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## **EGG 2018: Perspective sensitivity (week 1)**

Session 1: What is perspective sensitivity?

**Sarah Zobel**

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## Let's start with an example...

- (1) [**Context:** A and B sit across from each other. Between them on the table are two gift boxes – a red one and a blue one. A and B need to decide which of these two boxes to use for the gift they bought for C.]
- A<sub>1</sub>: The left box is prettier.
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Let's assume that both of A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub> are true. Now imagine that B was the speaker instead of A. What happens in the two cases?

(example inspired by the experimental set-up in Klages et al. 2018)



## Perspective-sensitive items

Adjectives *left* and *pretty*: “**perspective-sensitive items**”

(Bylinina, McCready & Sudo 2015)

(2) A: The left box is prettier.

- ▶ *left*: sensitive to the physical perspective of the speaker A
- ▶ *pretty*: sensitive to the aesthetic/taste preferences of the speaker A

What A says with her utterance and whether that content is true or false depends on A.



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**A direct consequence of this observation:**

- ⇒ the speaker is part of the utterance context
- ⇒ dependence on the speaker = dependence on the utterance context
- ⇒ **perspective sensitivity = a type of context-dependence**



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- ▶ indexicals: *I, you, here, now, . . .*
- ▶ 3rd person pronouns: *he, she, it, they*
- ▶ tenses (e.g., past tense, pluperfect tense)
- ▶ the positive form of degree-based adjectives
- ▶ expressives: *damn, bastard, . . .*

+ expressions like *left* and *pretty*

see Zimmermann 1991 for a classic discussion of context dependence



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⇒ Would allow: adoption of established analyses
  - ▶ Which machinery does the analysis of perspective sensitivity require?



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2. How can perspective sensitivity be captured formally?
  - ▶ Can perspective-sensitive expressions be grouped with other context-dependent expressions?  
⇒ Would allow: adoption of established analyses
  - ▶ Which machinery does the analysis of perspective sensitivity require?
  
3. Is the class of perspective-sensitive expressions a uniform class?  
⇒ Do the tests pick a class with uniform “relevant” behavior?



## Characteristic properties of perspective-sensitive expressions

Bylinina et al. 2015:

- ▶ default speaker-orientation
- ▶ shiftability

→ (1)

⇒ look at these in turn



## Shiftability – I

The perspective relevant for *left* and *pretty* in (1) is the speaker's.

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D: A said that the left box was prettier.



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(4) [**Context:** D walks past the side of the table and witnesses A's comment. Later D reports A's comment to E.]

D: A said that the left box was prettier.

⇒ *left* relative to A's perspective

⇒ *pretty* relative to A's aesthetic preferences

⇒ **But notice:** A is not the speaker of (4), A is the matrix subject



## Shiftability – II

- (5) [**Context:** After discussing the boxes for hours, B is annoyed and leaves. A has to pick the box for C's gift alone. D calls E again while A deliberates.]
- $D_1$ : A will choose the left box.
- $D_2$ : A won't reconsider even though the right box is bigger.
- $D_3$ : Only if the right box were the prettier box, A would choose that box.





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$D_3$ : Only if the right box were the prettier box, A would choose that box.

- (6) [**Context:** Suddenly, two hours later, A feels insecure about his choice. He asks D, who is again passing by, to sit with him and help him choose.]

$A_1$ : Which box is prettier?

$A_2$ : What about the left box?



## Shiftability – III

### Grammatical contexts and shifting effect:

(Bylinina et al. 2015)

▶ Embedded clauses:

↪ matrix subject

- ▶ complement clauses (under attitude verbs)
- ▶ adjunct clauses

▶ Non-clausal modifiers inside VP

↪ subject

▶ Root questions

↪ addressee

⇒ aka “interrogative flip”

(see e.g. Speas & Tenny 2003)



## Shiftability – IV

**Additionally:** whose perspective is relevant can also be determined pragmatically (e.g., narrative contexts) → Free Indirect Discourse (FID)

(7) *The saga of C's birthday box*

A was deeply irritated. B had abandoned him. How could she?!  
C was their best friend!

A sighed. He had to decide. He had already spent the entire afternoon deliberating.

Should he choose the left box? It was prettier, after all!

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⇒ A is the main protagonist

⇒ for narrative texts: speaker = narrator



## Default speaker-orientation – I

We have seen:

- ▶ relevant perspective = speaker's perspective (1)
- ▶ relevant perspective = non-speaker's perspective (4)–(7)

- (8) **Default speaker-orientation**
- Outside of shifting contexts: speaker's perspective
  - In shifting contexts: speaker's perspective or other perspective
- (9) [**Context:** A deliberates which box to pick. D and E watch A from across the room (B's former side of the table).]
- D: A believes that the ugly box on the right is pretty.



## Default speaker-orientation – II

**Open question 1:** When is the speaker's perspective understood in shifting contexts and why?

Some speculation:

(10) **[Context:** A deliberates which box to pick. D and E watch A from across the room (B's former side of the table).]

D: A said that he likes the box on the right.

⇒ no conflict between attitudes or aesthetic judgements

⇒ D and E see the two boxes on the table and their configuration



## Default speaker-orientation – II

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⇒ no conflict between attitudes or aesthetic judgements

⇒ D and E see the two boxes on the table and their configuration

**Possible motivation for D:** Maximize the use of the shared context.

⇒ general version of "Maximize Presupposition" (Heim 1991 and later work)

More work needed!



## Default speaker-orientation – III

**Open question 2:** In case of mixed perspective – are there restrictions on the possible interpretations?

**Observation from Bylina et al. 2015:**

(11) **[Context:** Wei and A are sitting on a large table with various people. They are facing each other. Wei is from China. Later on, A talks to B, telling her what the evening was like.]

A: Wei talked to a foreigner on the left.

⇒ perspective-sensitive: *foreigner, left*





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## Default speaker-orientation – IV

**Open question 3:** Are there “grammatical constructions” that block non-speaker perspective – even in shifting contexts?

**Observation:** Effect of definiteness (?)

- (12) A: This boring comedian met a funny philosopher.  
A: This boring comedian met the funny philosopher.

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## List of perspective-sensitive expressions

List in Bylinina et al. 2015:69:

- ▶ Relative locative and socio-cultural expressions (e.g. *left*, *foreigner*)
- ▶ Subjective predicates (e.g. *pretty*)
- ▶ Epistemic modals and evidentials
- ▶ Perspective-sensitive anaphora

⇒ by far not exhaustive!



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Plausibly part of this list as well:

- ▶ degree-based adjectives (see Bylinina 2017)
- ▶ expressives and epithets (see Harris & Potts 2009, Patel-Grosz 2014)
- ▶ German discourse particles (see Eckardt 2012)

More work needed!



## Summary

- ▶ Perspective sensitivity is a subtype of context dependence.
- ▶ Properties of perspective sensitivity (Bylinina et al. 2015):
  - ▶ Default speaker-orientation
  - ▶ Shiftability
- ▶ Lots of open questions!
  - ▶ When is the speaker's perspective understood in shifting contexts and why?
  - ▶ In case of mixed perspective – are there restrictions on the possible interpretations?
  - ▶ Are there “grammatical constructions” that block non-speaker perspective – even in shifting contexts?
- ▶ **Also:** Is there cross-linguistic variation wrt. all of this?

Slides will be uploaded at: [sarahzobel.net/egg2018.html](http://sarahzobel.net/egg2018.html)



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