Person split and the syntax of imposters

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Abstract: This paper aims to introduce a unified analysis for two phenomena involving the category *person*: nominal imposters, which are nominal expressions with personal reading, and imposter pronouns, which are personal pronominal forms with impersonal reading. Based on the referential structure proposed by Collins and Postal (2012), and the pronominal DP structure by Orlando and Saab (2021), I propose an analysis in which imposter expressions have participant pragmatic features to which the syntactic structure is sensitive, namely: [AUTHOR] and [ADDRESSEE]. These features, however, differ from the 1st and 2nd person phi-features, which are responsible only for the agreement operation. Thus, there is an asymmetry in the configuration of imposter DPs: while nominal imposters do not have person phi-features, which blocks the personal morphology in the sentence agreement of these expressions, imposter pronouns lack participant pragmatic features, preventing a referential reading. These pragmatic features are computable in a syntactic projection, which is responsible for linking nominals to discursive relations: GroundP (Ritter; Wiltschko, 2019). Finally, I demonstrate that nominal and pronominal impostors have their participant features valued in the position of the specifier of two functional heads above the DP, which are responsible for the speaker and addressee readings.

Keywords: Imposters, determiner phrase, speech act projection.

1. Introduction

Speakers of a given language use different strategies to designate the discourse participants in the enunciation. Pronominal expressions and, more specifically, the so-called personal pronouns are the most frequent ones. Languages like English and Portuguese provide their speakers with 1st and 2nd person pronouns to refer to direct interlocutors and third-party person pronouns to refer to entities outside direct interlocution. However, these languages allow the asymmetrical use of these

pronominal forms for arbitrary or generic reference, as in (1) and (2), in English and in Brazilian Portuguese, respectively. Still, the same speaker can refer to themself through referential expressions that, by definition, do not participate in the discourse, as in (3).

(1) You start smoking a cigarette today, tomorrow you'll try something stronger.
   (Context: a narcotic drug control agent being interviewed by a TV presenter)

(2) *Você/a gente/alguém* começa   a   fumar um   cigarro
   you.sg/we/someone   start   to   smoke a   cigarette
      hoje,   amanhã   *você/a gente/alguém* experimenta   algo
      today   tomorrow   I/you.sg/we/somebody   tries   something
      mais   forte.
      more   strong

'Someone starts smoking cigarettes today and tomorrow they'll try something stronger'

(3) [This teacher]$_{1sg}$ is exhausted.
(Context: a linguistics teacher addressing their class and complaining about being overworked)

While the generic reading of first-person singular pronouns seems to be a more restricted phenomenon, the impersonalization of second person pronouns is pointed out as recurrent cross-linguistically, as Siewierska (2004) and Gruber (2013) claim. In the phenomenon illustrated in (3), referring expressions are used to denote the speaker and/or the addressee. These expressions, whose personalization is done through indexicalization, are called by Collins and Postal (2012) as *imposters*.

Such phenomenon is attested in several languages (cf. Dudley, 2011, 2014; Collins; Ordóñez, 2021; for Spanish; Das, 2014, for Bengali; Kalulli, 2014, for Albanian; Servidio, 2014, for Italian; Wang, 2014, for Chinese; Wood; Sigurðsson, 2014, for Icelandic; Taylor, 2009, Carvalho; Brito, 2017, for Brazilian Portuguese). In the example in (4), from English and extracted from Siewierska (2004, p. 1), Mummy and Johnny, respectively, represent 1st and 2nd persons in a context in which a mother is addressing her child directly.

(4) Mummy will spank Johnny.

These phenomena (the impersonalization of personal pronouns and the personalization of referring expression) are both two sides of the same coin: presence/absence of person interpretation. To resolve this puzzle, this paper proposes that in both cases we have imposters and that there is only one syntactic structure to both. The difference in the reading is due to the internal configuration of the (pro)nominal and its feature valuation within the nominal projection. This paper, then, tries to answer two central questions: (i) what is the internal structure of impostors? and (ii) how are these expressions linked to the syntactic structure? To do so, I assumed that these expressions have the internal structure of a pronoun, according to Orlando and Saab (2021), based on the structural proposal of Collins and Postal (2012) for imposters.

2. **The representation of an imposter**

According to Collins and Postal (2012), an *imposter* is a nominal expression that has a person reference notionally X and grammatically Y, where X ≠ Y. Superficially, impostors descend from referential expressions, i.e., expressions that designate by themselves their referents, which in turn grammatically express the third person. Examples of referring expressions are "the teacher" in (3), repeated below, and "Dorothy"[1] in (5):

(3) This teacher is exhausted.

(5) Dorothy is going for a walk.

However, *this teacher* in (3) may be interpreted as the first person singular (the speaker) and the *Dorothy* in (5), as the second person (the addressee), as illustrated in (6) and (7), respectively. In other words, these nominal expressions allow for an imposter reading.

(6) This teacher$_{1sg}$ is/*am exhausted.

(7) Dorothy$_{2sg}$ is/*are going for a walk.

Also, Collins and Postal (2012) point out the fact that most of impostor forms present some kind of definiteness mark, such as the definite article, proximal or distal demonstrative pronouns, possessive pronouns, or being proper nouns or a kinship term[2]. On the other hand, pronominal imposters, even with impersonal reading, show a definite form, since its shape is of morphological personal pronouns. As will be seen in the

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[1] I will consider proper names referential expressions for the present discussion. Proper and indexical nouns share some characteristics and differ in others. For example, both are referential, but proper names name, while indexicals denote. For a more in-depth discussion of the semantics of proper names, see Longobardi (1994). For the morphosyntax of proper names, see Schlücker and Ackermann (2017).

[2] Kinship terms, along with proper names, are intrinsically definite (Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 2001).

nominal structure assumed for analysis, the definiteness' feature is a constant element of these expressions. However, in the present work, I will not develop an investigation into the effect of definiteness in imposter expressions. In the appendix, one can see that most would-be impostors in Brazilian Portuguese are preceded for some of these definite determiners or are definite nominals.

In general, imposters demand sentential third person agreement and this generalization can be applied to all types of imposters (singular, plural, coordinates).[3] I assume in the present work that the impossibility of having grammatical (morphological) agreement with the impostors is due to the absence of person grammatical features in these expressions. However, as will be shown later, the syntax of these nominal expressions presents another category of features, of a pragmatic nature, which allow their reading as a participant in the discourse.

The analysis of impostors, however, must capture the opposite picture: pronouns that function as impersonals. Collins and Postal (2012) present candidates likely to function as pronominal imposters. An example is *nurse-we*[4]:

(8) How are we$_{2sg}$ feeling today?

In (8), a first-person plural pronoun is used by the speaker to refer to the addressee. Collins and Postal (2012) analyze the example in (8) as a plural pronoun with a second person feature, or an addressee feature, inherently. In order to explain the first-person reading, illustrated in example (3), the authors postulate an author feature, inherent to the nominal form. This inherence, as will be seen later, may be explained by

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[3] There are, however, specific contexts in which first-person pronominal anaphors can resume imposters. For examples from English, see Das (2014, p. 28).

[4] First-person plural pronoun used by a nurse to denote a single patient s/he is addressing (Collins; Postal, 2012; Joseph, 1979).

the very constitution of features of the noun phrase.

While the generic reading of first-person singular pronouns seems to be a more restricted phenomenon interlinguistically, the impersonalization of second-person pronouns is pointed out as recurrent across languages, as Siewierska (2004) and Gruber (2013) claim.

(9) Brazilian Portuguese

Você começa a fumar um cigarro hoje, amanhã *você* experimenta x.

(10)   English

You start smoking a cigarette today, tomorrow *you* will try x.

(11)   Spanish (Collins; Ordoñez, 2021, p. 4)

Se	irá	*usted*	acostumbrando	al clima.
CL	will	you	getting used	to the climate

'You will get used to the climate'

In the examples above, the second-person pronoun means, in the context of an interview about illicit drug use, that any individual can start smoking cigarettes and then try other drugs. In other words, the second person singular pronoun has an impersonal or universal reading, being interpreted as *someone* or *everyone*.

Nevertheless, some languages allow other personal pronouns to act as impersonals. It is the case of Brazilian Portuguese, in which (12) is perfectly grammatical.[5]

(12)   *Eu* começo   a   fumar um   cigarro   hoje, amanhã

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[5] (12) is a simplification of (2).

I	start		to	smoke a	cigarette	today, tomorrow

eu experimento   x.

I   try   x

'Someone starts smoking a cigarette today and tomorrow they tray something stronger'

However, the possibility that the examples in (9) and (12) can occur with the first-person plural in Brazilian Portuguese seems to be restricted to the form *a gente* (we). In the contrast in (13) and (14), the version with nós (we) is considered marginal compared to *a gente*. According to Carvalho and Brito (2017), this marginality is due to the morphological material in the verb with *nós*, since *-mos* stands for person and number information (first person and plural).

(13)   ??Nós começamos a fumar um cigarro hoje, amanhã nós experimentamos x.

(14)   A gente começa a fumar um cigarro hoje, amanhã a gente experimenta x.

All the data above show us an asymmetry regarding the form-function relationship of (pro)nominal expressions with regard to their person reference: while the data in (3-5) necessarily trigger third-person agreement in the sentence, including the anaphoric retakes, examples (9-14) demonstrate defectiveness in their personal reading. Thus, on the one hand, referential expressions may present personal interpretation, even if they do not trigger morphological agreement for person; on the other hand, personal pronouns may present an impersonal interpretation. This referential deficiency will be treated in the present work as a structural deficiency. In other words, I assume that imposter expressions, whether nominal or pronominal, present underspecification of some of their features. More specifically, the impossibility of having grammatical

agreement in imposters is due to the absence of grammatical features of person in these expressions, while the impersonal reading of pronominals is due to the lack of participant features, of a pragmatic nature. Therefore, as will be shown later, I will adopt a split of the person category: the (pro)nominal structure has person features of two natures, one being syntactic or grammatical, responsible for the agreement operation (Chomsky, 2000) and the other pragmatic, which allows its reading as a participant in the discourse (Wiltschko, 2017).

From the above, I propose that the answer to this puzzle lies in the personal (pro)nominal structure. I assume that these expressions are DPs (Abney, 1987) whose root is a referential index (Orlando; Saab, 2021). However, unlike canonical personal pronouns, imposter expressions, including pronominal imposters, may not have person features, which, depending on their nature, prevents either triggering agreement at the DP level or personal interpretation. I assume the representation of the DP in (15).

(15)   Structure of the imposter DP and the impersonal pronoun
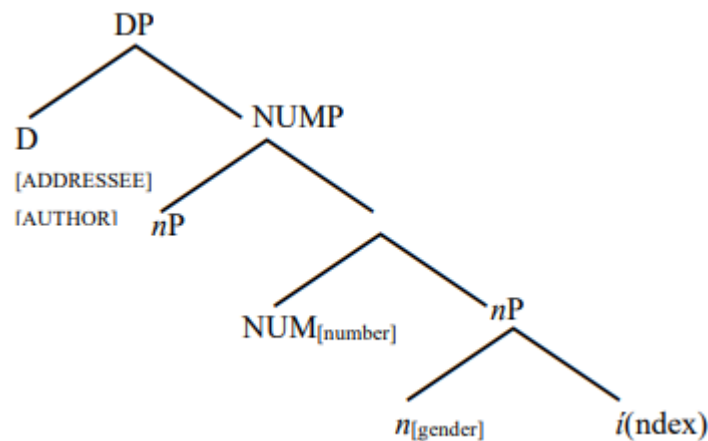
In this structure, a pronoun differs from a referential expression by the fact that the nominal categorizer n is joined to an index (numeric, for Orlando and Saab, 2019),

without lexical content, therefore, and that points to some entity in the real world. In other words, the core complement of the most embedded *n*P projection is an indexical element such that its interpretation is phoric and established within a common universe among the interlocutors. Its lexical form is an *n*P introduced into the syntactic derivation at the NUMP specifier position, establishing unique phi-number agreement. This nominal expression at the same time that referentially indicates a group or individual in the real world, is also indexically linked to a referent present in the discursive universe.

I also assume, with Ritter and Wiltschko (2019), that the nominal spine involves a speech act projection, responsible for the (pro)nominal (discursive) reference, illustrated in (16). This structural and functional parallel between the nominal and the sentential spine has been, since Abney's (1987) seminal thesis, widely adopted, with a variety of empirical and conceptual arguments (e.g, Szabolcsi, 1994, Lobeck, 1995, Chomsky, 2015).

(16)   Nominal spine
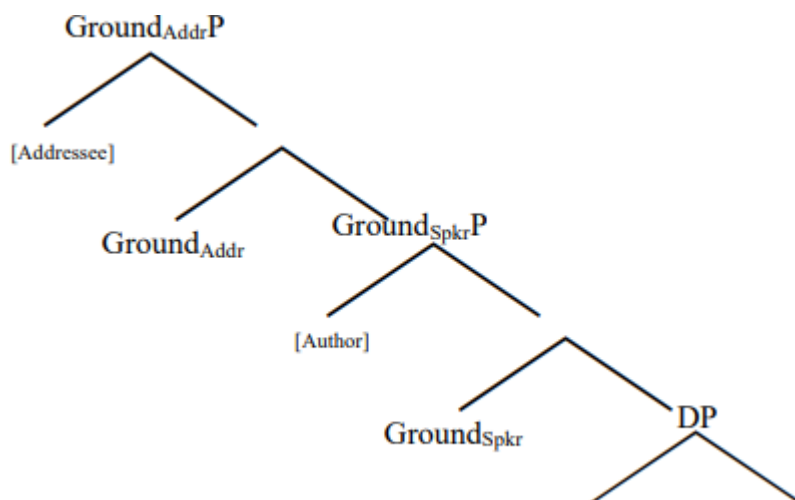
This analysis can be extended to imposters in general. Example (3), repeated below in (17), has its 'syntactic deformation', in the terms of Collins and Postal (2012), explained by assuming that teacher is an *n*P associated with a referential index and whose person trait is valued above the DP, in a functional projection responsible for the discursive interface, à la Cinque, since it has no grammatical traits of person (considering the third person as a non-participant in the discourse (cf. Benveniste, 1966)). Thus, the representation for the DP *this teacher* is (18).

(17)   [This teacher]$_{1sg}$ is exhausted.

(18)
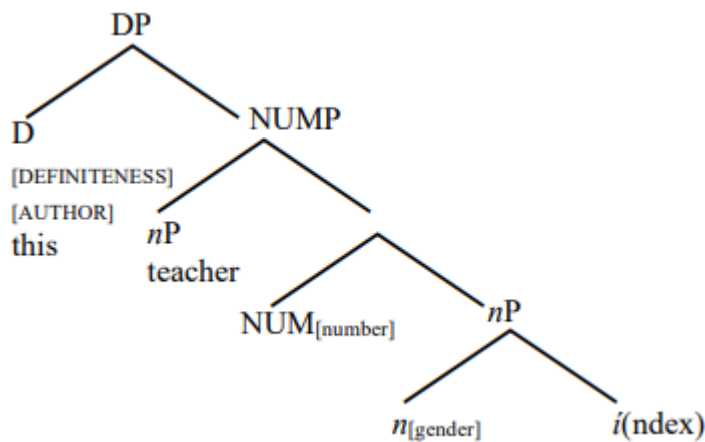
Thus, we can conclude that impostors can be understood as noun structures referentially linked to semantic features of the noun phrase: [Author] and [Addressee]. These features allow interlocutors belonging to a certain group of speakers to understand these expressions from an ordinary referring expression to a personal pronoun. However, their internal configuration has syntactic consequences. Therefore, a linguistic analysis of these structures must also explain their functioning as a syntactic

object. In the next section, I will demonstrate how nominal and pronominal impostors are the result of the same determiner structure (DP), based on Ritter and Wiltschko's (2019) nominal spine for impersonal pronouns. The difference between these expressions lies in the valuation of their features, which is strictly syntactic.

3. A nominal spine for imposters

Some nominal expressions can function as generic reference pronouns in some languages, the so-called *dedicated impersonal pronouns*. They are pronouns with a universal reading, like *one*, in English, and in certain languages they can have an existential reading. This is the case of *man*, in German. As Ritter and Wiltschko (2019) point out, these pronouns have a deficient structure, which makes plural agreement impossible, even though this is their reference. In (17), the ungrammaticality is due to the fact that man cannot appear in its plural form (*manen*) even with the verb in its plural form (*geben*). The authors propose, then, that this type of pronominal does not have any phi-features, which would be responsible for the agreement mechanism in languages (Chomsky, 2000, 2001).

(19)   In   Österreich   geb-en   **man**(*en)   **einander**

        In   Austria   give-3PL   IMPERS(PL) RECP

        zu   Weihnachten   Geschenke

        to   Chistmas   presents

'In Austria people give each other gifts at Christmas.'

Conversely, Ritter and Wiltschko (2019) present data on personal pronouns that function as impersonal pronouns. This is the case for *du* in German spoken in Austria:

(20)   a. Wenn   **du**   in   Wien   bist,   sollt-est

When   you   in   Vienna COPULA-2SG.PRES should-2SG

du   das   also   auch   tun.

you   that   therefore   also   do

'So when you are in Vienna, you should do that, too.'

b. In   Österreich   gib-**st** (*-**t**)   **du**   deinen

in   Austria   give-2SG (*3SG)   IMPERS.2SG seus

Freunden   zu   Weihnachten Geschenke

firends   to   Christmas   presents

'In Austria people give their children gifts at Christmas.'

The examples in (15) show that *du* works exactly like *eu* in Portuguese, as demonstrated in example (7), repeated below in (16)[6] , because, even with an impersonal reading, *eu* does not admit third-person verbal inflection (*-a*).

(21)   *Eu* começ-*o* (*-*a*) a fumar um cigarro hoje, amanhã *eu* experiment-*o* (*-*a*) x.

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[6] In Brazilian Portuguese, the second person singular also behaves like German *du*, but, unlike in this language, the second person singular in Portuguese *você* demand third person singular agreement, in the same way that the first-person plural pronoun *a gente*. Thus, to illustrate the empirical point I want, I used the first person singular, which still maintains its marks of agreement in most varieties of Brazilian Portuguese.

The dual behavior of these pronoun expressions, according to Ritter and Wiltschko, is due to the fact that impersonal dedicated pronouns do not have phi-features, while personal pronouns that function as dedicated have such features. Thus, to explain the distribution of these pronominal forms, the authors suggest the following configuration:

Figure 1 – (Pro)nominal spine[7]
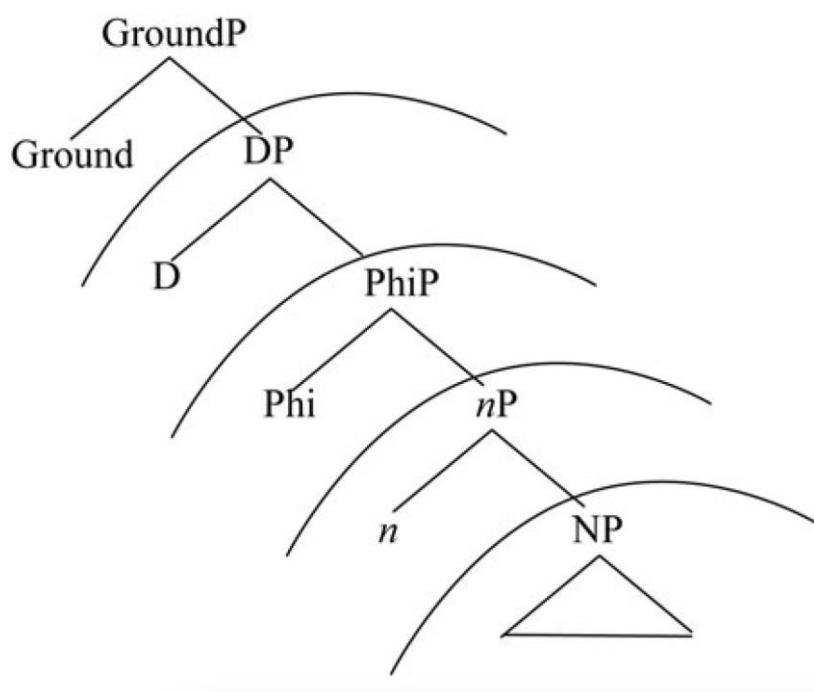
Source: Ritter e Wiltschko (2019, p. 15)

According to Ritter and Wiltschko, such a nominal spine can comprehend the different pronominal readings, from the totally impersonal to the person features' ones. The structure in Figure 1 is based on the idea, already discussed in Wiltschko (2014),

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[7] PhiP is the projection responsible for the valuation of number features in Ritter and Wiltschko's (2019) analysis. The same layer is represented by NUMP in Orlando and Saab (2021). As it is just a notation choice and considering that phi is a more comprehensive label (cf. Carvalho, 2017), I adopt here NUMP as the projection responsible for the valuation of number in the DP.

that, similarly to the clause cartography, the nominal expression also presents a discursive boundary (Figure 2). This discursive boundary is responsible for the discursive participant interpretation of (pro)nominals. Thus, a pronoun or referring expression may or may not be assigned participant values, such as speaker and addressee, even if these expressions have interpretable grammatical features (phi) for person, since nominal expressions can carry at least two types of person features: speech role features (speaker, addressee) and grammatical person features (1st and 2nd person). Ritter and Wiltschko call this Hypothesis the Duality of Person Hypothesis (Figure 3).

Figure 2 – Clause and nominal structure parallel
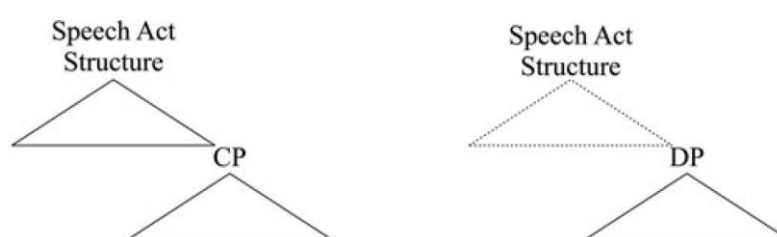
Source: Ritter e Wiltschko (2019, p. 10)

Figure 3 – The Duality of Person Hypothesis
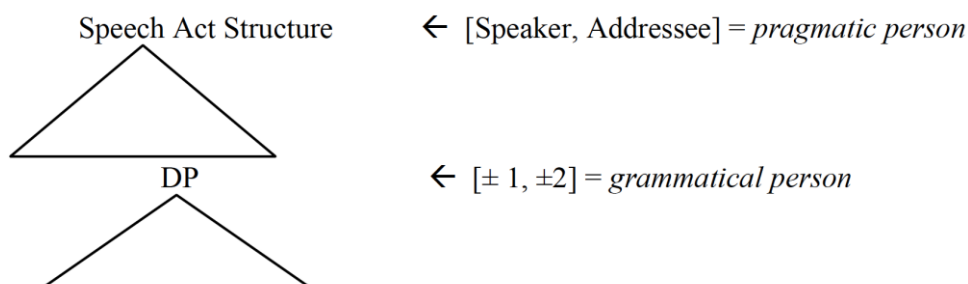
Source: Ritter e Wiltschko (2018, p. 2)

The Duality of Person Hypothesis allows us to deal with the data presented here, as it separates the grammatical features, that is, those responsible for licensing (pro)nominal expressions in the syntax, from the features responsible for the participant reading of these expressions. In this model, the person's formal features are morphological instruments. However, while they are classified as pragmatic features, they are still computed in the syntax, as their interpretation depends on the licensing of such features in the proper projections.

Returning to Figure 1, we can have a distribution of the various impersonal pronouns, whose features present in their composition will dictate their readings. Ritter and Wiltschko (2019) present the following typology of impersonal pronouns:

Figure 4 – Typology od impersonal pronouns
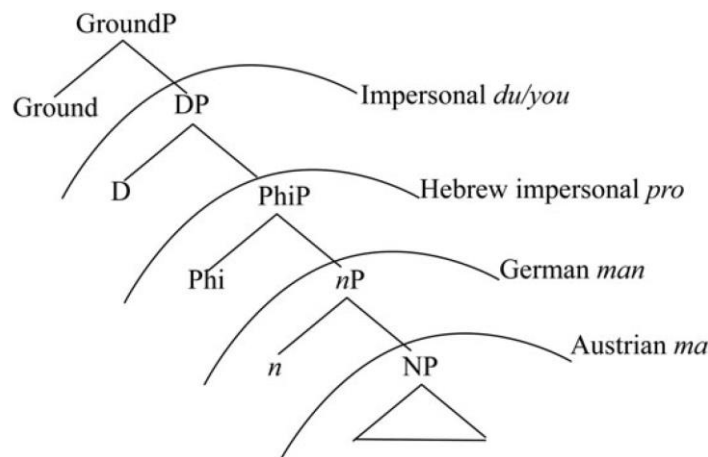
Source: Ritter e Wiltschko (2019, p. 18)

The pronoun *du* from Austrian German and *you* from English would be examples of impersonal DP, that is, that have person features, in addition to number, valued in PhiP, and gender, valued in *n*P. PhiP impersonals would be illustrated by the impersonal Hebrew *pro*. This analysis can consider impersonal pronouns in Portuguese,

those of examples (6) and (7), and in other languages, such as *nurse-we* in English, which have a generic reading, such as when they do not indexically point to a specific group, for these pronominal forms do not allow person inflection when their reading is impersonal. This evidence fills in the typological gap left by Ritter and Wiltschko (2019) about a phonetically realized impersonal PhiP pronoun. *Man* from the German illustrates the *n*P impersonals, as they only have a valuation for gender. This would also be the case for *nego/nega* ('black.masc/fem') in Brazilian Portuguese and other impersonal expressions inflected for gender in thins language. Finally, impersonal NP can be illustrated with the Austrian German *ma*, as this expression is not capable of referring to an individual in the discursive universe.

Ritter and Wiltschko's (2019) analysis does not, however, discuss the opposite picture: referential expressions that become participants in the discourse, which is perfectly captured by the their proposal. In this way, our analysis predicts the path towards a referential specification of nominal expressions. I assume that GroundP is unfolded as below:

Figure 5 – Nominal structure of speech act
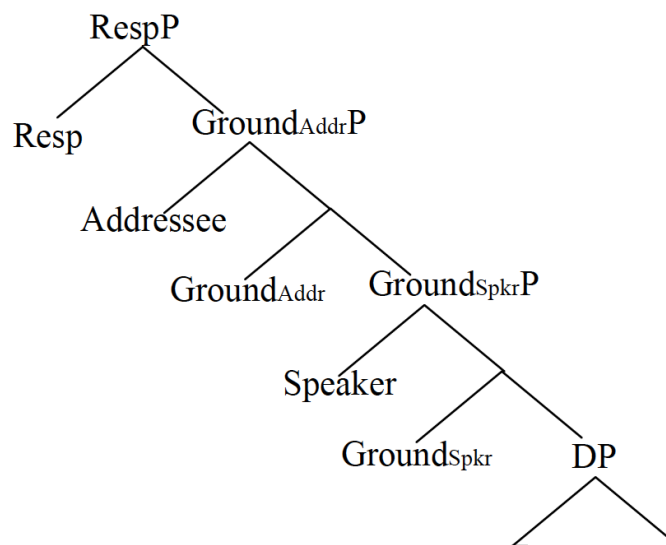
Source: Ritter e Wiltschko (2018, p. 4)

Ritter and Wiltschko (2018) assume the structure of Figure 5 based on Wiltschko's (2017) proposal, in which the clause speech act projection is articulated and consists of at least Resp(onse)P and two instances of GroundP, one for the speaker and one for the addressee. RespP encodes what the speaker wants the recipient to do with what is said (e.g., whether s/he is expected to respond). Sentential GroundP projections encode the speaker's and addressee's attitudes toward what is being said (e.g., whether they believe the proposition under discussion). This constitutes shared linguistic common ground. However, this sharing contains not only propositions but also individuals. Thus, based on Ritter and Wiltschko's (2018) hypothesis that these projections are mirrored in the nominal structure, the nominals would also be dominated by RespP and GroundP. Nominal GroundP projections encode the speaker's and addressee's attitudes toward who is being spoken to (e.g., whether they know the individuals under discussion). Ground$_{Spkr}$ represents the speaker's attitude towards the individual denoted by the DP; Ground$_{Addr}$ represents the addressee's attitudes. Therefore, I share with Ritter and Wiltschko the assumption that the roles of speaker and addressee are syntactically represented in the specifiers of their respective GroundP. This hypothesis allows that, in a given language, non-pronominal expressions in their form function as a pronoun when they present the features encoded in GoundP. That the case of imposters. Thus, imposter expressions have at least one of the valuable features in GroundP, namely [AUTHOR] and [ADDRESSEE]. Therefore, (17) is the analysis of *this teacher* as an AUTHOR imposter.[8]

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[8] The index *j* indicates that the nominal expression is generated as a determiner expression and raised to a position above the DP. The index *i* in front of the subscripted features indicates that that feature has been valued and is, therefore, readable by the conceptual-intentional interface.

(22)

GroundAddrP

[ADDRESSEE]

GroundAddr

GroundSpkrP

DP$_i$
this teacher
jAUTOR

GroundSpkr

DP$_i$
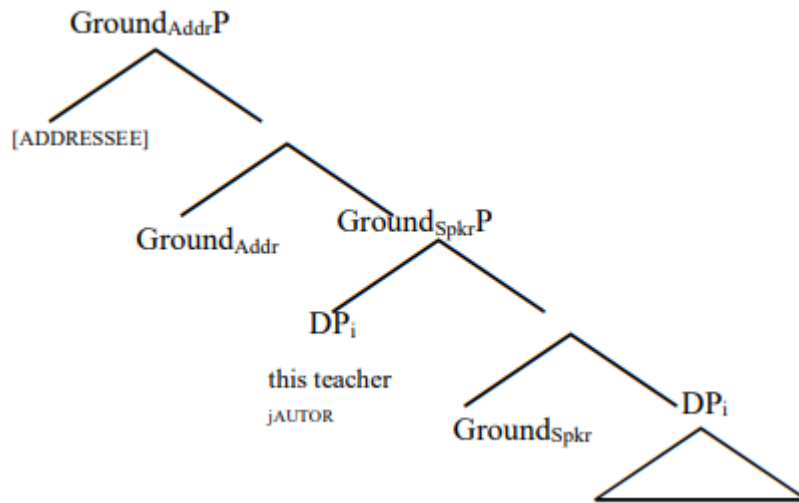
This analysis presents a property found in all nominals that fall into the imposter category. In the same way that the canonical pronominal forms are categorically indexical elements and that only have their referent defined from, at least, the sharing of the deictic information of who the speaker and the addressee are, the imposters need this minimum information shared between the interlocutors to that can be understood as indexical. A sentence like 'Mummy doesn't want you to do that anymore' can only have *mommy* as AUTHOR if the interlocutors share that it is a mother uttering the sentence and that, probably, her child is the interlocutor. Therefore, imposter expressions cannot be processed unless they present some indication that the group using them is able to recognize or at least track their indications.

Final remarks

Based on the referential structure proposed by Collins and Postal, this paper offered an analysis in which the imposter expressions have pragmatic features sensitive to the syntactic structure: [AUTHOR] and [ADDRESSEE], whose reading allows the

pronominalization of these referential expressions. These features are computable in a syntactic projection responsible for linking nominals to discursive relations, namely: GroundP (Wiltschko, 2017). I showed that these expressions have their features valued in the specifier position of two functional cores responsible for the speaker and addressee readings, respectively: Ground$_{Spkr}$ and Ground$_{Addr}$. Furthermore, I demonstrated that other correlated phenomena, such as the impersonality of certain personal pronouns, can be explained by adopting an underspecified DP structure, as proposed by Ritter & Wiltschko (2018, 2019).

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