

Referring to people can be seen as a universal characteristic of human social organization (Enfield & Stivers 2007), but person systems in languages offer remarkably different strategies for construing person. In terms of grammar, person systems differ, for instance, with respect to number, clusivity and gender marking, as well as the ways in which they express impersonality or distinguish between human vs. non-human participants or speech act vs. non speech act persons (Siewierska 2004). There has been a great number of research on these grammatical properties in Indo-European languages, but a cross-cultural, empirical study of the construal of person in interaction opens up new perspectives into the ways in which, for instance, agency and experience are organized and distributed.

For this panel, we invite presentations that focus on the empirical study of the construal of person in interaction. The panel aims at a cross-cultural perspective that sheds light on the interdependencies between culture, social action and language use. We aim to find similarities in the ways in which participants organize joint-action as a constant "fission-fusion" process between the "I", the "you", the "we", and the "they" (Enfield 2013). Simultaneously, we want to explore the different ways in which agency and experience are organized and distributed in the studied languages.

The Finnish person system, for instance, is similar to many European languages in that it comprises three persons and the 1st person plural form makes no distinction between inclusive and exclusive reference. However, Finnish organizes person differently compared to many other European languages (Helasvuo & Laitinen 2006). First, it has a personal passive that always implies a human agent performing the action and is typically used for expressing first person plural actions (Helasvuo 2006). Second, it has a zero person construction with no overt subject where the predicate verb appears in the third person singular form. The reference of a zero-person form can be interpreted as specific or non-specific: it offers an open space for shared experience that anyone can enter (Laitinen 2006). Unlike the passive, whose implied agent is typically collective, the implied agent of a zero is an individual, i.e. it treats its referents distributively (Etelämäki & Herlin forthc.). Third, in standard Finnish, the person is marked on finite verbs; therefore it is possible to leave out an overt pronominal subject.

We encourage the view of emancipatory pragmatics (Hanks et al. 2009) in the analyses of person systems. A key assumption in this approach is that pragmatics has been dominated by Euro-American languages and ways of speaking, and that to overcome this bias, there should be more comparative work on a wider range of languages, which would allow the possibility for other ways of describing language. The panel is a continuation of the panel "I, you, we and the others: dynamic construal of intersubjectivities in grammar and in interaction" (IPrA 2015).

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