Pronoun Strength and Agreement Shift in Assamese

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, an attempt has been made to show how Assamese, an IA language marks *de se* (conscious self-reference of the attitude holder) by using agreement shift (where first person Agreement on the embedded verb agrees with the third person subject of the matrix clause). It is seen only in the presence of the quotative complementizer *buli*. The paper discusses the interaction of Agreement shift with the two complementizers and the strength of pronouns which raises problems for previous analyses. The analysis is done using the LogP mechanism and we conclude that the [±LOG] feature of the pronouns is responsible for Agreement shift.

1 Introduction

Attitudes can be of two types: *de se* and *de re*. *De se* refers to the state when the attitude holder is fully aware that the said attitude is about himself whereas *de re* refers to the state when the attitude holder is unaware that the said attitude is about himself. Thus the following sentence (1) can mean both (2a) and (2b).

(1) Ram said that he is tall.

(2) a. Ram said, "I am tall."
b. Ram$_i$ said, "He$_i$ is tall."

In (2a), Ram is consciously referring to himself but in (2b) there might be an instance where he might be watching a video where he himself is acting but is unable to recognize himself. Thus, in both these contexts Ram is referring to himself.

Linguists are interested in *de se* attitude ascriptions and Chierchia (1989) discovered that there are elements in natural languages which must be obligatorily interpreted as *de se*. They can be overt and covert. As summarized in Balusu (2018), the overt pro-forms include: Quasi-indexicals (Castañeda 1966), West-African Logophors (Kusumoto 1998) and Shifted Indexicals (Schlenker 1999) and the covert/implicit arguments are: Subject Controlled *pro* (Morgan 1970,Chierchia 1989), Predicates of personal taste (Lasersohn 2005) and Generics/Impersonals (Safir 2005, Moltman 2006, Malamud 2006). Monstrous agreement or agreement shift (Messick 2016) is another process through which *de se* construals are formed.

Anand (2006) classifies the mechanisms for obtaining *de se* into three types.

(3) a. Special case (*de se* is derived from *de re*)
b. Via Binding
c. Via Overwriting

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According to the first mechanism which states that *de se* is a special case of *de re*, *de se* is the outcome of a self-acquaintance relationship which holds between the attitude holder and the person he/she is referring to whereas *de re* is just the acquaintance relationship between them.

(4) a. *De se* context: Ram looks at himself in the mirror and thinks, "I am tall".
Ram thinks that he$_{de\ se}$ is tall.
b. *De re* context: Looking at his reflection but unable to recognize himself Ram thinks, "That man is tall".
Ram thinks that he$_{de\ re}$ is tall.

De re reading requires an acquaintance relationship to hold between Ram (as the referent of *Ram*) and Ram (as the referent of *he*) which results in the relation *R(x, y) = x is the individual that y is looking in the glass*. On the other hand *de se* reading involves a 'self' acquaintance relationship which can be stated as *R(x, y) = x is the individual that y identifies with* (here, *R* is the 'self-acquaintance' relationship). It can be summarized as:

(5) a. *de re = de re* = $R_{acq}(x,y)$ (an acquaintance relation holds between *x* and *y*)
b. *de re = de se* = $R_{self\text{-}acq}(x, y)$ (a self-acquaintance relation holds between *x* and *y*)

According to the binding mechanism which was originally proposed by Percus and Sauerland (2003), *de se* and *de re* have different LFs. The *de se* LF contains a semantically uninterpreted pronoun which moves to the left periphery of the embedded clause. After that it triggers predicate abstraction over the argument associated with it and ends up identified with the center of world associated with the speaker's thoughts (in this case *think* from the previous contexts).

(6) a. Ram thinks that he$_{de\ se}$ is tall.
b. *de se* LF: Ram thinks that he* λx [x is tall].

On the other hand, the *de re* LF lacks overt pronoun movement as there is no pronoun that ends up being identified with the 'belief self'. Percus and Sauerland (2003) propose the following LF for *de re*:

(7) a. Ram thinks that he$_{de\ re}$ is tall.
b. *de re* LF: Ram thinks that PROP he$_2$ is tall. where [|he$_2$|] = Ram

The pronouns here are assumed to be directly referential and in order to maintain a single lexical entry for *think* in both *de se* and *de re* LFs the type shifting operator PROP is introduced which turns a proposition into a property.

The overwriting mechanism states that there is a monster operator which changes the author of context to the author of attitude context.

(8) $[|\ \textcircled{\scriptsize :}a|]^{c,i,g} = [|a|]^{i,i,g}$

This operator is responsible for Indexical shift (Schlenker1999, 2003) in languages like Slave and Zazaki (Anand 2006). When this operator doesn't change the author of context to the author of attitude context, there is no indexical shift.

2 Agreement Shift in Assamese

Agreement shift can be defined as the process where a 3rd person context triggers 1st person agreement. In South Asian languages like Tamil, Telugu, Assamese, Nepali and Marathi optional Agreement shift is seen in the presence of 3rd/2nd person subjects[2].

(9) a. xi [bhat kha-**m**] buli ko-isil-e (Assamese)
3M.Nom rice.Acc eat-Fut.**1** Comp say-Pst-3
'He said that he would eat rice.'
b. rani [tanu exam pass ajj-aa-**n**-ani] nam-mu-tundi (Telugu)[3]
rani [3Sg exam pass happen-Pst-**1Sg**-Comp] believe-Pst-F.Sg
'Rani believed that she passed the exam.'
c. u khan-**chu** bhanero bhan thiyo (Nepali)
3 eat-Fut.**1** Comp said exist.Pst
'He said that he would eat.'

All the sentences above are unambiguously interpreted *de se*.

2.1 Agreement Shift is not a 'Quote'

At first sight of these examples look like instances of direct speech there is no agreement shift in them. But there are certain tests which can prove that these are not quotations but indirect sentences. The test of *wh*-insertion is one such test:

(10) xi **ki** kha-m buli ko-isil-e
3M.Nom what eat-Fut.1 Comp say-Pst-3
'What did he say he'd eat?'

Operators can't move outside a quote and also a quote is like a wall blocking the interference from any outside element. In (10) the *wh*-word *ki* in the embedded clause is able to take matrix scope and that is sufficient to prove that agreement shift is not a quotation.

Another test, the test of NPI insertion, where negation in the matrix clause can license the NPI present in the embedded clause works for Telugu (Balusu 2018) but not for Assamese because Assamese NPIs are strict NPIs and require local licensing.

2.2 Properties of Agreement Shift in Assamese

A range of verbs in Assamese allow for agreement shift: it can happen in an embedded clause under a verb like *ko* 'say', *bhab* 'think' but not under the verb *zan* 'know'. The verb in the embedded clause has no restrictions.

(11) a. xi bhat kha-m buli bhab-isil-e / ko-isil-e
3M.Nom rice.Acc eat-Fut.1 Comp think-Pst-3 / say-Pst-3
'He thought/said that he would eat rice.'
b. *xi bhat kha-m buli zan-isil-e
3M.Nom rice.Acc eat-Fut.1 Comp know-Pst-3

[2] It is optional as 3rd/2nd person agreement (depending on the subject) can also be used which would mean the same.
[3] Example taken from Messick (2016)

'He knew that he would eat rice.'

The second property of agreement shift in Assamese is that verbs in RATIONALE clauses have obligatory agreement shift.

(12) xi mar-im /*mar-ib-o buli goisil-e
3M.Nom thrash-Fut.1 / thrash-Fut.3 Comp go.Pst-3
'He went with the purpose of thrashing.'

There is no agreement shift in the presence of an overt pronoun. The overt pronoun in the embedded clause doesn't refer to the matrix subject.

(13) xi_i [moi_j za-m] buli ko-isil-e
3M.Nom 1.Nom go-Fut.1 Comp say-Pst-3
'He_i said that I_j would go.'

This also shows that there is no indexical shift in Assamese. In indexical shift, the indexicals are subject to shift whereas in agreement shift, it is the agreement on the verb that shifts.

Agreement shift also occurs in the presence of an anaphor and in the presence of both an overt pronoun and an emphatic pronoun.

(14) a. xi nize za-m buli ko-isil-e
3M.Nom Anaph go-Fut.1 Comp say-Pst-3
'He said that he would go by himself.'
b. $tumi_i$-nize za-m buli tumi ko-isil-a
2-Emph go-Fut.1 Comp 2.Nom say-Pst-3
'You yourself said that you would go.'

2.3 Complementizers and Agreement Shift

Assamese has two complementizers: the quotative complementizer *buli* and the relative complementizer *ze*. The complementizer *ze* subcategorizes both for [±declarative] clauses while *buli* subcategorizes only for [+declarative] clauses.

(15) a. tumi ki kha-b-a buli ko-isil-a
2.Nom what eat-Fut-2 Comp say-Pst-2
'What did you say you would eat?'
b. tumi ko-isil-a ze tumi ki kha-b-a
2.Nom say-Pst-2 that 2.Nom what eat-Fut-2
'You said what you would eat.'

(15a) gives a wide-scope of *wh* whereas (15b) gives a narrow scope of *wh*. Thus, *ze* subcategorizes both for [±declarative] whereas *buli* subcategorizes only for [+declarative] clauses. Another area in which both of them differ is that *buli* allows for subject *pro* in the embedded clause whereas *ze* doesn't. Also, agreement shift happens only under the *buli* complementizer and not under *ze*.

(16) a. *xi ko-isil-e ze *pro* za-m
3M.Nom say-Pst-3 that go-Fut.1
'He said that he would go.'

b. xi *pro* za-m buli ko-isil-e
3M.Nom go-Fut.1 Comp say-Pst-3
'He said that he would go.'

Emphatic pronouns under *ze* also don't allow for Agreement Shift:

(17) xi ko-isil-e ze xi nije za-b-o / *za-m
3M.Nom say-Pst-3 that 3M.Nom Emph go-Fut-3 / go-Fut.1
'He$_i$ said that he$_{i/j}$ would go by himself.'

3 Logophoricity Vs Anti-logophoric Vs No Logophoricity

According to Anand (2006), pronouns have [±LOG] features associated with them and these features play an important role in *de se* interpretation. The [±LOG] features give rise to Logophoric pronouns, Anti-Logophoric pronouns and pronouns with No Logophoricity. They can be described as follows:

(18) a. Logophoric: When the overt pronoun/*pro* in the embedded clause and the matrix subject refer to the same person.
[$_{TP}$matrix subject$_i$…[$_{CP}$…[$_{TP}$… embedded subject/*pro*$_{i/*j}$]]]

b. Anti-Logophoric: the overt pronoun/*pro* in the embedded clause and the matrix subject are not and cannot be co-referential in any case.
[$_{TP}$matrix subject$_i$…[$_{CP}$… [$_{TP}$… embedded subject/*pro*$_{*i/j}$]]]

c. No Logophoricity: The overt pronoun/*pro* in the embedded clause may or may not be co-referential.
[$_{TP}$matrix subject$_i$ … [$_{CP}$… [$_{TP}$… embedded subject/*pro*$_{i/j}$]]]

3.1 Logophoric Vs Anti-Logophoric in Assamese

In Assamese, Agreement shift is related to the choice of the complementizer and also the *pro*-drop parameter. All the examples we've come across having the *buli* complementizer had a logophoric *pro* in the subject position of the embedded clause. They can be represented as (repeated from (11)):

(19) a. *xi$_i$ [pro$_{i/*j}$ bhat kham] buli koisile* 'He said that he would eat rice.'
b. *xi$_i$ [pro$_{i/*j}$ bhat kham] buli bhabisile* 'He thought that he would eat rice.'

In the presence of an anaphor or an emphatic pronoun also, this is the same case with the complementizer *buli*. The overt pronoun/*pro* will always refer to the matrix subject (repeated from (14)):

(20) a. *xi [pro$_{i/*j}$ nize zam] buli koisile* 'He said that he would go by himself.'
b. *[tumi$_i$ nize$_{i/*j}$ zam] buli tumi$_i$ koisila* 'You yourself said that you would go.'

Anti-Logophoric *pro* is seen with the complementizer *ze*[4].

In the presence of an emphatic pronoun with the *ze* complementizer, there is no logophoricity to be seen as in certain contexts it may refer to the speaker but in certain cases it may not.

(21) xi ko-sil-e ze xi nize za-b-o
3M.Nom say-Pst-3 that 3M.Nom Emph go-Fut-3
'He$_i$ said that he$_{i/j}$ would go by himself.'

To summarize our observations till now, we can say:

(22) a. *pro* is of two types: logophoric *pro* which goes with the complementizer *buli*; and anti-logophoric *pro*, which goes only with the complementizer *ze*.
b. Overt pronouns in the embedded clauses show no logophoricity.
c. Emphatic pronouns go both with *buli* and *ze*.
d. Agreement Shift happens with logophoric *pro* and emphatic pronoun which come under the *buli* complementizer.

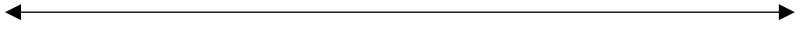
On the basis of these observations we can generalize the following:

(23) a. *buli* + *pro*$_{i/*j}$ [+LOG] = Agreement Shift
b. *ze* + *pro*$_{*i/j}$ [-LOG] ≠ Agreement Shift
c. buli + Emphatic pronoun = Agreement Shift
d. *ze* + Emphatic Pronoun ≠ Agreement shift
e. *ze/buli* + *xi*≠ Agreement Shift

4 Pronominal Strength

Patel-Grosz (2015) makes a distinction between strong and weak pronouns and proposes that pronouns with a more structural complexity are less likely be interpreted as *de se* whereas pronouns with a less structural complexity are more likely to have a *de se* interpretation. Her generalized hierarchy is:

(24) *null pronoun<clitic personal pronoun<strong personal pronoun<dem. pronoun*

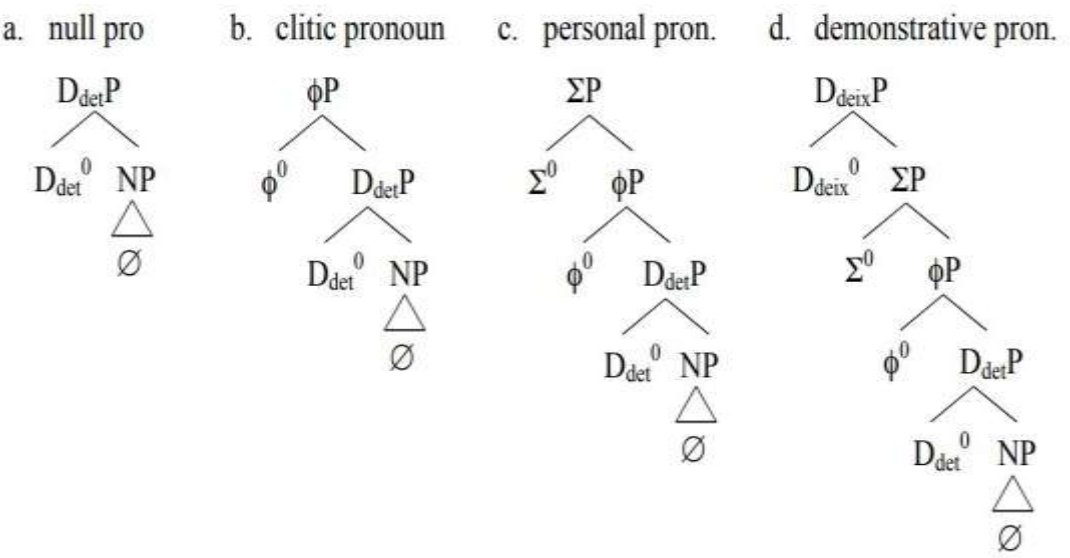


de se **de se*

The structure which she presents for the above mentioned types of pronouns is as follows (Patel 2015):

[4]Although *ze* doesn't allow *pro* in the subject position of the embedded clause, there are some rare cases but in all those cases the pro is anti-logophoric.
(1) xi ko-isil-e ze *pro*$_{*i/j}$ za-b-o
3M.Nom say-Pst-3 that go-Fut-3
'He said that he/they$_{*i/j}$ would go.'

(25)



Following the above trees, we see that the null pronouns have the least structurally complex structure whereas the pronouns used for deixis have the most structurally complex structure. Assamese makes distinction between null and overt pronouns. However, the null pronoun in Assamese goes with both the complementizers: *buli* and *ze*. This then raises a problem: the null pronoun with *buli* is most likely to be interpreted as *de se* but when it occurs with *ze*, there are least chances for it to be interpreted as *de se*. If we follow Patel Grosz's hierarchy for structural complexity of pronouns, then the hierarchy for Assamese would be as follows:

(26) *de se* proclivity in Assamese:
pro (with *buli*), anaphors, emphatic pronouns > personal pronouns, *pro* (with *ze*)

The distinction is not very clear and also there cannot be two null pronouns in the same language, each having a distinct choice of the complementizer. Thus, we do not follow the hypothesis that structural complexity is the reason behind *de se* interpretation.

5 Analysis of the Data

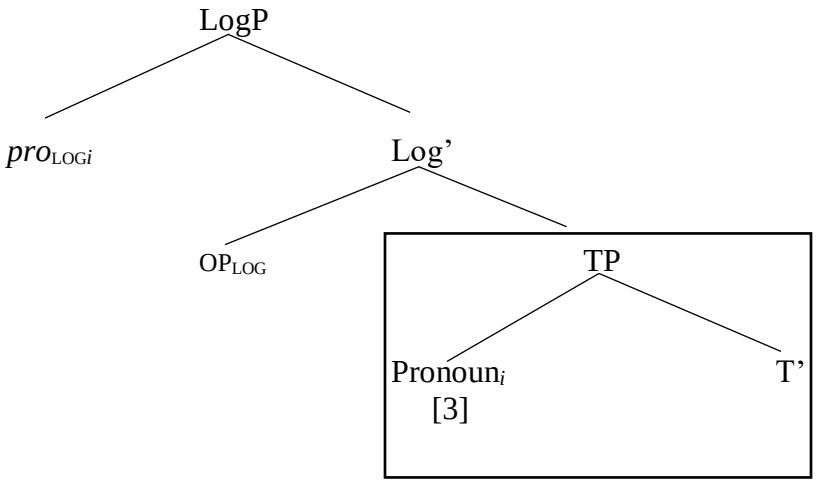
In order to analyse the Assamese data, following Balusu (2018) for Telugu, we use the LogP mechanism which was used by Charnavel (2017) to analyse exempt anaphors. Exempt anaphors are those anaphors which are not locally bound. LogP is a perspectival projection outside each spell-out domain which hosts a silent logophoric operator. That operator is a syntactic head OP_{LOG} and it selects a silent logophoric pronoun pro_{log} as its subject. It also presupposes that its complement α is presented from the first personal perspective of the subject.

(27) a. $[_{XP}\ [_{YP}[_{LogP} pro_{log\text{-}i}\ [OP_{log}$ … exempt anaphor$_i$…]]]]
<--------><--->
PHASE EDGE SPELL-OUT DOMAIN

b. $[[OP_{log}\alpha]] = \lambda x{:}\alpha$ is presented from x's first person perspective

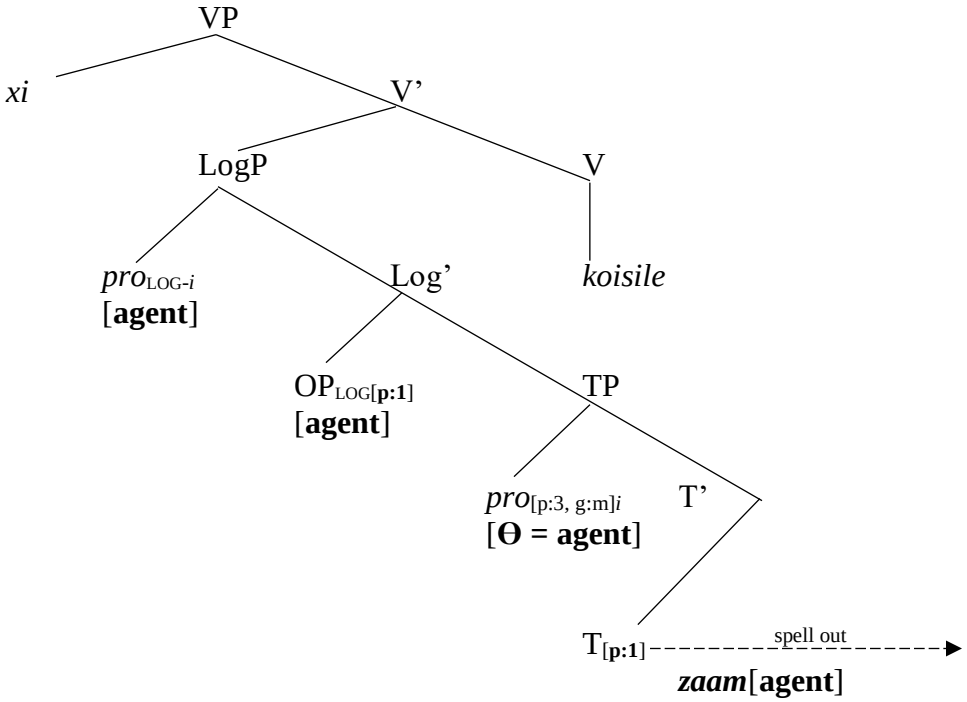
In order to explain Assamese data, we expand the LogP mechanism and propose that LogPs in Assamese are located at the phase edge of CP. The Assamese LogP is represented as follows:

(28)



The LogP in Assamese is outside the spell-out domain of CP. The operator head of LogP i.e. OP has a [1] feature that it transfers to T via C-to-T transfer (Obata and Epstein 2008). After C-to-T transfer happens, the agent Θ-role gets transferred from T to OP_{LOG} from which it is assigned to pro_{LOG}. This is the reason why only the agent pronouns can co-refer to pro_{LOG}. The pronouns in the Spec of TP and LogP co-refer, which trigger C-to-T movement of [1] and that shows up as verbal agreement and in this case it is agreement shift.

(29)



[[OP*pro* zaam]]: λx: '*pro* zaam' is presented from x's first person perspective

In cases where there is normal 3rd person agreement we can state that there is no LogP. Thus, we see that pronouns have [±LOG] feature associated with them which plays the main role in agreement shift.

5.1 Interaction of Agreement Shift with pronouns, complementizers and verbs

Anaphors, emphatic pronouns and *pro* in Assamese have [±LOG] features which allows them to be embedded under a LogP. On the basis of this discussion we can represent the [±LOG] features of Assamese pronouns in the following Table:

Pronouns	[±LOG] feature
pro (with *buli*)	[±LOG]
pro (with *ze*)	[−LOG]
Personal pronouns	[−LOG]
Anaphors	[+LOG]
Emphatic pronouns	[+LOG]

Table 1: [±LOG] features of Pronouns

In answer to the question of why agreement shift happens under the complementizer *buli* and not under *ze*, the answer is that *buli* has a larger left periphery compared to *ze* and this allows *buli* to embed a LogP under it. Since *ze* cannot embed a LogP under it, there is no agreement shift.

In case of verbs, agreement shift is mostly seen with verbs like *ko* 'say', *bhab* 'think' as the matrix verb. As mentioned earlier, the embedded verb has no restrictions. Agreement shift is never seen with verbs like *zaan* 'know', *buz* 'understand' and so on. Thus, SPEECH and THOUGHT verbs allow agreement shift whereas KNOWLEDGE verbs don't. Thus, the LogP in Assamese is merged at such a height that SPEECH and THOUGHT verbs can embed it, but KNOWLEDGE verbs can't. The hierarchy is:

(30) SPEECH>THOUGHT>KNOWLEDGE

6 Critique of previous accounts of Agreement Shift

Messick (2016) and Sundaresan (2018) have put forward two different analyses to account for Telugu and Tamil data respectively. However these accounts fail to account for the Assamese data. According to Messick, the 3rd person pronoun in the embedded clause is a result of feature transmission mechanism. It starts as a minimal pronoun and the abstractor over individuals binds the pronoun in its scope and values its *i*F and *u*F with author and –C* features (-C* means that the pronoun is not the author of the actual speech context):

(31) $[_{CP1}\lambda w1.\ [_{w1}$ John believes $[_{CP2}\lambda x2\ .\lambda w3\ .\ [_{TP}X_{[uF:\ author,\ -c^*,\ iF:author,\ -c^*]}$ is smart]]]] (BINDING)

Assuming the language has subject agreement, the pronoun and T undergo match:

(32) $[_{CP}\lambda x\ .\lambda w\ .\ [_{TP}X_{[uF:\ author,\ -c^*,\ iF:author,\ -c^*]}\ \ldots\ T_{u\Phi}\_\_\_\ \ldots\ ]]$ (MATCHING)

After this the pronoun and T undergo VALUATION, in which the *i*F value of the pronoun is copied to T:

(33) [$_{CP}$λx .λw . [$_{TP}$X$_{[uF:\ author,\ -c^*,\ iF:author,\ -c^*]}$ … T $_{u\Phi author,\ -c^*}$ …]]

VALUATION

The result is spell-out which results the pronoun and the agreement morpheme to be spelt out as first person. But in Telugu, the first person pronoun *neenu* can only be inserted with the feature values [AUTHOR] and [+C*] (+C* means author of actual speech context). As a last resort, feature transmission with the matrix subject (which is a third person pronoun) allows the pronoun to be spelt out as *vaaDu*.

(34) S$_{[3.m.sg]}$V[[… X$_{[uF:3.m.sg;\ -c^*,iF:author;\ -c^*\ldots]}$…]

FEATURE TRANSMISSION

Mesick follows the overwriting mechanism to account for agreement shift in Telugu *i.e.* the overwriting mechanism where features are being overwritten. This analysis cannot account for the Assamese data as there is the presence of *pro*, anaphors and emphatic pronouns in the embedded clause. Also, in the presence of an overt pronoun in the embedded clause there is no agreement shift in Assamese.

Sundaresan (2018) proposes a solution for the Tamil anaphor *taan*, which is an anaphor in the embedded clause and whose antecedent is a 3rd person pronoun but the agreement on the verb is 1st person. She proposes that there is a silent perspectival *pro* in the PersP with inherent *Φ*-features. The *pro* denotes the individual denoted by the anaphoric antecedent. The agreement mechanism (Sundaresan 2018) is as follows:

(35) Agree + binding between *pro* and *ta(a)n*

T probes upward to get its *Φ*-features valued by *taan* but fails

[$_{CP}$…[$_{PerspP}$*pro*$_{\{Dep:\ i,\ P:3;\ G:\ m;\ N:\ sg\}}$…[$_{TP}$*taan*$_{\{Dep:\mathbf{i},\ N:\ sg\}}$ T$_{\{P:_;\ G:\ _;\ N:_\}}$…]]]

T probes locally until it hits *pro*, the next closest goal

[$_{CP}$…[$_{PerspP}$*pro*$_{\{Dep:\ i,\ P:3;\ G:\ m;\ N:\ sg\}}$…[$_{TP}$*taan*$_{\{Dep:\mathbf{i},\ N:\ sg\}}$ T$_{\{P:_;\ G:\ _;\ N:_\}}$…]]]

Valuation succeeds!

[$_{CP}$…[$_{PerspP}$*pro*$_{\{Dep:\ i,\ P:3;\ G:\ m;\ N:\ sg\}}$…[$_{TP}$*taan*$_{\{Dep:\mathbf{i},\ N:\ sg\}}$ T$_{\{P:\underline{3};\ G:\underline{m};\ N:\underline{sg}\}}$…]]]

In order to have 1st person agreement on the embedded verb the perspectival *pro* must also be born with 1st person *Φ*-features. She assumes that the shift is due to the presence of a "monster" (😟) operator (Kaplan 1989, Schlenker 2003, Anand 2006, Shklovsky and Sudo 2014) introduced by the speech predicate *soll* 'say' in its complement. The operator replaces the context of utterance context with the intensional index of the predicate.

(36) [|😟*a*|]^{c,i,g} = [|*a*|]^{i,i,g}

Pro, a first person indexical is merged in the scope of this monster and as a result it shifts.

(37) [$_{CP}$😟 [$_{PersP}$ *pro*$_{[P:1;\ G:m;\ N:sg]}$…[$_{TP}$*taan*$_{[n:s]}$ T$_{[P:1;\ G:m;\ N:sg]}$…]]]

This method also uses the overwriting mechanism to explain for agreement shift where contexts are being overwritten. The analysis can account for agreement shift in Assamese in the presence of *pro* and anaphors but it still can't explain agreement shift in the presence of emphatic pronouns.

The LogP mechanism, on the other hand can explain agreement shift in Assamese for all the facts and also the optionality of Agreement shift. The [±LOG] feature allows a pronoun to be embedded under a LogP and hence explain agreement shift.

7 Conclusion

To account for Assamese agreement shift we use both Charnavel (2017) and Sundaresan's (2018) mechanisms. The LogP is a perspectival projection which hosts a silent logophoric operator, just like the silent *pro* in PersP. *De se* interpretation in Assamese depends on the [±LOG] features of the pronoun and not in its structural complexity. The LogP in Assamese is merged at such a height that SPEECH and THOUGHT verbs can embed it, but KNOWLEDGE verbs can't. The quotative complementizer *buli* has a larger left periphery compared to the relative complementizer *ze*, which allows it to embed a LogP under it. Optionality of agreement shift results from the absence of LogP. Hence no LogP means no agreement shift. Rationale clauses in Assamese have obligatory agreement shift in them as the mental perspective of the context speaker is presented.

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