

Mỹky interlocutor exponence and the syntax of the speech act

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Abstract. Mỹky is an isolated polysynthetic language spoken in southern Amazonia, in the western area of the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso (Montserrat 2010; Bardagil 2023). One of the morpheme slots on the right edge of the polysynthetic verb displays a morphological alternation, with one form corresponding to a speaker and addressee of the same category, and another form to interlocutors of different categories. I lay out a proposal to account for this alternation as an instance of morphological indexing of speech act-level participants, rather than event- or clause-level, by adopting a Participant Structure Analysis (Portner et al. 2019, 2022) and reframing Status as a broader notion called Sameness.

Keywords. syntax; morphology; Amazonian languages; speaker; addressee

1. Introduction. Mỹky is an isolated language spoken in southern Amazonia, in the western area of Mato Grosso, in Brazil (Montserrat 2000; Montserrat 2010; Bardagil 2023). The morphological profile of Mỹky is that of a polysynthetic language, with morphological exponence of multiple core and peripheral notions on the verbal complex (see section 2.1 below). One of the morpheme slots on the right edge of the polysynthetic verb displays the alternation illustrated in (1–2).

- (1) To-lo-paa-nĩ.¹
 leave-FUT-1SG-★
 ‘I’m leaving.’
- (2) To-lo-paa-sã.
 leave-FUT-1SG-★
 ‘I’m leaving.’

The difference between the two instances of this Mỹky sentence is that (1) is acceptable when said by a man to another man or by a woman to another woman, whereas (2) is acceptable only when said by a woman to a man, or vice versa. Not only that, but (1) is the required form also when both interlocutors belong to the same age category or the same cosmological category (see §2.2), whereas (2) is the obligatory form when they do not.

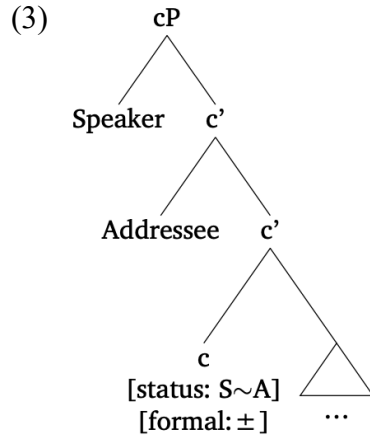
In this paper I lay out a proposal to account for the alternation illustrated above as an instance of morphological indexing of speech act-level participants, rather than event- or clause-level. In particular, I show that adopting the participant structure approach proposed by Portner

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¹Unless otherwise indicated, the data presented were collected by the author during fieldwork in Brazil. Glossed examples use standard Leipzig notation.

et al. (2019, 2022) and expanding it to accommodate inter-participant relations beyond formality can account for the morphological alternation presented by M̃ky:



Besides being one of the first theoretical publications on the syntax of M̃ky, this paper makes a contribution to the syntactic analysis of morphological representations of interlocutors. §2 briefly presents the relevant aspects of M̃ky morphosyntax, and discusses in detail the patterns of interlocutor sameness. In §3 I put forward the argument that interlocutor sex exponence is part of a broader phenomenon of interlocutor exponence. In §4 I lay out the syntactic landscape behind the phenomenon, and §5 concludes the paper.

2. Interlocutor exponence in M̃ky

2.1. THE M̃KY LANGUAGE. M̃ky is an isolated language spoken by two indigenous communities in the Juruena river basin in western Mato Grosso, in Brazil. The two communities that speak M̃ky today went through different processes of contact with neo-colonial Brazilian society. As a result of the cultural genocide that took place at the Utiariti mission’s boarding school in the mid-20th century, there has been a severe language shift in the Manoki (or Iranxe) community, with three fluent (and elderly) speakers in a community of approximately 420. The language is more vital in the M̃ky dialect, with a population of approximately 100 people, being spoken as a first language across all generations. However, a degree of diglossia favouring interactions in Portuguese has been observed in younger generations, a source of preoccupation in the community.

The context of M̃ky within Amazonia is also worth mentioning. It is located in the upper Tapajós, on the eastern part of the Guaporé-Mamoré language area (Crevels and Van der Voort 2008), a region of exceptionally high linguistic diversity encompassing parts of both Brazil and Bolivia, which presents a large number of isolated languages such as M̃ky itself.

M̃ky is a largely head-marking language. Both nouns and especially verbs are inflected for several categories. Verbs are extremely suffixing, with up to eleven suffix slots (Bardagil 2023). As a polysynthetic language, sentences in M̃ky consist minimally of the verbal word, with its inflectional morphology:

- (3) Pase-lera-maka-māju-sã.
 sing-NEG-RPT-3PL.PST-★
 ‘They did not make music.’

2.2. INTERLOCUTOR EXPONENCE. In both varieties of Mÿky, an inflectional morpheme on the verb complex is the morphological exponence of the sex of the interlocutors. This is the penultimate suffix in the verb complex, being followed only by the declarative suffix *nã~nãtã~ntã*. One of the morphemes indicates sameness between speaker and addressee, while a different morpheme indicates mismatch between speaker and addressee. In this paper I adopt the following notation for this morphological alternation: SM (same) and NSM (not same, or mismatch). A minimal pair from Monserrat (2010) is provided in example (4).

- (4) a. ♂→♂ or ♀→♀
 Poku ko-pa-rã-meemĩ-Ø/nĩ.
 bow scrape-REFL-M-3DU-SM
 ‘The two of them scraped a bow for themselves.’
 b. ♂→♀ or ♀→♂
 Poku ko-pa-rã-meemĩ-xã.
 bow scrape-REFL-M-3DU-NSM
 ‘The two of them scraped a bow for themselves.’

The Manoki variety largely presents the non-phonologically null allomorph for the interlocutor sameness value, /nĩ/, as in (5).

- (5) a. ♂→♂ or ♀→♀
 Alamy mata-lopa-raa-nĩ.
 banana eat-FUT-1SG-SM
 ‘I will eat a banana.’
 b. ♂→♀ or ♀→♂
 Alamy mata-lopa-raa-sã.
 banana eat-FUT-1SG-NSM
 ‘I will eat a banana.’

Thus, the morphological inventory of the relevant morphological slot is as in Table 1 below.

	SM	NSM
Mÿky	Ø /nĩ/	sã~xã~rã~jã
Manoki	nĩ	sã~xã~rã~jã

Table 1. Mÿky interlocutor sameness morphology.

In Mÿky, the interlocutor sameness-mismatch morphological alternation extends beyond the category of sex to also include age and cosmological nature as relevant categories targeted by the alternation. An adult speaking to a child will use the mismatch *-sã* suffix, as will also do a person speaking to a spirit, regardless of the sex of said spirit. When speaking to a *jeta* spirit, a Mÿky woman will say (6) even in the case of a female *jeta* addressee.

- (6) Mi-anã-sa-pira-papju-rã-ntã
 grow-hear-2SG-RFL-3PL-NSM-DCL
 ‘I’m listening to you with them.’

3. Sex indexicality is interlocutor exponence. Sex indexicality (also called ‘gender indexicality’) is the exponence of the sex of the interlocutors, the speech event participants (cf. Silverstein 1985; Rose 2015). Sex indexicality is a grammatical phenomenon realized in what is sometimes known as male and female speech, or “genderlects”. It can be referential, when speaker or addressee are an argument) or non-referential (when speaker or addressee are not an argument). Unlike the morphological exponence of predicate-level participants (e.g. subject or object agreement), with sex indexicality the reference is to the context of the speech act rather than the event or predicate:

“It does not matter what is being said, nor whom or what is being referred to; the indexical forms mark something about the context in which they are used.” (Silverstein 1985: 233)

Ever since the publication by Haas (1944), her proposal of a classification of sex indexicality has become the common way of describing the exponence of interlocutor sex:

- (7) **Type 1:** Indexation of the speaker’s sex (male or female speech)
Type 2 : Indexation of the addressee’s sex
Type 3: Indexation of the sex of both (relational)

While sex indexicality is far from uncommon in South American indigenous languages, a highly grammaticalized morphological manifestation such as the one attested in M̃ky is quite exceptional. Of the 41 languages with interlocutor sex indexicality found by Rose (2015), 37 present type 1, three present type 2, and five present type 3.

Type 1 is usually based on the choice of lexical item, from a small repertoire of items that exhibit this sort of alternation. Some languages like Kokama (Tupi) also index the sex of the speaker in their pronominal paradigms. An example from a Type 1 language would be the M̃bêngôkre (Jê) word for “yes”, as seen in (9).

- (8) Djàm a= mej kumrej?
 Q 2SG.ABS good very
 ‘Are you doing fine?’

- (9) a. ♂→
 Nà.
 yes
 b. ♀→
 Nhýmwej.
 yes

Type 2, or addressee-focused sex indexicality, is attested in only three of the languages in Rose’s (2015) sample. An example of that is Nambikwara, spoken by a neighbouring indigenous nation of the M̃ky in the eastern Guaporé-Mamoré area. The Southern Nambikwara variety presents non-referential indexicality of the addressee on aspect suffixes (10).

- (10) a. →♂
 Wxã³-na¹-tu¹wa².
 come-1SG.IO-FUT-IMPF.ADD♂
 ‘I will come.’

- b. $\rightarrow \text{♀}$
 Wxã³-na¹-tu¹?a².
 come-1SG.IO-FUT-IMPF.ADD ♀
 ‘I will come.’

Type 3, or relational sex indexicality, is attested in five languages of the sample in Rose (2015); note that Mÿky is absent from the sample. Of these, it is restricted to the choice of lexical items for some discourse markers in Cubeo (Tukano) and in Temb , Tapirap  and Tupinamb  (Tupian), which coexist with some Type 1 alternations. For instance, the word for an informal greeting in Tupinamb  is *h * exclusively when uttered by a female speaker to a female addressee.

A special case among the five Type 3 languages in Rose’s the sample is Chipaya, a quasi-isolated language of the Uru-Chipaya family, spoken in the Bolivian Andes (11).

- (11) a. $\text{♂/♀} \rightarrow \text{♂}$
 Zhup oqh-u-tra.
 firewood go-1SG-DCL
 ‘I’m going for firewood.’
 b. $\text{♀} \rightarrow \text{♀}$
 Zhup oqh-u-?a.
 firewood go-1SG-DCL
 ‘I’m going for firewood.’
 c. child $\rightarrow \text{♂}$
 Zhup oqh-u-qa.
 firewood go-1SG-DCL
 ‘I’m going for firewood.’
 d. $\text{♂} \rightarrow \text{♀}$ (intimate)
 Zhup oqh-u-ma.
 firewood go-1SG-DCL
 ‘I’m going for firewood.’

In the Chipaya language there is a declarative suffix that triggers a relational sex indexicality alternation based on the sex of the interlocutors (11a, 11b). Additionally, children younger than 15 years old form a separate category (11c), and the male \rightarrow female morpheme is restricted to intimate use between husband and wife (11d):

“Four forms would be expected to constitute a symmetric system of relational gender [sic] indexicality systems, because two binary parameters are combined—the gender of the speaker and that of the addressee. Remarkably, no language is known to conform to this model.(...) Although Chipaya has four forms, they are arranged in an asymmetric system involving parameters other than gender per se” (Rose 2015: 508).

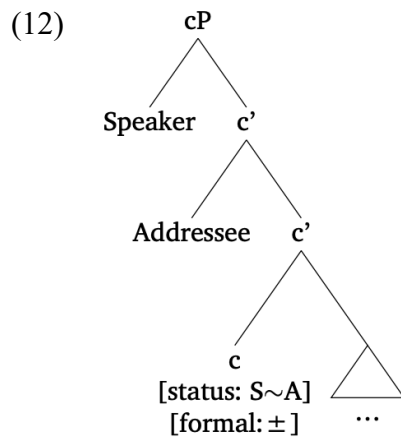
It stands that very few languages use an interlocutor exponence system, such as sex indexicality, which is also extended to other categories that characterize the interlocutors. The male \rightarrow female form in Chipaya acts as a sociolinguistic variable, being only felicitous when used in the context of intimacy with a partner. Similarly, the *-nĩ* sameness morpheme in Mÿky is recruited as a honorific: when a woman addresses her brother in law, or vice-versa, this suffix is used instead of the *-s * mismatch morpheme that would otherwise be expected between male and female interlocutors.

As seen in §2.2, like in Chipaya, in M̃yky there are other categories beyond the sex of the interlocutors that are indexed morphologically, such as age category and cosmological nature. In this paper I propose to reframe so-called sex (or gender) indexicality as an epiphenomenon of a broader morphosyntactic mechanism in languages, namely the morphosyntactic expression of speech event participants, alongside phenomena such as honorifics, allocutive agreement, or certain pragmatic particles.

4. Participant Structure Analysis. In a system that can derive the syntax behind morphological interlocutor exponence, we need to represent the Speaker and the Addressee (and the Speech Act) syntactically. I adopt the Participant Structure Analysis approach that was designed for such a goal, namely, to account for polite and familiar second person pronouns in Italian and Korean clause-typing morphemes that are sensitive to the placement of Speaker and Addressee on a hierarchy scale (Portner et al. 2019; 2022). As we will see, the two elements used in this system will prove extremely useful for a description of the M̃yky alternation (and also Chipaya), namely hierarchy and formality (Portner et al. 2022:3).

- **Hierarchy:** the hierarchical relation between speaker and addressee, along some socially relevant scale (e.g. seniority, age, kinship, etc.).
- **Formality:** the type of relation between the interlocutors that is highlighted in a given conversation.

These two dimensions are formalized as features on a syntactic head *c*, situated on the left periphery of the clause, that takes both Speaker and Addressee as its arguments (12).



In the Participant Structure Analysis framework, the [status] feature can have several possible values (13), which represent the hierarchy between the arguments of the *c* head, Speaker and Addressee; ~ is “the open relation compatible with any hierarchy” (Portner et al. 2022: 19).

- (13) [status: S<A, S>A, S ≤ A, A ≥ A, S=A, S~A]

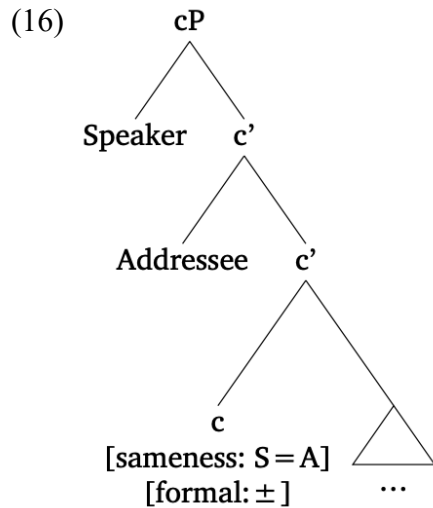
In grammatical systems where interlocutor relational exponence is manifested as a social hierarchy, using the notion of status is intuitively sound, since hierarchy is coded as the presence or absence of symmetry between Speaker and Addressee. However, this approach limits the scope of the system, crucially excluding asymmetries that are not located on a hierarchical scale, such as sex. I introduce a modification to this system in the form of replacing Status as a feature on

the *c* head with Sameness. Sameness can contain Status, but it can also encode asymmetric relationships between interlocutors which are not about status or hierarchy, just about being similar or being different for a relevant category. I also introduce one additional possible value to the Sameness feature, namely inequation, as in (14).

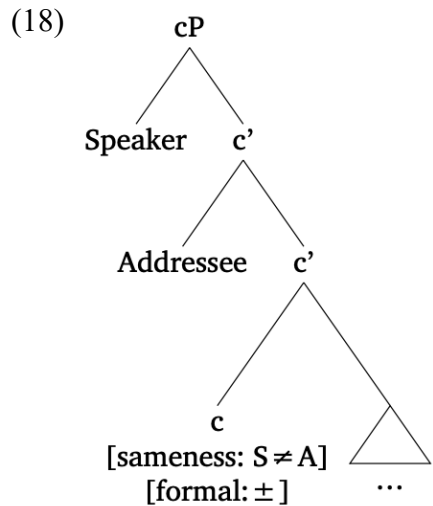
(14) [sameness: $S < A$, $S > A$, $S \leq A$, $A \geq A$, $S = A$, $S \neq A$, $S \sim A$]

This revised formal toolkit allows the Participant Structure Analysis to capture a morphological relational interlocutor exponence system such as the one in M̃yky. The feature value corresponding to an interlocutor sameness context (15) is given in (16), and the feature value of a mismatch context of interlocutor categories (17) is provided in (18).

(15) Anã-sa-raa-nĩ.
listen-2SG-1SG-SM
'I heard you.'



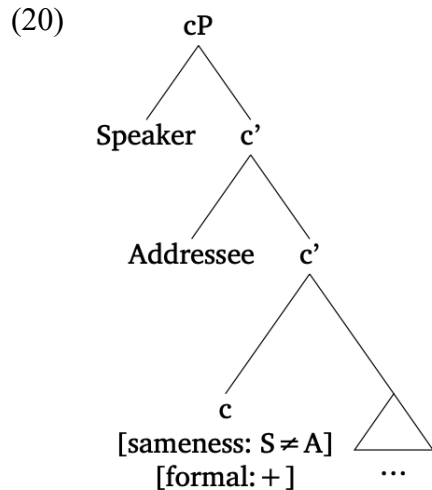
(17) Anã-sa-raa-sã.
listen-2SG-1SG-NSM
'I heard you.'



A Vocabulary Insertion rule, such as (19), then follows and derives the attested alternation based on the feature values on the c head at the spell-out stage.

- (19) [sameness: S=A] ⇒ /nĩ/
 [sameness: S≠A] ⇒ /sã~rã/

The one context where the [formal] feature is relevant in M̃yky is between siblings in law of opposite sexes, in which case the Formal value will override the Sameness feature value, as in (20-21).



- (19) [sameness: S≠A; formal: +] ⇒ /nĩ/

This approach also shows promising outcomes when applied to the Chipaya system, as summarized in (20-21).

- (20) ♀→♀
 [sameness: S=A] ⇒ /ʔa/

- (21) child→♂
 [sameness: S≠A; formal: +] ⇒ /qa/

As for the male/female→male morpheme, under the present approach it should be analyzed as being triggered by a lack of formality, given that both Speaker and Addressee would be in the same age category as adults, as in (23).

- (22) ♂/♀→♂
 [sameness: S~A; formal: -] ⇒ /tra/

Finally, the context that triggers the use of *ma* in Chipaya, intimacy between husband and wife, is a combination of inequation in sameness (for the category of sex) and a lack of formality of the context, as in (23).

- (23) ♂→♀(intimate)
 [sameness: S≠A; formal: -] ⇒ /ma/

In both M̃ky and Chipaya, interlocutor morphology is recruited to express the interpersonal or pragmatic relationship between Speaker and Addressee on a formality level. In M̃ky, the sameness form is used between siblings in law. In Chipaya, the male→female form also expresses the intimacy of the communicative situation. Here, the closeness between interlocutor sameness and honorificity is no coincidence, but a result of the predictions system that encodes these two notions as intimately related.

5. Conclusion. M̃ky is one of two South American languages with a described morphological system of relational interlocutor exponence, the other language being Chipaya. In order to derive the morphosyntax of interlocutor sameness, the syntax needs to gain access to the contextual layer of the clause, the speech event level. Participant Structure Analysis provides such a framework. I have shown in this paper that stepping back and approaching the notion of Hierarchy, and the corresponding feature, as being an instantiation of a broader notion of Sameness, the framework is readily able to predict highly grammaticalized interlocutor exponence patterns such as those attested in M̃ky and Chipaya.

Under the present analysis, far from it being exceptional or exotic, interlocutor sex exponence becomes reframed as one manifestation of a broad and well-attested phenomenon, namely the morphosyntactic expression of Speaker and Addressee, and the speech event more generally. Just like the morphosyntactic exponence of event-level participants can be instantiated as different features in the morphosyntax (gender, number), so is the case as well with utterance-level participants.

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