Implicit reference to the ground in pronoun drop languages: A case study of internal state predicates in Japanese & Thai

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In the cognitive theory of subjectivity, Langacker (1985, 2008) and others have argued that "implicit reference to the speaker correlates with the speaker being construed more subjectively" (Langacker 1985:140) and demonstrated such correlations by utilizing English examples such as (1) and (2):

(1) a. Vanessa is sitting across the table from me.

b. Vanessa is sitting across the table.

(Langacker 1990:20)

(2) a. I don't trust him.

b. Don't trust him.

(Langacker 2008:518)

Researchers may wonder, however, whether the form-construal iconic relation can be attested in so-called "pronoun drop" (in some frameworks, "zero pronominal") languages, where, unlike English, pronouns in general including those referring to speech act participants can be rather freely implicit. The current research analyzes the internal state predicates (ISPs, henceforth) of Japanese and Thai, two pronoun drop languages, examines some differences in their lexicalization patterns (Talmy 1985), and argues that the cognitive theory of subjectivity can be applied to analyses of pronoun drop languages as well. More specifically, it is argued that implicit 1st person pronouns in pronoun drop languages can be classified into regular (anaphoric) zero pronouns and "deictic zero", only the latter of which is lexically specified to represent the speaker's subjective construal (cf. Uehara 1998).

This paper examines and compares the ISPs in Thai (Iwasaki 2002) and those in Japanese, which are known to have person restriction (Kuroda 1975, inter alia), and demonstrates the following points: 1) Thai also has some expressions involving ISPs (i.e. the can construction) that exhibit person restriction like those in Japanese, but the restriction in the former can be characterized as constructional and marked while lexical and unmarked in the latter; 2) with respect to some sensation predicates, whose experiencer subject is normally implicit, the use of those in Thai (e.g. cèp 'hurt') presupposes the existence of the interlocutor/hearer, i.e. they can be used only in the descriptive mode, while their translation equivalents in Japanese (e.g. itai) can be used in a soliloquy, i.e. in the exclamatory mode. In other words, being a pronoun drop language, either language allows the experiencer role noun of ISPs to be implicit, but unlike ISPs in Thai, those in Japanese are characterized as lexically deictic (cf. 'preferentially deictic' by Langacker 1985 for the verb come), thus representing 'deictic predicates', which subcategorizes 'deictic zero'. Therefore it argues that as far as implicit first person pronouns in the experiencer role of the unmarked ISPs are concerned, those in Thai are anaphoric zero, while those in Japanese represent the subjective construal of the speaker. The paper also demonstrates that pronoun drop languages are not to be uniformly characterized: they are sub-classified depending on their lexicalization patterns of subjectivity.

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