

Gender and allocutivity in the world's languages

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Overview. The term ‘allocutivity’ refers to the grammatical encoding of speech act participants, i.e. *speaker* and *addressee* of an utterance, which may also describes the social relations that they share with each other like *politeness* and *familiarity*. In the expression of such allocutivity, we put forth our crosslinguistic observations wrt. gender in (1) and (2).

- (1) **Addressee generalization:** If languages mark the gender of the addressee (addressee allocutivity), then gender indicates familiarity, not politeness between speaker and addressee.
- (2) **Speaker generalization:** If languages mark the gender of the speaker (speaker allocutivity), then gender does not distinguish politeness from familiarity between speaker and addressee.

While the phenomenon has been documented in a number of unrelated languages (Antonov 2015), both types of allocutivity are prominently attested for South Asian languages. To account for (1) and (2), we encode the speaker as the external and the addressee as the internal argument of a speech act head (Speas and Tenny 2003), which comes with a gender probe and enters spec-head agreement. The addressee must undergo object shift to check features.

Data. The addressee generalization (1) is fully explicated in languages like Basque (Oyharçabal 1993, Antonov 2015, Haddican 2018) and Tamil (Amritavalli 1991, McFadden 2020), which express addressee allocutivity to indicate both politeness and familiarity. As illustrated for Tamil, when politeness is expressed, there is no gender distinction (3a) but in the case of familiarity, there is a gender distinction (3b-3c). Gender can also not be expressed, but in this case the missing distinction cross-cuts contexts, shown for Magahi (Alok 2021: 2) in (4). A non-exhaustive list of languages is given in Table 1.

- (3) a. Mani va-nt-aan-unge
 Mani come-PST-3SGM-ALLOC.POL
 ‘Mani came.’ (politeness: male or female addr)
- b. Mani va-nt-aan-da
 Mani come-PST-3SGM-ALLOC.FAM.M
 ‘Mani came.’ (familiarity: male addr)
- c. Mani va-nt-aan-di
 Mani come-PST-3SGM-ALLOC.FAM.F
 ‘Mani came.’ (familiarity: female addr)

Languages	POL	FAM	source
Basque	✗	✓	Oyharçabal (1993)
Tamil	✗	✓	McFadden (2020)
Nambikuara	✗	✓	Antonov (2015)
Beja	✗	✓	Antonov (2015)
Punjabi	✗	✗	Kaur (2020)
Magahi	✗	✗	Alok (2021)
Korean	✗	✗	Pak (2015)
Japanese	✗	✗	Pak (2015)

Table 1: Gender distinction for addressee

- (4) a. Haam jaait h-i-o
 1SG go.PROG be-1-ALLOC.POL
 ‘I’m going.’ (politeness: male or female addr)
- b. Haam jaait h-i-au
 1SG go.PROG be-1-ALLOC.FAM
 ‘I’m going.’ (familiarity: male or female addr)

Languages	POL	FAM	source
Yanuwa	✓	✓	Kirton (1988)
Kūṛux	✓	✓	Ekka (1972), fieldwork
Chiquitano	✓	✓	Rose (2015)
Kokama	✓	✓	Vallejos (2010)
Burmese	✓	✓	fieldwork
Iatê	✓	✓	Costa and Silva (2005)

Table 2: Gender distinction for speaker

In addition to addressee allocutive languages, there are also speaker allocutive languages that reflect gender of the speaker invariably across politeness or familiarity contexts (2). Kūṛux explicates (2) by always encoding the gender of the speaker to express allocutivity (Ekka 1972), see (5-6). More speaker allocutive languages are shown in Table 2 (for Burmese and Kūṛux at least we verified with speakers that politeness and familiarity are triggers for speaker allocutivity).

- (5) ni:n bar-k-i
 2SG come-PST-2SG.ALLOC.M
 ‘You came.’ (Male speaker)
- (6) ni:n bar-k-in
 2SG come-PST-2SG.ALLOC.F
 ‘You came.’ (Female speaker)

Analysis. We follow Miyagawa (2012), Haegeman and Hill (2013), Akkuş and Hill (2020), assuming

that speech act participants are encoded syntactically. Specifically, we adopt the original proposal in [Speas and Tenny \(2003: 320\)](#), where speaker and addressee (henceforth HEARER) are modeled as external and internal argument of a speech act head (7).

(7) $[_{saP} \text{ SPEAKER } [_{sa'} \text{ sa}^o [_{SAP} \text{ UTTERANCE CONTENT } [_{SA'} \text{ SA}^o \text{ HEARER }]]]]$

In light of (7), we model the addressee generalization in (1) as a markedness effect, akin to Differential Object Marking ([Aissen 2003](#)). In DOM languages, an object is more likely to be case marked the more prominent it is in the discourse. Similarly, we propose that HEARER is more likely to be gender marked the more prominent s(he) is to the speaker, where familiar arguably indicates more prominence than polite. We implement this intuition with a raising analysis, as it is prominently also adopted to account for DOM effects ([Bhatt and Anagnostopoulou 1996](#), [Kelepir 2001](#), [López 2012](#)). For a DOM effect, objects shift to a case marking position (or to escape existential closure). In parallel, we propose HEARER shifts to a position where it can establish a familiar relation to SPEAKER (semantic details will be given in the talk). Allocutive languages are special in that the sa^o head comes with a gender probe $[u\gamma: _]$, resulting in allocutive markers sensitive to gender distinctions. We derive the typology in Tables 1 and 2 via ordering of features ([Stabler 1997](#), [Müller 2009](#)) on the sa^o head, where HEARER shift is triggered via $[uFAM]$ and SPEAKER is externally merged via $[uD]$. Only the highest feature on the feature stack is accessible, it has to be deactivated before the next feature can become active. For languages like Basque and Tamil, the order of features is: $[uFAM \prec u\gamma: _ \prec uD]$, see (10) below for typology. In the familiar context (8), HEARER moves to Spec, saP first, where it is in a local relation to undergo Agree with sa^o in a second step. SPEAKER is merged in step 3 since $[uD]$ is the last feature on the stack. The allocutive markers in (3b-3c) spell out $[\gamma: val, FAM]$.

(8) a. *Step 1*: $[_{sa'} \text{ HEARER}_{[FAM]} [_{sa'} \text{ sa}^o_{[uFAM \prec u\gamma: val \prec uD]} [_{SAP} \text{ UC } [_{SA'} \text{ Sa}^o _]]]]$

b. *Step 2*: $[_{sa'} \text{ HEARER}_{[FAM]} [_{sa'} \text{ sa}^o_{[uFAM \prec u\gamma: val \prec uD]} [_{SAP} \text{ UC } [_{SA'} \text{ Sa}^o _]]]]$

c. *Step 3*: $[_{saP} \text{ SPEAKER } [_{sa'} \text{ HEARER}_i [_{sa'} \text{ sa}^o_{[uFAM \prec u\gamma: val \prec uD]} [_{SAP} \text{ UC } [_{SA'} \text{ Sa}^o _ i]]]]]]$

The feature $[uFAM]$ is privative, its absence implicates politeness. In the politeness context (9), $[u\gamma: _]$ remains unvalued. Merge of SPEAKER comes to late to feed Agree. We assume Agree can fail, thus leading to insertion of the non-gender specific allocutive marker in (3a).

(9) a. *Step 1*: $[_{sa'} \text{ sa}^o_{[u\gamma: _ \prec uD]} [_{SAP} \text{ UC } [_{SA'} \text{ Sa}^o \text{ HEARER }]]]]$

b. *Step 2*: $[_{saP} \text{ SPEAKER } [_{sa'} \text{ sa}^o_{[u\gamma: _ \prec uD]} [_{SAP} \text{ UC } [_{SA'} \text{ Sa}^o \text{ HEARER }]]]]]]$

In addressee allocutive languages without gender sensitivity (10b), $[u\gamma: _]$ is the first feature on the stack, which will always remain unvalued as neither SPEAKER nor HEARER is merged in Spec, saP in time for Agree to take place. Allocutive familiar markers spell out $[\gamma: _, FAM]$ (4a), polite markers spell out $[\gamma: _]$ (4b). Finally, speaker allocutive languages always track gender features of the speaker (10c). Thus, SPEAKER is merged first, providing the local goal for Agree with sa^o ($[uFAM]$ attracts HEARER to the outer specifier). Allocutive markers spell out $[\gamma: val]$ (5-6).

(10) *Typology of Table 1 and Table 2*

a. $uFAM \prec u\gamma: _ \prec uD$ (*Basque, Tamil, Nambikuara, Beja*)

b. $u\gamma: _ \prec \{uFAM, uD\}$ (*Punjabi, Magahi, Korean, Japanese*)

c. $uD \prec \{uFAM, u\gamma: _ \}$ (*Table 2*)

Summary: The addressee generalization results from HEARER shift – a movement operation triggered by a prominence requirement, in parallel to DOM effects. The speaker generalization falls out from the fact that SPEAKER is already first merged in a position local to the gender probe. The language typology

is modeled by order of features on the *sa*^o head.

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