

“Someone help me!” – On the status of quantified NPs in directive speech acts

This talk investigates the nature of vocatives by contrasting the behavior of quantified and non-quantified subject NPs in directive speech acts, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. Hey, Peter help me!
b. *Hey, someone help me!

Based on a distinction pinned down by Zwicky (1974), Portner (2007) argues that call-type vocatives typically are compatible with utterances containing the element "hey". As Portner (2007: 5) notices, quantified NPs for some mysterious reason cannot co-occur with "hey".

We will argue that the examples in (1) involve different syntactic structures. While (1a) can be considered a true imperative, (1b) should be analyzed as a *directive infinitive*. Therefore only the first example contains a vocative NP, whereas the second one exhibits an overt subject NP of an infinitive. The major structural difference between these two constructions is blurred, since there is no morphological distinction in English between infinitives and imperatives.

Turning to a language like German that still exhibits different morphological patterns for the verb the picture gets clearer. As shown by Reis (1995), infinitives with overt nominative NPs can function as directive speech acts. She further argues that these nominative NPs can be integrated into the intonation contour of the VP. A striking property of these nominative NPs is that they are felicitous even if there is no adequate addressee present in the utterance context. Vocatives, by contrast, typically require the presence of an addressee to which the speech is directed. This contrast is illustrated in (2).

- (2) a. Personen mit Kleinkindern bitte vorne anstellen.
persons with infants please front line up
“Persons with infants please line up at the front”
b. Personen mit Kleinkindern! Bitte stellen Sie sich vorne an.

We conclude at this point that vocative NPs always refer to some specific referent, which will be formally captured by assigning the feature [+ADDR]. By contrast, there is no such requirement for overt nominative NPs in infinitives, which thus bear the feature [-ADDR]. Whenever the nominative NP remains silent, it is underspecified. There has to be agreement between a vocative NP and the (silent) subject of the directive with respect to number and [+/-ADDR], as illustrated in (3) and (4).

- (3) a. Peter[-ADDR]! ø[+/-ADDR] bitte absteigen!
b. *Peter[+ADDR]! Fahrradfahrer[-ADDR] bitte absteigen!
- (4) Liebe Leute[+ADDR,+PL]/*Liebe Vroni[+ADDR,-PL] ! Steigt[+PL] bitte ab!

This enables us to draw conclusions about the nature of vocative morphology: The functional contribution of the vocative is to mark an expression as [+ADDR], possibly vocative morphology is a strategy to shift person specification of nonpronominal NPs from 3rd person to 2nd person. Directive infinitives as in (3a) are underspecified with respect to the feature [ADDR]. Non-pronominal nominative NPs being specified for 3. Person, will contribute always the value [+ADDR], see (3b). This also explains Portner's puzzle. The ungrammaticality of (1b) is caused by a clash of diverging specifications, while *hey* is [+ADDR], the quantified NP is [-ADDR].

Portner, Paul (2007). Instructions for Interpretation as Separate Performatives, in K. Schwabe and S. Winkler, eds., *On Information Structure, Meaning and Form*. John Benjamins, 407-426.

Reis, M. (1995). Über infinite Nominativkonstruktionen. In O. Önnarfors (Ed.), *Sprache und Pragmatik*. University of Lund.

Zwicky, Arnold. (1974). Hey, whatsyourname! In Michael La Galy, Robert A. Fox, and Anthony Bruck (Eds.), *Papers from the Tenth Regional Meeting of the CLS*, Chicago: CLS, 787–801.