

Can we like me?

On the (im)possibility of
partial argument coreference

Michael Cysouw
LMU Munich

(with Javier Fernandez)



I have some doubts about a verb tense. Could I check your book?

Of course. Come!

Let's see ...
I love myself
you love me
he loves me
we love ...
You see? It's not there!

What is missing?

WE LOVE ME
But Susanita, it doesn't exist!

How can "we love me" not exist?

It doesn't. Don't you see that it isn't in there?

Take it. What I see is that the one who made the verbs might have been a good grammarian, but an idiot concerning selfishness

“The problem concerns the description of sentences with subjects and objects which, while not fully identical, embody common reference to either a first or second person element, i.e. sentences which express meanings like ‘I like us’, ‘we like me’, ‘we inclusive like you’, etc. **It is interesting that in both Mohawk and English it is apparently impossible to find grammatical sentences which express such meanings.**”

Postal, Paul. 1966. A note on ‘understood transitively’, *International Journal of American Linguistics* 32(1): 90-93. (91, n. 1, emphasis added)

Unlike Person Constraint

“The point seems to be that a rule of interpretation (RI) applying to the structure NP-V-NP (among others) seeks to interpret the NPs as nonintersecting in reference, and **where this is impossible (as in the case of first and second person pronouns)**, it assigns ‘strangeness’, marking the sentence with *.”

Patient▶	1s	1de	1di	1pe	1pi	2s	2d	2p	3s	3d	3p
Agent▼											
1s						-ni	-nici	-nini	-u	-utsi	-umi
1de						-tsuku	-tsuku	-tsuku	-tsuku	-tsuku	-tsuku
1di									-tsi	-tsi	-tsi
1pe						-ku	-ku	-ku	-ku	-ku	-ku
1pi									-i	-itsi	-i
2s	-ŋi	-ŋitsi/ -tsiki		-ki					-na	-na	-na
2d	-ŋitsi	-tsiki		-tsiki					-tsi	-tsi	-tsi
2p	-ŋini	-kini		-kini					-ni	-ni	-ni
3s	-ŋi	-ŋitsi/ -tsiki	-tsiki	-ki	-sa	-na	-natsi	-nimi	-y	-ytsi	-ymi
3d	-ŋitsi	-ŋitsi/ -tsiki	-sa	-sa/ -kini	-sami	-natsi	-natsi	-nimi/ -nitsi	-ytsi	-ytsi	-ytsi
3p	-ŋimi	-tsiki	-sami	-sami/ -kimi	-sami	-nami	-nitsi/ -natsimi	-nimi	-mi	-ytsi/ -mi	-mi

Table 13 Non-past personal endings for transitive verbs

Lahaussais, Aimée. 2002. Aspects of the grammar of Thulung Rai: an endangered Himalayan language. Ph.D Dissertation: University of California, Berkeley.

- **Puedo volver a vernos**, parados en medio de una calle a las cuatro de la mañana.
(Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*)
- En écribant ces lignes, je revis notre dernière reencontre à Honfleur. [...]
Je nous revois à table.
(Henri Jeanson, Newspaper article)

Preferences for PAC

So why are we not voting for me
in green and yellow?

<http://forums.penny-arcade.com/showthread.php?t=48389&page=18>

...want to explain why we are voting for me?

<http://diablo.incgamers.com/forums/showthread.php?t=613724&page=51>

So, any reason we are voting for me?

I still don't see the reason.

<http://www.neoseeker.com/forums/118/t1236834-star-wars-deadly-mistakes-part-six/5.htm>

Then we're voting for me.

<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/041031/sm.02.html>

Encoding of partial argument coreference

- PAC is possible, though using different kinds of pronouns
 - ▶ Germanic/Romance: personal pronouns
 - ▶ Even, Lezgian: reflexive pronouns
- PAC seems to be impossible
 - ▶ Basque
 - ▶ Tibeto-Burman, Cariban, Yimas, Bunaba ...

Why ?

- Grammaticalization
- Low-frequency constructions (like PAC) do not lead to grammaticalization
- What about clitics?

Conclusion

- I would like to dispute the impossibility of PAC for many European languages
- Something is strange, but this is due to the rarity of such situations in the real world
- However, with morphological bipersonal marking, PAC seems to be indeed impossible
- Because low-frequency constructions (like PAC) will not be grammaticalized