

## Shifters and Verbal Categories

### EDITORS' NOTE

This essay is of great significance in the field of general morphology in two respects. First, it defines a universal class of grammatical units—called shifters, after Jespersen (1922b:123). Their essential characteristic is to possess a general meaning in the code that necessarily makes reference to the message in which they are used. Since the message is part of the speech event (see Chapter 4), shifters are deictic. Second, it establishes a universal classification of verbal categories, on the basis of the combinations into which the four elements relevant in linguistic communication can enter: the speech event and its participants, and the narrated event and its participants. Hence, it is a theory of grammatical categories based on speech pragmatics.

We have included here only the first and second sections of "Shifters." They were originally written independently of the two remaining sections, which treat the verbal system of Russian in both its semantic and formal aspects and which have been omitted because they are too specialized.

### Shifters and Other Duplex Structures

A message sent by its addresser must be adequately perceived by its receiver. Any message is encoded by its sender and is to be decoded by its addressee. The more closely the addressee approximates the code used by the addresser, the higher is the amount of information obtained.

Both the message (M) and the underlying code (C) are vehicles of linguistic communication, but both of them function in a duplex manner; they may at once be utilized and referred to (= pointed at). Thus a message may refer to the code or to another message, and on the other hand, the general meaning of a code unit may imply a reference (*renvoi*) to the code or to the message. Accordingly four DUPLEX types must be distinguished: (1) two kinds of CIRCULARITY—message referring to message (M/M) and code referring to code (C/C); (2) two kinds of OVERLAPPING—message referring to code (M/C) and code referring to message (C/M).

M/M "REPORTED SPEECH is speech within speech, a message within a message and at the same time it is also speech about speech, a message about a message," as Vološinov (1929:115) formulates it in his study of this crucial linguistic and stylistic problem. Such "relayed" or "displaced" speech, to use Bloomfield's terms (1933), may prevail in our discourse, since we are far from confining our speech to events sensed in the present by the speaker himself. We quote others and our own former utterances, and we are even prone to present some of our current experiences in the form of self-quotation, for instance by confronting them with statements by someone else: "Ye have heard that it hath been said . . . But I say unto you . . ." There is a multiplex scale of linguistic processes for quoted and quasi-quoted speech: "direct speech," "indirect speech" (*oratio recta, obliqua*), and various forms of "represented discourse" (*style indirect libre*, "free indirect style"). Certain languages, as for instance Bulgarian (see Andrejčin 1938), Kwakiutl (see Boas 1947), and Hopi (see Whorf 1946), use particular morphological devices to denote events known to the speaker only from the testimony of others. Thus in Tunica all statements made from hearsay (and this covers the majority of sentences in the texts aside from those in direct discourse) are indicated by the presence of /-áni/, a quotative postfix used with a predicative word (Haas 1940).

C/C PROPER NAMES, treated in Gardiner's "controversial essay" (1940) as a very knotty problem of linguistic theory, take a particular place in our linguistic code: the general meaning of a proper name cannot be defined without a reference to the code. In the code of English, *Jerry* means a person named Jerry. The circularity is obvious: the name means anyone to whom this name is assigned. The appellative *pup* means a young dog, *mongrel* means a dog of mixed breed, *hound* is a dog used in hunting, while *Fido* means nothing more than a dog whose name is *Fido*. The general meaning of such words as *pup*, *mongrel*, or *hound* could be indicated by abstractions like puppyhood, mongrelness, or houndness, but the general meaning of *Fido* cannot be qualified in this way. To paraphrase Bertrand Russell (1940), there are many dogs called

*Fido*, but they do not share any property of "Fideness." Also the indefinite pronoun corresponding to names such as Jean, Jan, Joan, June—the "what's-her-name" or "what-do-you-call-her" or "how-d'ye-call-her"—includes a patent reference to the code.

M/C) A message referring to the code is in logic termed an AUTONOMOUS mode of speech.<sup>1</sup> When we say, *The pup is a winsome animal* or *The pup is whimpering*, the word *pup* designates a young dog, whereas in such sentences as "*Pup*" is a noun which means a young dog or, more briefly, "*Pup*" means a young dog or "*Pup*" is a monosyllable, the word *pup*—one may state with Carnap (1937)—is used as its own designation. Any elucidating interpretation of words and sentences—whether intralingual (circumlocutions, synonyms) or interlingual (translation)—is a message referring to the code. Such a hypostasis—as Bloomfield (1933:148) pointed out—"is closely related to quotation, the repetition of speech," and it plays a vital role in the acquisition and use of language.

C/M) Any linguistic code contains a particular class of grammatical units which Jespersen (1922b) labeled SHIFTERS: the general meaning of a shifter cannot be defined without a reference to the message.

Their semiotic nature was discussed by Burks (1949) in his study on Peirce's classification of signs into symbols, indices, and icons. According to Peirce, a symbol (for example the English word *red*) is associated with the represented object by a conventional rule, while an index (such as the act of pointing) is in existential relation with the object it represents. Shifters combine both functions and belong therefore to the class of INDEXICAL SYMBOLS. As a striking example Burks cites the personal pronoun. *I* means the person uttering *I*. Thus on one hand, the sign *I* cannot represent its object without being associated with the latter "by a conventional rule," and in different codes the same meaning is assigned to different sequences such as *I*, *ego*, *ich*, and *ja*: consequently *I* is a symbol. On the other hand, the sign *I* cannot represent its object without "being in existential relation" with this object: the word *I* designating the utterer is existentially related to his utterance and hence functions as an index (see Benveniste 1956).

The peculiarity of the personal pronoun and other shifters was often believed to consist in the lack of a single, constant, general meaning. Husserl (1913): "The word 'I' designates a different person in each case and it does this always by means of a new meaning." For this alleged multiplicity of contextual meanings, shifters in contradistinction to symbols were treated as mere indices (Bühler 1934). Every shifter, however, possesses its own general meaning. Thus *I* means the addresser (and *you*, the addressee) of the message to which it belongs. For Bertrand Russell, shifters, or in his terms "egocentric particulars," are defined by the fact that they never apply to more than one thing at a time. This, however, is common to all the syncategorematic terms. For example the

conjunction *but* each time expresses an adversative relation between two stated concepts and not the generic idea of contrariety. In fact, shifters are distinguished from all other constituents of the linguistic code solely by their compulsory reference to the given message.

The indexical symbols, and in particular the personal pronouns, which the Humboldtian tradition conceives of as the most elementary and primitive stratum of language, are, on the contrary, a complex category where code and message overlap. Therefore pronouns belong to the late acquisitions in child language and to the early losses in aphasia. If we observe that even linguistic scientists had difficulties in defining the general meaning of the term *I* (or *you*), which signifies the same intermittent function of different subjects, it is quite obvious that the child who has learned to identify himself with his proper name will not easily become accustomed to such alienable terms as the personal pronouns: he may be afraid of speaking of himself in the first person while being called *you* by his interlocutors. Sometimes he attempts to redistribute these appellations. For instance, he tries to monopolize the first person pronoun: "Don't dare call yourself I. Only I am I, and you are only you." Or he uses indiscriminately either *I* or *you* both for the addresser and the addressee so that this pronoun means any participant of the given dialogue. Or finally *I* is so rigorously substituted by the child for his proper name that he readily names any person of his surroundings but stubbornly refuses to utter his own name: the name has for its little bearer only a vocative meaning, opposed to the nominative function of *I*. This attitude may persevere as an infantile survival. Thus Guy de Maupassant confessed that his name sounded quite strange to him when pronounced by himself. The refusal to utter one's own name may become a social custom. Zelenin (1930) notes that in the Samoyed society the name was taboo for its carrier.

*Jim told me "flicks" means "movies."* This brief utterance includes all four types of duplex structures: reported speech (M/M), the autonomous form of speech (M/C), a proper name (C/C), and shifters (C/M), namely the first-person pronoun and the preterit, signaling an event prior to the delivery of the message. In language and in the use of language, duplicity plays a cardinal role. In particular, the classification of grammatical, and especially verbal, categories requires a consistent discrimination of shifters.

### Attempt to Classify Verbal Categories

In order to classify the verbal categories two basic distinctions are to be observed:

1. speech itself (<sup>s</sup>), and its topic, the narrated matter (<sup>n</sup>);
2. the event itself (E), and any of its participants (P), whether "performer" or "undergoer."

Consequently four items are to be distinguished: a narrated event (E<sup>n</sup>), a speech event (E<sup>s</sup>), a participant of the narrated event (P<sup>n</sup>), and a participant of the speech event (P<sup>s</sup>), whether addresser or addressee.

Any verb is concerned with a narrated event. Verbal categories may be subdivided into those which do and those which do not involve the participants of the event. Categories involving the participants may characterize either the participants themselves (P<sup>n</sup>) or their relation to the narrated event (P<sup>n</sup>E<sup>n</sup>). Categories abstracting from the participants characterize either the narrated event itself (E<sup>n</sup>) or its relation to another narrated event (E<sup>n</sup>E<sup>n</sup>). For categories characterizing only one narrated item—either the event (E<sup>n</sup>) itself or its participants (P<sup>n</sup>) themselves—the term DESIGNATORS will be used, while those categories which characterize a narrated item (E<sup>n</sup> or P<sup>n</sup>) with respect to another narrated item (E<sup>n</sup>E<sup>n</sup> or P<sup>n</sup>E<sup>n</sup>) will be termed CONNECTORS.

Designators indicate either the quality or the quantity of the narrated item and may be termed QUALIFIERS and QUANTIFIERS respectively.

Both designators and connectors may characterize the narrated event (*procès de l'énoncé*) and/or its participants either without or with reference to the speech event (*procès de l'énonciation*) (.../E<sup>s</sup>) or its participants (.../P<sup>s</sup>). Categories implying such a reference are to be termed SHIFTERS; those without such a reference are NONSHIFTERS.

With regard to these basic dichotomies any generic verbal category can be defined.

P<sup>n</sup>) Among categories involving the participants of the narrated event, GENDER and NUMBER characterize the participants themselves without reference to the speech event—gender qualifies, and number quantifies the participants. In Algonquian, for example, verbal forms indicate whether the performer, on the one hand, and the undergoer, on the other, are animate or inanimate (Bloomfield 1946); and the singleness, duality, or multiplicity of performers as well as undergoers is expressed in Koryak conjugation (Bogoraz 1922).

P<sup>n</sup>/P<sup>s</sup>) PERSON characterizes the participants of the narrated event with reference to the participants of the speech event. Thus first person signals the identity of a participant of the narrated event with the performer of the speech event, and the second person, the identity with the actual or potential undergoer of the speech event.

E<sup>n</sup>) STATUS and ASPECT characterize the narrated event itself without involving its participants and without reference to the speech event. Status (in Whorf's terminology) defines the logical quality of the event.

For example in Gilyak, the affirmative, presumptive, negative, interrogative, and negative-interrogative statuses are expressed by special verbal forms (Krejnovič 1934). In English the assertive status uses the "do"-combinations which in certain conditions are optional for an affirmative assertion but compulsory for a negative or questioned assertion. Aspect quantifies the narrated event.

E<sup>n</sup>E<sup>s</sup>) TENSE characterizes the narrated event with reference to the speech event. Thus the preterit informs us that the narrated event is anterior to the speech event.

P<sup>n</sup>E<sup>n</sup>) VOICE characterizes the relation between the narrated event and its participants without reference to the speech event or to the speaker.

P<sup>n</sup>E<sup>n</sup>/P<sup>s</sup>) MOOD characterizes the relation between the narrated event and its participants with reference to the participants of the speech event: in Vinogradov's formulation, this category "reflects the speaker's view of the character of the connection between the action and the actor or the goal" (1947).

E<sup>n</sup>E<sup>n</sup>) There is no standardized name for this category; such labels as "relative tense" cover only one of its varieties. Bloomfield's (1946) term "order" or rather its Greek model "taxis" seems to be the most appropriate. TAXIS characterizes the narrated event in relation to another narrated event and without reference to the speech event, thus Gilyak distinguishes three kinds of independent taxis—one requires, one admits, and one excludes a dependent taxis, and the dependent taxes express various relationships with the independent verb—simultaneity, ante-

Table 23.1 Verbal categories

Reference to narrated item	Participant involved		Participant not involved	
	Designator	Connector	Designator	Connector
Nonshifter	Qualifier: Gender, Quantifier: Number	Voice	Qualifier: Status, Quantifier: Aspect	Taxis
Shifter	Person	Mood	Tense	Evidential

Table 23.2 Shifters and nonshifters

Reference to narrated item	Participant involved		Participant not involved	
	Designator	Connector	Designator	Connector
Nonshifter	P <sup>n</sup>	P <sup>n</sup> E <sup>n</sup>	E <sup>n</sup>	E <sup>n</sup> E <sup>n</sup>
Shifter	P <sup>n</sup> /P <sup>s</sup>	P <sup>n</sup> E <sup>n</sup> /P <sup>s</sup>	E <sup>n</sup> /E <sup>s</sup>	E <sup>n</sup> E <sup>n</sup> /E <sup>s</sup>

riority, interruption, concessive connection, etc. A similar Hopi pattern is described by Whorf.

$E^n E^{ns}/E^s$ ) EVIDENTIAL is a tentative label for the verbal category which takes into account three events—a narrated event, a speech event, and a narrated speech event ( $E^{ns}$ ), namely the alleged source of information about the narrated event. The speaker reports an event on the basis of someone else's report (quotative, i.e. hearsay evidence), of a dream (revelative evidence), of a guess (presumptive evidence), or of his own previous experience (memory evidence). Bulgarian conjugation distinguishes two semantically opposite sets of forms: "direct narration" ( $E^{ns} = E^s$ ) versus "indirect narration" ( $E^{ns} \neq E^s$ ). To our question, what happened to the steamer *Evdokija*, a Bulgarian first answered, *zaminala* (it is claimed to have sailed), and then added, *zamina* (I bear witness; it sailed). (Cf. H. G. Lunt [1952] on the systematic distinction made in the Macedonian verbal pattern between "vouched for" and "distanced" events.)

The interrelation of all these generic categories may be illustrated by the overall scheme in Table 23.1. With special regard to the opposition shifters versus nonshifters, we condense this model into the simpler format appearing in Table 23.2.

## PART VI

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# *Sound and Meaning in Language: Their Interrelations*