

CONTEXT SHIFT AND INDEXICAL VARIABLES IN SIGN LANGUAGES

Josep Quer (ICREA & Universitat de Barcelona)

josep.quer@ub.edu

Background: Role Shift and Indexicals. The grammatical phenomenon known as *Role Shift* (RS) in sign languages (SLs) is often viewed as the equivalent of a direct discourse report (or quotation) in the visual-gestural modality. It is typically flagged by a number of nonmanual markings that may include body shift, eye gaze, head position or facial expression. Those markings are coarticulated with the manual material that is interpreted as the reported proposition. The default interpretation of personal pronouns in the scope of role shift is not determined by the utterance context but rather by the context of reported conversation, as in (1) from ASL.

- (1) JOHN_i SAY IX-1_i WANT GO (ASL: Lee et al. 1997)
‘John said: “I want to go.”’/ ‘John said that he wanted to go.’

In SLs, this strategy constitutes a much more genuine mechanism of reporting someone else’s utterance or thought than regular indirect discourse, which is an existing alternative as well. However, RS is not restricted to quotational environments, and it can also appear outside the scope of an attitude predicate, as in (2) (LIS, Italian SL): the main clause is not an attitude report in the usual sense, but it has the same surface properties as a direct quotation, for RS implies that the subject of the agreeing verb DONATE is coreferential with GIANNI. Some other examples instantiate the possibility for RS to occur independently, as in (3) from ASL.

- (2) GIANNI_i ARRIVE BOOK 1-DONATE-2 (LIS: Zucchi 2004)
‘When Gianni arrives, he will give you the book as a present.’
- (3) MOM_i IX-1_i BUSY (ASL: Lillo-Martin 1995)
‘Mom’s like, I’m busy!’

Recent work (Anand & Nevins 2004, Speas 1999, Schlenker 2003) has demonstrated that the Kaplanian analysis of indexicals in the scope of attitude reports is challenged empirically by languages like Amharic, Navajo, Slave or Zazaki, where first person pronouns embedded under a verb of saying, for instance, can corefer with the matrix clause subject (the attitude holder), and not necessarily with the utterer, as in English. The proposals made for that set of data can straightforwardly tackle the SL examples of RS such as (1), but are faced with an additional problem in cases like (2)-(3): no attitude report verb is present in the structure in order to license the shifted reading of person pronouns, a scenario which is explicitly excluded in Schlenker (2003: 69).

Proposal. In this paper I show that sign languages introduce new empirical challenges to the existing analyses of indexical elements just mentioned. Following the basic insight in Lillo-Martin (1995), I suggest that these type of languages instantiate a Point of View Operator (PVO) that materializes in RS nonmanual morphology and accounts for the attested shifted interpretations of indexicals in its scope (first and second person pronouns, time and locative indexicals). Unlike Lillo-Martin, though, I argue that PVO is not a covert reportive/attitude predicate taking a subordinate CP (the reported proposition), but a covert operator sitting in a very high projection of the functional structure of the clause, Speech Act Phrase (cf. Cinque 1999, Speas & Tenny 2003).

Such an analysis is shown to be able to unify both the quotational and non-quotational instances of RS. Further support for the proposal comes from the fact that PVO is optionally attested as an overt manual sign in the two kinds of contexts. In contrast to other analyses, the one proposed here does not reduce the issue of RS to the interpretation of first person pronoun (Zucchi 2004), as other contextual variables display a comparable pattern of behavior. It offers strong confirmation for the idea that context variables (author and addressee, time, location) in a derived context can be bound independently from each other by an attitude operator (PVO or an attitude verb) or identified with the value of the parameters in the main context of utterance. The new data discussed come mainly from Catalan Sign Language (LSC), but crosslinguistic comparison with published ASL, LIS and Danish SL data will be undertaken.

Independent shifting of indexicals. Although a hasty examination of RS in examples like (1) might take it to be simply an instance of direct “quotation”, examples like LSC (4) invalidate such a rough approach: while the first person pronoun in the reported thought is interpreted as coreferential with the attitude holder JOAN, the locative indexical HERE refers to the context of utterance (Barcelona), and not to the derived context where the locative parameter is explicitly fixed (Madrid).

- (4) $\frac{\text{MADRID}_m}{t}$ ÉS JOAN_i $\frac{\text{THINK IX}_i \text{ STUDY FINISH HERE}_b}{\text{RS-i}}$
 ‘When he was in Madrid, Joan thought he would finish his study in Barcelona.’

That this is not something specific to a particular context parameter is demonstrated by example (5) from DSL reported in Engberg-Pedersen (1995): in a RS stretch of discourse reporting her mother’s signing, the utterer uses first person pronouns to refer to herself, where a second person would have appeared in direct speech.

- (5) $\frac{\text{IX-1 MOTHER FATHER HOME AGAIN}}{\text{RS-mother}}$ / $\frac{\text{IX-1(DSL:Engberg-Pedersen 1995)}}{\text{neg}}$
 ‘that my mother and and father would go home again, not me.’

On the basis of data like these, I will argue against the crosslinguistic validity of the “Shift-Together Constraint” proposed in Anand & Nevins (2004) for Slave and Zazaki. Furthermore, additional support will be offered for Schlenker’s (2003) binding analysis of contextual variables with fresh evidence from SL showing quantifier binding reading of a first person pronoun within the scope of RS. Moreover, I will defend that Kaplanian indexical “monsters” do exist in SLs (contra Zucchi 2004).

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