

Person reference as a clause structuring device

Barbara De Cock

Person reference devices (whether verbal morphology, personal pronouns or impersonalising constructions), next to their illocutionary and self-reference functions, also establish an intersubjective mental space in which speaker, hearer and bystanders interact. (This is sometimes called referential common ground, see Heritage 2007.) Even person reference devices that do not address the interlocutor, entail some positioning within the intersubjective space. This positioning can be done by means of either overt demonstration or tacit claims concerning the person reference, the latter being by far the most frequent strategy (Heritage 2007).

Assuming that person reference devices establish an intersubjective space in which further speech acts and utterances have to be interpreted, complex clauses raise two important issues with respect to the interdependence between the (sub)clauses, and with respect to person reference devices: (i) the delimitation of the intersubjective space and (ii) the repercussions of intraclausal complexity.

(i) The first question relates to the delimitation of the intersubjective space by means of person reference devices. Person reference switches – or, quite the contrary, the overt or tacit continuation of person reference – have an impact on the structure of complex clauses. Indeed, maintaining or recreating the intersubjective space entails a degree of independence – at least from a pragmatic and interactional point of view –, which may crosscut the syntactic clause structure.

(ii) From the point of view of intraclausal complexity, the occurrence patterns of person reference devices in complex clauses provide new insights into the person reference paradigm as a whole. Indeed, the occurrence of person reference devices in successive clauses reveals how these devices function with respect to one another. The intraclausal relations, however, constitute an extra factor that influences the combinatory tendencies for person reference devices.

The following example, taken from the *Corpus oral de referencia del español contemporáneo*, illustrates both research questions.

Yo creo que la experiencia no es una cosa transmisible. Creo que la experiencia es algo que uno adquiere o no, a veces... ni siquiera se adquiere pues a través de los años.

“I think that experience is not something transmissible. I think that experience is something that one acquires or not, sometimes... one doesn’t even acquire over the years.”

Creo is a 1st person singular form. The constructions with *uno* and *se* are used for a more generic and abstract person reference, without a clear deictic component. They differ in that *uno* implies speaker empathy and is more prone to establish the intersubjective space. *Se* continues an established space (De Cock ms.). The consecutive use of *creo*, *uno* and *se* presents the evolution of explicit speaker anchoring (*creo*) over generic referencing by the establishment of a new intersubjective space (*uno*) to, finally, continuing the established space (*se*).

When looking at the establishment of the intersubjective spaces (i), the switch from the 1st person singular (*creo*) to a generic construction (*uno* and *se*) invites us to reconsider the

relation between the main clause and the (completive) subclause. The change in person reference device opens up the intersubjective space from the speaker's personal view (*creo*) to a more generic view (*uno* and *se*). This is one of the cues for considering the main clause as an expression of speaker commitment concerning the generic statement in the subclause. From the intraclausal perspective (ii), the fact that *uno* is subordinated to 1st person singular *creo* enhances the interpretation of *uno* as actually including the speaker him-/herself, rather than merely expressing speaker empathy.

Thus, the interaction between complex clause structure on the one hand, and the morphological and pragmatic features of person reference on the other hand, sheds light on both research questions.

The starting point of this research will be Spanish examples, taken mainly from the *Corpus oral de referencia del español contemporáneo*. Since Spanish is a pro-drop language, the most frequently used person reference devices are both verbal morphology and subject pronouns. I will contrast this paradigm with English, where the verbal morphology on its own is not a person reference device, only the subject pronoun can fulfil this function. The consequences of these differences in the person reference device paradigm for complex clause structures will be looked into with more detail.

References

Corpus: *Corpus oral de referencia del español contemporáneo*.

<<http://www.llf.uam.es/corpus/corpus.html>>

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