-ra miradisa
2SG-to angry.be.PRS

✓ 'Yesterday R$_i$ said to B$_j$ that he$_i$ is angry at him$_j$.'
✓ 'Yesterday R$_i$ said to B$_j$ that I am angry at you.'
✗ 'Yesterday R$_i$ said to B$_j$ that I am angry at him$_j$.'
✗ 'Yesterday R$_i$ said to B$_j$ that he$_i$ is angry at you.'
[Zazaki, Anand and Nevins 2004: (13)]

OPERATOR-BASED APPROACHES

Operator-based approaches (OBAs): shifting is introduced at the level of the embedded clause by a **context-shifting** operator that rewrites the coordinates of the context with those of the index (Anand 2006, Deal 2020):

(3) **Monster operator**
$[\![\text{☹} \phi]\!]^{c,i} = [\![\phi]\!]^{i,i} = 1$

Since indexicals can only get their reference from a single context, if the context has been shifted (due to the presence of a monster), then the matrix context is not available anymore.

☺Nicely derives shift together
☹A single monster cannot derive indexical shifting typologies cross-linguistically; multiple monsters need to be assumed (at least 3; cf. Deal 2020)
☹Does not readily account for the fact that IS is largely optional across languages

REFERENCES

Scan the code to access references. Comments most welcome!

SILENT VS. OVERT FORMS

In indexical shifting languages allowing *pro* drop, null elements are more prone to shift than overt ones. This is illustrated in (4) for Mishar Tatar and in (5) for Turkish:

(4) Alsu ***pro* / min** kaja kit-te-m
Alsu ***pro* / 1SG.NOM** where go.out-PST-1SG
diep ʌt'-tɣ
COMP say-PST.3SG
'Which place did Alsu$_i$ say **I**$_{Spk,i}$ / **I**$_{Spk,*i}$ went?'
[Podobryaev 2014: (202)-(203)]

(5) Seda *pro* / ben sınıf-ta
Seda.NOM ***pro* / 1SG.NOM** class.LOC
kal-dı-m san-ıyor
flunk-1SG-PST believe.PRS
'Seda$_i$ believes that I$_{Spk,i}$ / I$_{Spk,*i}$ flunked'
[Şener and Şener 2011: (11)/(15)]

These languages allow shifted silent elements and overt unshifted elements within the same CP domain, thus violating **shift together**: both (6) and (7) allow for mixed readings where an indexical is shifted and the other is not.

(6) Alsu ***pro*** ber kajčan da
Alsu ***pro*** one when nPCL
miŋga bag-m-a-s-mɣn diep
1SG.DAT look.at-NEG-ST-POT-1SG COMP
bel-ä
know.ST-IMPF
'Alsu$_i$ knows that **I**$_i$ would never look at **me**$_{Spk}$'
[Mishar Tatar, Podobryaev 2014: (210)]

(7) Tunç ***pro*** **sen-i** nere-ye götür-eceğ-im
Tunç ***pro*** **2SG-ACC** take-FUT-1SG say-DUB-3SG
de-miş?
'Where did Tunç$_i$ say that **he**$_i$**/I** would take **you**$_{Add(c),*Add(i)}$.'
[Turkish, Özyıldız 2012: (22)]

Analogous data has been reported for Amharic (Schlenker 2003, Anand 2006), Kazan Tatar (p.f.), Mutki Zazaki and Muṣ Kurdish (Akkuş, 2019), a.o.

PERSON ASYMMETRIES

In some IS-languages, first person shifting is licensed whereas second is not. This asymmetry is illustrated in (7) and has been reported in Slave with the predicate *hadi* 'say', (8):

(8) Simon räsereyineht'u hadi
Simon 2SG.hit.1SG say.3SG
'Simon$_i$ said that you$_{Add}$ hit me$_{i,*Spk}$'
[Rice 1986: (29)]

However, as Özyıldız (2012) notes, shifting of the 2nd person is possible in Turkish if the reported addressee is explicitly mentioned in the matrix clause, (9), or highly salient in the context of utterance:

(9) Tunç **Ayşe'ye** *pro* **sen-i** nere-ye
Tunç **Ayşe-DAT** *pro* **2SG-ACC** take-FUT-**1SG**
götür-eceğ-**im** de-miş?
say-DUB-3SG
'Where did Tunç$_i$ say to Ayşe$_j$ that **he**$_i$ **/ I** would take **her**$_j$ **/ you**?'
[Turkish, Özyıldız (2012): (23)]

Analogous data can be observed in Tigrinya: mentioning Kebede as the reported addressee in the matrix clause unlocks the shifted reading of the 2nd person, (11):

(10) Solomon ʔanɛ ab srah **kingze-xa**
Solomon 1SG.NOM at work **help-OBL.2SG**
ʔɨj-ə ʔɨl-u
COP.PRS-1SG say.PST-3SG.M
'Solomon$_i$ said that he$_{Spk,i}$ will help **you**$_{Add,*j}$ at work'

(11) Solomon n-Kebede ʔanɛ ab srah
Solomon to-Kebede 1SG.NOM at work
kingze-xa **ʔɨj-ə** ʔɨl-u
help-OBL.2SG **COP.PRS-1SG** say.PST-3SG.M
'Solomon$_i$ said that he$_{Spk,i}$ will help **you**$_{Add,j}$ at work' [Tigrinya, personal fieldwork]

These data are problematic for most OBAs, since indexicals referring to a single context parameter are expected to behave uniformly.

A SOLUTION: CONTEXT UNSPECIFICATION

Following Blunier (2023), I am assuming a different theory where **shiftable indexicals are unspecified with respect to which context they are evaluated against**. This is implemented by positing that indexicals differ across languages in their **featural makeup**: shiftable indexicals lack an ACTUAL feature that restrict person reference (encoded as partial functions over individuals, cf. Cooper 1983; Heim 2008) to participants of the utterance context (cp. Schlenker 2003; Deal 2021). This derives the hierarchy in (12), where features are ranked in terms of strength/markedness (Sauerland 2008, Sauerland and Bobaljik 2022):

(12) a. 1: [AUTHOR] $\rightsquigarrow [\![\text{1st}_5]\!]^{g,c,i} = [\lambda x : x \sqsubset s(c) \vee s(i)].g(5)$
b. 2: [PART(ICIPANT)] $\rightsquigarrow [\![\text{2nd}_7]\!]^{g,c,i} = [\lambda x : x \sqsubseteq s(c) \vee a(c) \vee s(i) \vee a(i)].g(7)$
c. 3: [ ] $\rightsquigarrow [\![\text{3rd}_4]\!]^{g,c,i} = g(4)$

This derives the **optionality of shiftability**, since every indexical is able to access either the context or the index (cp. the context binding theory of Schlenker 2003). **Shift together** effects are captured by assuming a pragmatic preference for interpreting indexicals within the same contextual domain whenever possible. Indexicals sharing the same feature are able to circle out the same class of referents, but end up co-indexed with different individuals: this is what happens in (4) and (5), where both *pro* and 1SG are **both first person, but denote different authors**. Assuming that anaphora has to obtain whenever possible (Williams, 1997), a **competition mechanism** ensures that anaphora is realized using the **simplest form compatible with the features of its referent** (Montalbetti 1984, Levinson 1987, 1991, Mayol 2010, Ahn 2019 a.o.):

(13) **Don't overdeterminate!** [Adapted from Ahn 2019: (90)]
Let β and α be anaphoric expressions within a given language. Block β if
$\exists\alpha : \alpha \in ALT(\beta) \wedge \forall P_{\langle e,t\rangle} \lambda w P_w([\![\beta]\!]^{D,g}) \subseteq \lambda w P_w([\![\alpha]\!]^{D,g})$

Since *pro* $\in$ ALT(1SG), we correctly derive the pattern in (6), where the **structurally simplest form** (in the sense of Katzir 2007) is given a shifted interpretation. Analogous reasoning applies to examples (7) and (10): while the PART feature in unrestricted with respect to which context it can pick out its referent from, the shifted (i.e., anaphoric) meaning is not available because **the associated discourse referents have not been introduced in the discourse** (Heim 1982; Roberts 2003). In contrast, such a referent is readily retrievable from the utterance context in (9) and (11).