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Evidentiality and Enunciation. A Cognitive and Semiotic Approach

1.

In his Dictionary of Linguistics, P. H. Matthews writes:

evidential. (Particle, inflection) which is one of a set that make clear the source or reliability of the evidence on which a statement is based.

Thus in a given language they might formally distinguish statements based on direct information from ones based e.g. on inference (*cf.* inferential), or on what someone else has told the speaker (*cf.* quotative), or e.g. on guesswork.¹

Statements are made in sentences whose grammar in some languages allows or demands morphological indication of the validity of the information or instruction given, and hence of the source, reliability or authority of this information or instruction, according to the speaker. Evidentials are the morphemes (particles, inflections) implied in this phenomenon as its signifiers, and evidentiality is the universal semantic dimension of validity, whether signified by evidentials, explicitly mentioned by phrases or clauses in the sentence, or just implicitly present.

Since the speaker – or, structurally put, the speaker role, the 'enunciator' role that a speaking person must assume – is implied in the semantics of evidentiality as the presumed intentional transmitter of the involved information, the structure underlying evidentiality is the part of linguistic semiosis that refers to and characterizes speakers, hearers, and general relations between content and instance of speech – the dimension that French theoreticians of language and text call l'énonciation, and which cognitive semiotics has therefore named enunciation.

In a French Dictionary of linguistics², Jean Dubois et al. introduce the article on enunciation as follows:

¹ Matthews 1997.

² Dubois et al. 2001.

énonciation. L'énonciation est l'acte individuel de production, dans un contexte déterminé, ayant pour résultat un énoncé ; les deux termes s'opposent comme la fabrication s'oppose à l'objet fabriqué.

L'énonciation est l'acte individuel d'utilisation de la langue, alors que l'énoncé est le résultat de cet acte, c'est l'acte de création du sujet parlant devenu alors ego ou sujet d'énonciation. Il s'agit essentiellement, pour les initiateurs de ce concept (R. Jakobson, É. Benveniste, J. L. Austin, J. R. Searle), de dégager les éléments qui, dans les énoncés, peuvent être considérés comme les traces ou les empreintes des procès d'énonciation qui les ont produits, puis de dégager leur fonctionnement, leur organisation, leur interaction.

In Greimas and Courtés' *semiotic Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*³, we find an extensive article on enunciation, introduced by the following indication:

Selon les présupposés épistémologiques, implicites ou affichés, l'énonciation se définira de deux manières différentes : soit comme la structure non linguistique (référentielle) sous-tendue à la communication linguistique, soit comme une instance linguistique, logiquement présupposée par l'existence même de l'énoncé (qui en comporte des traces ou marques).

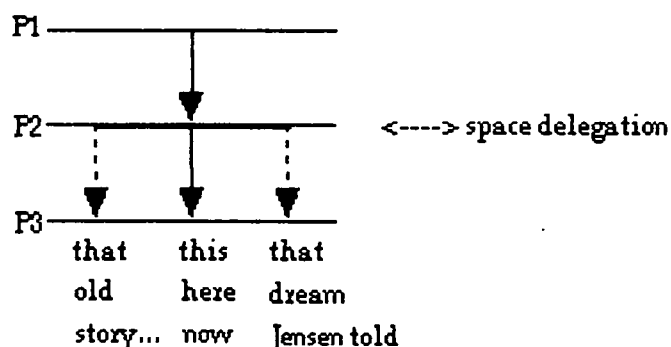
The 'speaker' is not only the individual person physically doing the speaking, but also a referent of certain systematic elements in the utterance – morphemes and other markers – that can be considered as indicators or traces of the process of enunciation; these elements, by which we could say that la parole (language use) is inscribed in la langue (language as structure), are organized and interact functionally in ways that it pertains to linguistics and semiotics to examine.

Evidentiality is an important aspect of enunciation and should be studied as grounded in it. This is the initial assumption of this paper, in which I intend to develop some models of the alleged organization of enunciation in order to specify its evidential aspect.

³ Greimas and Courtés 1979 and 1986.

2.

The simplest way to characterize the inscription of the speaker in the semantics of the utterance is probably to follow the deictic processes relating the personal pronouns to each other and to the content of an utterance.⁴ According to this view, enunciation is basically a matter of shared attention. The first person (P1, ego, the 'I') attends to something and addresses the second person (P2, alter, the 'you') with the intention of making P2 attend to the same thing (in the 'third person', P3, including non-persons). By 'deixis ad oculos', P1 can direct P2's attention to any P3, i.e. any object, state, event etc. in 'speech space', the space-time of present enunciation.⁵ Using other forms of deixis, P1 can 'send' P2's attention out of the space of enunciation and into any setting that human imagination can access and hold. We call this possibility a semantic space delegation. Fig. 2:



The cognitive question that immediately arises is of course what sorts of space delegation there are at all, in human semantics – and the analysis of evidentiality is perhaps rightaway the answer to this question. To my knowledge, the issue has never been systematically addressed⁶, and it is indeed a very difficult one, and one that has wide and deep philosophical implications. Nevertheless, we can point out a series of delegation types that any corpus of data will manifest. The modelling principle could be that there is a zero point of delegation, where the speaker could use arm, hand, and

⁴ Brandt 2002.

⁵ In French, the expressions donner à voir, donner à penser etc. come close to rendering the semantics of the P1-2-3 cluster, which can be conceptualized as a form of GIVING. P2 is the dative, P3 is the (accusative) direct object of P1's donative act. In language, speech seems conceptualized as a donation.

finger to point to an object given in enunciation space, e.g. a botanical garden, and say to someone, in a pedagogical tone of voice, e.g.: "This is an aspidistra; isn't it beautiful?". This quite normal, unmarked, and structurally impersonal statement – as impersonal as: "It is raining" – can be modified by various enunciations effets de sens, as the French theoreticians would say. I will represent these modifications as declinations, produced by distinct semantic attractors, from our point zero. I shall suggest four directions in which these declinations tend to go.

The basic, deictic, enunciations position – the simple: "I am here now!" – can be turned into (I) an experiential position ([X, because:] I see/hear/feel... that X, I remember/regret that X, I expect/wish/fear that X), or (II) an epistemic position ([X, because:] I conclude/know/find that X); (I) is perceived as eminently emotional and subjective, and (II) as typically logical and objective. Therefore, a minimum of (I) is compatible with a maximum of (II) and inversely. But (I) and (II) cannot both be maximal (*I conclude and feel that X...). Experiential truth is 'subjective' (personal), epistemic truth is 'objective' (impersonal). Both (I) and (II) are 'truth-makers' that justify the uttered sentence by anchoring it in a 'state of affairs', namely either in the mental domain of the subject or in the subject's outer world.

(I) and (II) create non-emphatic delegations in time and space (I remember that last year, in Oslo, X; I conclude from the premisses that in the last century, in Paris, X). Experiential time delegations and epistemic space delegations seem particularly natural, since the subject has to be present physically in the former case, but not in the latter. Both (I) and (II) are strongly realistic, belief-generating, in contrast to the following two types.

We have to account for two more or less emphatic, and far less realistic types of delegation. Thus, the basic position can be drawn into (III) a position of polyphony⁷ by which the speaker's voice reproduces directly or indirectly another person's or an institution's voice or thought but also positively or negatively reflects the speaker's own attitude as in 'magister dixit' quotes or ironic statements. Deontic utterances are polyphonic, in this sense, since there is an alien voice behind the speaker's in such indications (We must make sure

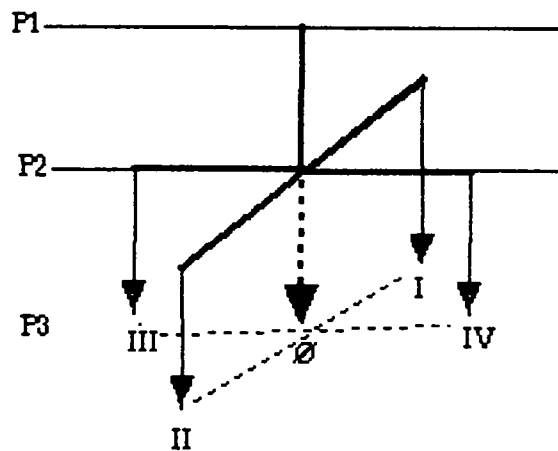
⁶ Brandt 2003, chap. 14, offers a tentative classification of types, hopefully superseded by the version presented in this article.

that X; you should always see to it that X). Evidentiality is often primarily a variation of this kind (As Aristotle said, X; Allegedly, X; ironical intonation: "The political plan was indeed a 'roadmap to peace'...").

Finally, the enunciational base position can be deviated in a direction constituting the opposite of polyphony, namely (IV) a position of what could be called aphony, by which I mean that the speaker emphatically withdraws or refrains from investing in the utterance (I am not saying that X; let us counterfactually imagine that X; if it were the case that X...). Pure imaginations are uttered in this mode of delegation, which is, in particular, the enunciative position found in jokes and literary fiction.

The result is a 'crossroads' model as the following, where P3 is now a surface and the positions I-IV are demarcated correspondingly (fig. 3):

Mental space delegations in enunciation:



- I: experiential subjectivization
- II: epistemic objectivization
- III: polyphonic relativization
- IV: aphonic imaginization
- Ø: here-and-now speech act

The first person image is modified by these delegations, in the sense that the subjectivized 'I', in (I), for example, can be textually more foregrounded, whereas the subject of logic, over the mode (II), is typically a more

⁷ Prof. Henning Nølke, at the University of Aarhus, is currently leading a research team on polyphonic enunciation in a similar sense, inspired by philosopher Oswald Ducrot's work and by M. Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoyevski's prose, in the scope of literary criticism.

disembodied, Cartesian, cogito-like subject. The representational subject (III) is a political figure, a salesman-like transparent person, a representative, or a theatrical ironist. The subject in (IV) is a day-dreamer, a theoretician, a joke-telling humorist, an olympic fictional narrator (we will have to be able to tell the differences here), or simply and basically someone expressing and explaining a pure hypothesis. Finally, the non-delegated position (\emptyset) carries the burden of the elementary speech act consisting in speaking: saying something to someone, instead of nothing. This mode of enunciation has to be set in the present, whether the performative is emphatic or just phatic (emphatic performative: "I hereby declare that X"; phatic performative: "What I am saying is X"). This \emptyset position thus either functions as the base of a speech act in the ordinary sense of the term, or just functions as a thematizer of ongoing speech.

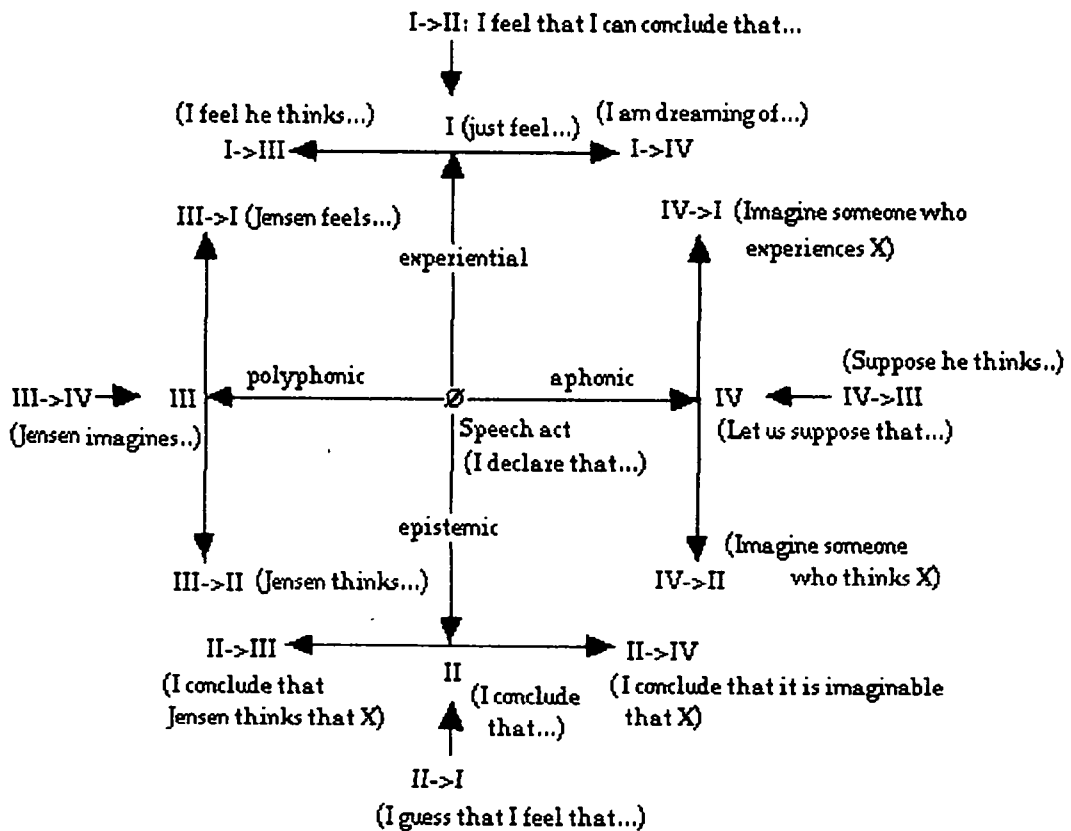
Linguistically, this model must be considerably further developed in order to account for the real complexity of occurring evidentialities. So, if we displace the enunciatonal focus from (\emptyset) to (I): ($\emptyset \rightarrow$ I), we can again from here – the new base in (I) – display the full spectrum, and get a subjectivized version of all positions: (I \rightarrow I=I etc.); (I \rightarrow II) – I feel that I can conclude...; (I \rightarrow III) – I feel that P thinks that...; (I \rightarrow IV) – I am dreaming of...

Likewise, if the enunciatonal focus is first displaced from \emptyset to (II), we will get special effects like: (II \rightarrow I) – I guess that what I feel is this...; (II \rightarrow III) – I think that what Jensen is saying is that...; (II \rightarrow IV) – I conclude from my premisses that it is at least imaginable that...

If we go from (\emptyset) to (III), the spectrum from there is: (III \rightarrow I) – Jensen feels that... (empathic report); (III \rightarrow II) – Jensen thinks that...; (III \rightarrow IV) – Jensen imagines that...

And finally, we could go from (\emptyset) to IV: (IV \rightarrow I) – Let us imagine what we would feel...; (IV \rightarrow II) – Let us imagine what a Marsian would conclude...; (IV \rightarrow III) – Let us imagine people saying things like...

From the new positions obtained by delegating from these delegations, we could go on, as current discourse of all sorts does. We do not presently know what the results are, or how many steps it is possible to take without losing track of the corresponding enunciatonal values. In the first generation, we have seen something like the following (fig. 4):



This analysis simply combines the choices ($\emptyset \rightarrow I, II, IV$) of the first generation of delegations with those of a second generation of delegations (from I further to II, etc.); we could of course continue. The linguistic question here is how many of these semiotic specifications through generations of semantic delegations in discourse and discursive texts the morphology of a language can reflect. Most enunciative values are probably based on only two or three delegations, along the lines illustrated by the examples given directly on the graph.

The most difficult problem for any theory of enunciation is perhaps that of understanding how the phenomena of fiction, fictive enunciation, and behavioral theatricality⁸, which may be at least compared to fictive behavior, are possible. How can humans 'jump out of' their real personhood and

⁸ Cf. Brandt 2003, chapter 14: "From Gesture to Theatricality".

playfully 'pretend' to be and speak through the voices of different persons? How can we account for this strange and culturally prominent capacity? The present model of enunciative delegations may offer a new way of explaining fictivity. If enunciative delegation is structured according to our analysis, then it should additionally be acknowledged that we can delegate from the initial position \emptyset to one of the four cardinal positions in the model and then stress this new enunciational 'base' in its emphatic or phatic function, from where new delegations in all directions can spring and to which they can return as a delegated 'base space' \emptyset – which is what the speaker is doing when

– speaking in the name of someone else without saying so: $\emptyset \rightarrow \text{III} \rightarrow \emptyset$ '

"[I just talked to your boss. He said that:] You are fired; you might as well pack your things!"

– speaking as if a theory was a fact: $\emptyset \rightarrow \text{II} \rightarrow \emptyset$ '

"[Here is my new theory. It says:] The world is made of green cheese!"

– speaking as if a hope or a feeling was a fact: $\emptyset \rightarrow \text{I} \rightarrow \emptyset$ '

"[I hope that:] Everything will be all right." – "[I strongly feel that:] You are a genius!"

– speaking with the intention of telling an imaginary story: $\emptyset \rightarrow \text{IV} \rightarrow \emptyset$ '

"[Let's imagine someone saying that:] Once upon a time there was..."

The voice of the impersonal, or 'olympian', narrator in fiction is a fictive voice, the non-voice of an imagined speaker, and could be analyzed as the result of such a move: $\emptyset \rightarrow \text{IV} \rightarrow \emptyset$ (i.e.: 'I' invite 'you' to imagine a speaker saying "Once upon..."), soon followed by other delegations that make it possible for the narrator in fiction to enter his characters' heads and give accounts of their experiential or epistemic minds, their imaginations and their thoughts about other persons' minds, etc. In first-person narratives, the voice of a fictive personalized narrator's stream-of-consciousness appears at the end of a longer delegation path:

$\emptyset \rightarrow \text{IV} \rightarrow \text{III} \rightarrow \text{I} \rightarrow \emptyset$ '

i.e.: speaker \rightarrow imagination \rightarrow imagined other person \rightarrow subjectivized \rightarrow speaker

This complex but calculable device in the human cognitive organization of intentionality is still to be submitted to comparative linguistic and semiotic

inquiry and systematic unfolding in the framework of existing expressive morphologies. It constitutes a field of research in which only the textual use of language, and the explicitation of the enunciative meaning of forms in textual use, can yield access to the semantics of these grammatical forms. This is already, and par excellence, the case of the personal pronouns I, you... These Jakobsonian 'shifters' do not only 'shift' by reference to 'shifting' instances in the extralinguistic world, but also intralinguistically and intra-cognitively, so to speak, with reference to the available delegation paths that lead to distinct evidential values, roles, and ultimately, meanings and intentions.

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