

# Pragmatic disguise in pronominal-affix paradigms

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## 1. Introduction

The concept “one form, one meaning”, whether thought of literally as a heuristic for concrete linguistic description or more modestly as a developmental tendency (not always attained in practice), is but one instance of our perennial tendency to reduce grammatical structures to ideal forms. It is spiritually akin to the reduction of syntax to simple, visually appealing geometrical diagrams, and to hard-core phonological structuralism.

Let us briefly recall some of the problems with the latter. The original idea was that each phoneme could be decomposed into a set of binary features, each with plus and minus values, e. g. [ $\pm$ voiced]. From the beginning, it was recognised that contextual sliding of the phonetic realisations could occur, but it was thought that the relational opposition was typically unaffected thereby (Jakobson—Fant—Halle 1951: 5). A major problem, it turned out, was that the markedness values were not stable across environments. Within the phoneme matrix itself, the value of one feature such as [ $+$ nasal] could reverse the markedness polarity of another (e. g. favouring [ $+$ voiced] at the expense of [ $-$ voiced]). Even more crucially, adjoining segments and above all the larger syllabic and prosodic structure proved to have important influences on markedness patterns for individual features (e. g. [ $+$ voiced] could be unmarked for stops in intervocalic position, but [ $-$ voiced] could be unmarked syllable-finally).

Problems of this type have also bedevilled the structuralist analysis of morphological systems. In this approach, grammatical morphemes are organised into paradigmatic sets (tense, aspect, case, gender, number, etc.), each containing two or more mutually exclusive categories such as singular versus plural or perfective versus imperfective, with appropriate distinctive-feature interpretations ([ $\pm$ plural], [ $\pm$ perfective]). Jakobson’s early papers on morphology (e. g. Jakobson 1932) were representative of this strategy.

The hope was that interference effects from one paradigmatic set on another, chiefly neutralisations, could be handled in terms of the internal, intrinsic markedness patterning of the affected (neutralised) set. Suppose that

[ $\pm X$ ] and [ $\pm Y$ ] are categorial features from distinct sets. A typical neutralisation pattern would be for [ $\pm Y$ ] to be neutralised in favour of the [ $-Y$ ] morpheme in the presence of [ $+X$ ], essentially as a device to set a ceiling on the overall level of marked morphemes in the surface string. The value [ $+X$ ] did not trigger neutralisation of [ $\pm Y$ ] by virtue of any special semantic affinity between [ $+X$ ] and [ $-Y$ ], rather simply by virtue of being formally marked. Convenient summaries of the structuralist approach to markedness-based neutralisations are given in Silverstein (1976: 120–121) and Mayerthaler (1981: 61–62).

The problem is that, under closer scrutiny, it often appears that there is a more direct semantic or real-world association between [ $+X$ ] and [ $-Y$ ]. For example, the neutralisation of perfectivity in favour of [ $-perfective$ ] in negative contexts has often been used to argue for the unmarked status of imperfective aspect, but it could also be argued that sentence negation (e. g. *He did not come*) is normally meaningful only in connection with an extended span of time, unlike the situation with corresponding positives (*He came*) which may designate momentaneous or brief events, so that there is a semantic and not merely a markedness element in the neutralisation. The same point can be made about aspect neutralisation in favour of the imperfective in the present tense.

Indeed, a modicum of experience with highly-inflected languages (American, Australian, Caucasian, etc.) suffices to teach us that categories from different paradigmatic sets constantly interact with each other. To take just one example, research on “ergative” case systematics since Silverstein (1976) has shown that the use of unmarked (nominative, absolutive) versus marked (ergative, accusative) cases is very frequently affected by categorial values from apparently orthogonal paradigmatic sets including pronominal person, number, tense/aspect, mood (e. g. imperative), and status as independent or subordinated clause. In short, linear (syntagmatic) interactions among categories play a much greater role than imagined in early structuralist morphology.

But this is not all. To an extent rarely recognised, “pragmatic” effects of various kinds additionally complicate (or rather, enrich) morphology. Many highly-inflected languages abound in explicit morphological marking of pragmatic nuances such as (paradigmatic) focus, contrastive or simple topic, and several shades of definiteness and anaphora. By contrast, languages like English use special syntactic configurations (or rhetorically based intonation, keeping the syntax unchanged), while others with some freedom in constituent order, like Basque, use sentence-initial and/or preverbal position to mark topic and focus.

In this paper, however, I concentrate on a more specific aspect of pragmatics, viz., the tendency to mitigate or disguise reference to speech-act participants.

## 2. Pronominal pragmatics<sup>1</sup>

A discrepancy between semantics and linguistic expression has long been recognised in the study of personal pronouns in European and other languages. While the first person (at least first singular) may be relatively straightforward, we commonly find “polite” second singular (2Sg) pronouns that have the form either of second plural (2Pl), as in French *vous* or Russian *vy*; of third singular (3Sg), as in Italian *Lei* (also obsolete German *Er*, though this one was not honorific in function); or third plural (3Pl), as in German *Sie* (with plural concord, hence to be associated with 3Pl *sie* rather than with third feminine singular, 3FSg, *sie*); or finally of a noun phrase, as in Portuguese *o Senhor, o meu rico Senhor* (literally ‘the my rich Sir’), etc., and Spanish *Usted* (< *Vuestra Merced* ‘Your Mercy’). English has less to offer, but of course there are some euphemistic pronominal substitutes such as *yours truly* for first singular (1Sg), taken from the coda of formal letters, and the royal or academic *we*. For further discussion see, for example, Brown–Gilman (1960), Brown–Levinson (1978), and Plank (1985).

Far from being a European specialty, pronominal substitutes are typologically common. They are made into an art form in East Asian languages such as Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, and Javanese, where we find that much of the syntax has been organised around the sociolinguistic need to omit 1Sg and 2Sg pronouns, and that a large inventory of noun-like “pronouns” is available when omission is, for one reason or another, not preferred. In the more elaborate systems, the forms functioning as 1Sg and 2Sg pronouns tend to form reciprocal sets, so that a given speaker/addressee relationship (say, teacher–student, or elder and younger siblings) has a characteristic two-way pronominal structure. The use of any 1Sg or 2Sg “pronoun” depends critically on the relationship between speaker and addressee. For some of the more exotic Southeast Asian systems see Cooke (1968).

Attempts to reduce pronominal systems to structuralist principles have been only partly successful. To be sure, Benveniste’s (1966) division between speech-act participants (first and second persons) and nonparticipants has been productive. However, using semantic features to distinguish first from second person is more difficult, especially when assigning markedness values

is necessary. The use, in English and many other languages, of first plural in both exclusive (= 'he/she/they and I') and inclusive (= 'you and I') senses could be taken as pointing to the unmarked status of first person. However, other linguists have used the same data to argue that the speaker is more salient than other referents, which does not seem to jibe with unmarked status.

If second person is intrinsically a marked category, why, for example, does Basque have just a singular/plural subdivision of first person pronominals, whereas the verbal concord system has no fewer than five second person forms: 2Sg familiar masculine, 2Sg familiar feminine, polite 2Sg, diminutive 2Sg, and 2Pl? Why do Algonquian languages favour second person over first and third for access to the one prefixal slot for verbs and nouns (Bloomfield 1946: 95), while in many other languages, on various criteria, first person seems to rank highest?

Silverstein, noting that the (chiefly Australian) data on split ergativity distinguish sometimes first person, sometimes second person from all other pronouns (as two among many possible splits of the total pronominal array), makes this point (1976: 118):

In effect, while [+ego] presupposes the speaker and hence is a presupposing index, [+tu] creates the hearer as referent and hence is relatively more performative. On the other hand, the whole set of forms for referring to the hearer which we deal with under the rubric of "politeness" indicate that the "polite second person" forms are the most highly marked ones if categorially distinct. ... Both of these presupposing and performative forces seem to be at work in hierarchisation.

Although I have several quibbles about the precise way this is formulated, the general point — that conflicting factors are involved in the hierarchical and marking relationship between first and second persons — is valid and important. Rather than emphasising the technical problems of establishing and maintaining the communication channel, I would stress the pragmatic delicacy and dangerousness of using first and second person pronouns (particularly singulars), and the particular delicacy of combining them in a noun phrase or sentence in a manner overtly specifying their relationship to each other. Even such details as the use, in English, of first plural for inclusive as well as exclusive ('you and I' undifferentiated from 'he/she/they and I'), commonly analysed as a simple matter of feature hierarchisation (first person taking precedence over others), could just as easily be interpreted as a device to avoid overt usage of a second person form.

### 3. Australian pronominal-prefix systems

The material to be presented below is from languages of the northern part of Australia, which have more complex morphologies than the (better-known) languages of the middle and southern areas. In the north, most languages have a pronominal prefix (PRON) at or near the beginning of verb forms. In the languages we are interested in, PRON includes object- as well as subject-marking for many verb stems. More often than not, instead of discrete paradigmatic sets for subject and object, each in its own well-defined slot, we find complex interactions between the two, and between PRON as a whole and other grammatical morphemes.

We begin with a comparatively "simple" system from one of the few languages in the north that limits the PRON prefix to subject-markers (object category is marked in a separate, suffixal subsystem). The language is Maranungku (Tryon 1970).

Table 1. Maranungku

category	nonfuture	future
1Sg	<i>ka</i> – <i>ŋa</i> – VERB	<i>ŋa</i> – X – VERB
1ExPl	VERB – <i>n</i>	<i>ŋa</i> – <i>ɾa</i> – VERB
1InDu	<i>ka</i> – <i>ma</i> – VERB	<i>ŋa</i> – <i>ma</i> – VERB
1InPl	<i>ka</i> – <i>rka</i> – VERB	<i>ŋa</i> – <i>rka</i> – VERB
2Sg	<i>ka</i> – <i>na</i> – VERB	VERB
2Pl	<i>ka</i> – <i>ɾa</i> – VERB	VERB – <i>ɾa</i>
3Sg	<i>ka</i> – VERB	<i>ka</i> – X – VERB
3Pl	<i>ku</i> – VERB – <i>ña</i> <i>ku</i> – <i>ña</i> – VERB	<i>pu</i> – <i>ɾa</i> – VERB

Note: -X- is a phonological effect on the verb stem, possibly representing an original consonant.

This is not the type of material commonly served up to students of introductory linguistics as a problem set in morphological segmentation. Several morphemes resist simple glossing; indeed, only 1InDu *-ma-* and 1InPl *-rka-* are readily definable (they do not, however, match anything in the corresponding independent pronouns, 1InDu *ŋaŋku* and 1InPl *keja*). In Table 1, *-ɾa-* is probably identifiable as a Plural morpheme, but it is absent in some semantically plural forms. It seems as though *ka-* is basically a nonfuture marker, but it fails to occur in the 1ExPl nonfuture, is only questionably present in 3Pl nonfuture *ku-*, and on the other hand it does occur in one future form (3Sg). At first sight, *ŋa-* looks like a future marker opposed to nonfuture *ka-*, but *ŋa-* as future marker is confined to the first person (inclusive

and exclusive), and its relationship to non-word-initial *-ŋa-* in 1Sg nonfuture *ka-ŋa-* is (synchronically) problematic.

Despite the apparent chaos at the level of individual morphemes, the overall Maranungku system is perfectly functional. The unusual distribution of *ka-*, with both tense and person (here, 3Sg) values, is found in cognates of this morpheme in a number of other northern languages despite considerable genetic separation, suggesting a reasonable level of stability for such a system. It is true that certain languages have narrowed the reflex of *\*ka-* either as a pure tense morpheme or as a pure pronominal marker, but there has been no stampede toward such a “one form, one meaning” realignment.

We now turn to languages (the majority in the north) where the PRON prefix can mark objects as well as subjects. In such languages, over and above the complexities just observed in Maranungku we find further formal interactions between subject- and object-markers when they co-occur.

#### 4. Pragmatic disguise in 1st ↔ 2nd combinations

Of particular interest for our purposes are cases where intransitive and some transitive (two-place) PRON forms are relatively transparent (i. e., where their component morphemes are readily segmentable and glossable), but where 1st → 2nd (‘I saw you’, etc.) and 2nd → 1st (‘You saw me’, etc.) combinations, which we will subsume under the label ‘1st ↔ 2nd’, display unusual features. In one language after another, 1st ↔ 2nd forms are the messiest and most opaque of all transitive combinations, and grammarians have often despaired of analysing them structurally.

Before focusing on them, it is necessary to describe the typical structure of transparent transitive forms. In some languages, subject- and object-markers are more or less consistently ordered, so that, e. g., the object-marker regularly precedes the subject-marker. More often, however, the linear sequence of pronominal markers is determined not by case, but by a pronominal hierarchy such as (1):

- (1) a. 1st or 2nd
- b. 3Pl (human only)
- c. 3Sg human
- d. 3rd nonhuman

The higher-ranking of the subject- and object-markers precedes the lower-ranking. In both ‘You saw them’ and ‘They saw you’, the sequence is therefore

2Sg-3Pl-see-Past. Following the terminology used in connection with Algonquian languages, we call the 2Sg-3Pl sequence *direct* when interpreted as 'You ... them', and as *inverse* when interpreted as 'They ... you'. Inverse combinations are, therefore, those with subjects that are lower in hierarchical ranking than the co-occurring objects. (In some languages, though not especially in Algonquian, it is desirable to recognise *equipollent* combinations, with subject and object in equivalent hierarchical positions — 'He saw him', etc. — as a distinct subtype.)

Languages with direct-inverse systems generally have some formal device for disambiguating most or all direct forms from corresponding inverse ones. In the relevant Australian languages, this may be accomplished partly by using slightly distinct allomorphs for some pronominal categories depending on whether they function as subject- or as object-markers, but it is accomplished more commonly (and more reliably) by inserting a special Inverse morpheme between the two pronominals in the "inverse" interpretation: direct 2Sg-3Pl-see-Past = 'You saw them', but inverse 2Sg-Inverse-3Pl-see-Past = 'They saw you'.

This device is effective in distinguishing 1st/2nd  $\rightarrow$  3rd from 3rd  $\rightarrow$  1st/2nd combinations (among other things). From a structural perspective, there is no reason why this mechanism could not also be used for 1st  $\rightarrow$  2nd and 2nd  $\rightarrow$  1st forms. If, for example, first person outranks second on the hierarchy, we could theoretically have combinations like 1Sg-2Sg-see-Past = 'I saw you' (direct), versus 1Sg-Inverse-2Sg-see-Past = 'You saw me' (inverse). However, while the languages sometimes allow first and second person morphemes to be linearised together, the Inverse morpheme is not ordinarily used in such combinations.

Indeed, the 1st  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd combinations seem to go out of their way to be structurally perverse. To begin with, there are often fewer 1st  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd combinations than would be expected. For example, whereas many languages clearly distinguish dual from plural (i.e. three or more) in other transitive (as well as intransitive) PRON forms, dual is generally merged with plural in 1st  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd combinations, and in some cases plural is even neutralised with singular. It is as though vagueness rather than clarity were being sought for.

As for the forms themselves, 1st  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd combinations commonly involve the following features:

- (2) a. special allomorph for first and/or second person marker;
- b. unanalysable (nonzero) portmanteau;
- c. combination expressed by zero ( $\emptyset$ );



- d. special use of nonpronominal morpheme;
- e. first person inclusive morphology used;
- f. second person merged with third person;
- g. singular "promoted" to plural.

These features overlap to some extent; (2c), for example, is perhaps just a special case of (2b). Furthermore, the features in (2) are not mutually exclusive.<sup>2</sup>

(2a) is exemplified by Ngandi *gura*- '1Sg → 2Pl; 1Pl → 2Sg/Pl', analysable as *[gur-na-]*. Here *[-na-]* is the regular 2Pl morpheme, seen (with word-initial retroflexion of alveolars) in *na-r-gu-ni*- '3MSg → 2Pl'. Since in all other 1st ↔ 2nd combinations the first person marker comes first, we must infer that *[gur-]* is a 1ExPl marker here. Since the usual 1ExPl marker is *na-r-* or (when final within PRON) *-na-*, *[gur-]* (perhaps further segmentable as *[gu-r-]* with Pl *[-r-]*) must be taken as a special allomorph limited to one of the 1st ↔ 2nd forms.

(2b), where the entire transitive combination is expressed by an unanalysable portmanteau, is not easy to exemplify in a pure form (except for zero portmanteau, see below), since almost any overt form could evoke associations with some phonologically similar morpheme elsewhere in the grammar. On the other hand, the element of opacity inherent in the other patterns to be dealt with here, including (2a) and several types discussed just below, leaves them in the middle ground between transparency and complete unanalysability; it could be argued that Ngandi *gura*- (above) is virtually a portmanteau to native speakers, and that the linguist's segmentation as *[gur-na-]* is only historically valid.

Another case of near-portmanteau status is Rembarnga 2Sg → 1Sg *tan-*. Here, though, the existence of a single other form, 2Sg → 3Sg *ta-*, allows us to break up *tan-* as *ta-n-*, where *ta-* is a special 2Sg allomorph used just in these 2Sg → 1Sg/3Sg combinations.

In Alawa, however, there seems to be little hope of segmenting and analysing such forms as 1ExPl → 2Sg *añi-* and 2Sg → 1Sg *ji-*, in the absence of any phonologically similar morphemes elsewhere in the PRON system, and these forms can be taken as nearly pure portmanteaus.

(2c), where a complete transitive combination is expressed by  $\emptyset$ , is seen in Kunwinyku 1Sg → 2Sg/2Pl  $\emptyset$  (1Sg → 2Du is, however, *na-*, homophonous with 1Sg → 3Sg). Both the 1Sg and 2Sg categories are elsewhere expressed with nonzero morphemes, so the transitive  $\emptyset$  is especially striking.

(2d), where a morpheme elsewhere functioning in a nonpronominal affixal subsystem (tense, aspect, mode, etc.) is used in a special function in one or



more 1st  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd combinations, is seen in Jawony *wal-* '1Sg  $\rightarrow$  2Sg', apparently the same morpheme as *wal-*, the Irrealis mood marker used with 3Sg prefix  $\emptyset$  (3Sg Realis  $\emptyset$  versus 3Sg Irrealis *wal-* $\emptyset$ ). In the sense '1Sg  $\rightarrow$  2Sg', *wal-* is used in both Realis and Irrealis contexts, so here it has evidently been skewed as a substitute for pronominal markers regardless of mood.

(2e), the use of first inclusive morphology in some 1st  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd combinations, is found in several languages. Consider Jawony *wañu-* '1Sg  $\rightarrow$  2Pl; 1Pl  $\rightarrow$  2Sg/Pl' (no change in Irrealis), and *ñanu-*, Irrealis *wa-ñanu-* '2Sg  $\rightarrow$  1Pl; 2Pl  $\rightarrow$  1Sg/Pl'. We can perhaps segment *wañu-* as *wa-ñu-*, where *wa-* is another special use of an Irrealis allomorph (cf. discussion of *wal-*, above); we can also segment *ñanu-* as *ña-nu-*, where the second component is the usual 2Pl marker. It remains to explain *-ñu-* in *wa-ñu-* and *ña-* in *ña-nu-*. Among pronominal morphemes, the only reasonable formal correlation is with 1InPl *ña-* (cf. also 1InDu *ñi-*).

In Nunggubuyu, 2Pl  $\rightarrow$  1Sg/Pl *ñiri-* likewise looks like various 1InPl forms with the shape  $\eta VrV-$  (*ñuru-*, *ñiri-*, and *ña-* from earlier *\*ñara-*). In Anindilyakwa, 2Sg  $\rightarrow$  1Sg/Pl *y(ə)-* is homophonous to (intransitive) 1InDu *y(ə)-*, and 1Sg/Pl  $\rightarrow$  2Pl *ñar-* is homophonous to (intransitive) 1InPl *ñar-*. Alawa 1Sg  $\rightarrow$  2Sg *ña-* matches intransitive 1InDu *ña-*. Thus, there is a distinct tendency to treat some 1st  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd transitive combinations as morphologically equivalent to first inclusive (often intransitive), a device that formally downplays the role differentiation of subject and object.

In pattern (2f), second person is merged formally with third person precisely in combinations where the other component is first person. In some languages the pattern is sporadic, as in Kunwinyku, where neutralisation occurs in certain forms such as 2Sg/2Pl/3Pl  $\rightarrow$  1Sg *gan-*. It is, however, quite systematic in Warndarang, e.g. 1Sg  $\rightarrow$  2Sg/3Sg *ña-* and 2Sg/3Sg  $\rightarrow$  1Sg *ñara-*.

An interesting case is provided by Mara. So far as morphemic composition is concerned, second and third persons are neutralised in the majority of combinations involving a first person participant. However, the phonology conspires to reestablish the distinction between second and third persons in several such forms, notably by having nasal-stop sequences undergo point-of-articulation assimilation in the case of second but not third person combinations. For example, the morphological rules (including second-third merger) produce the morpheme sequence *[na-n-gu-]* (1Ex-Inverse-dummy-) for both '2Sg  $\rightarrow$  1Sg' and '3Sg  $\rightarrow$  1Sg', but the surface forms are distinct: *ṇangu-* '2Sg  $\rightarrow$  1Sg' (showing assimilation) versus *nangu-* '3Sg  $\rightarrow$  1Sg'. One could ask for no more dramatic illustration of the conflicting structural and functional factors impinging on this morphological subsystem.

While there are many instances of second and third persons merging in the presence of a first person, we can also cite an occasional parallel merger of first with third person in the presence of a second person. An example is Mangarayi 1Sg/1Pl/3Sg  $\rightarrow$  2Pl *nnyan-* (but Mangarayi also has some mergers of second with third person).

In type (2g), unusual mergers of singular with plural (adopting the form of the latter) occur. Note that, taking plural as the marked number category, this pattern of neutralisation is the opposite of that predicted by markedness theory.

In Ngandi, in all 1st  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd combinations, the object marker is formally plural regardless of objective (real-world) number. Furthermore, if the object is objectively plural, the subject-marker takes plural form even if objectively singular. In (3) we see how objective scenarios (left side) are expressed morphologically:

- (3) a. scenario Sg  $\rightarrow$  Sg expressed as Sg  $\rightarrow$  Pl  
 b. scenario Sg  $\rightarrow$  Pl expressed as Pl  $\rightarrow$  Pl  
 c. scenario Pl  $\rightarrow$  Sg expressed as Pl  $\rightarrow$  Pl  
 d. scenario Pl  $\rightarrow$  Pl expressed as Pl  $\rightarrow$  Pl

It is interesting to note that the surface form 'Sg  $\rightarrow$  Pl' can *only* be decoded as real-world Sg  $\rightarrow$  Sg, since the real-world scenario Sg  $\rightarrow$  Pl is expressed (like all other combinations involving at least one objectively plural participant) as morphological 'Pl  $\rightarrow$  Pl'.

The actual Ngandi forms are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Ngandi

a. 1st $\rightarrow$ 2nd			b. 2nd $\rightarrow$ 1st		
		object			object
subject	Sg	Pl	subject	Sg	Pl
Sg	<i>n̄u-nu-</i>		Sg	<i>ŋa-na-</i>	
Pl		<i>n̄a-na-</i>	Pl		<i>g̃u-r-a-</i>

morphemes: *ŋa-* '1Sg'

*n̄a-(r-)*, *n̄u-* '1ExPl'

*g̃u-r-* (or *g̃u-r-*) '1ExPl' (special allomorph)

*-nu-* '2Sg'

*-na-*, *-a-* (from */-na-/*) '2Pl'

We noted above, in the discussion of type (2a), that */gur-/* is best analysed as a special 1ExPl allomorph, the usual allomorph being *ñā-(r-)*. Thus, in all cases the first person morpheme precedes the second person morpheme (the morphemes are 1Sg *ŋa-*, 1ExPl */gur-/* and *ñā-(r-)*, 2Sg *-nu-*, and 2Pl *-na-*). Phonological rules include an irregular vocalic assimilation in *ñu-nu-* < */ñā-(r-)nu-/* and */rn/* → *r* in *gur-a-* < */gur-na-/*. Note that the morphologically Singular forms *ŋa-* and *-nu-* are used only in object function, and at that only when the subject pronominal is objectively singular.

Approximately similar 1st ↔ 2nd systems occur in neighbouring languages such as Ngalakan.

Though I have done no survey of non-Australian languages in regard to formally deviant 1st ↔ 2nd forms, mention may be made of a striking parallel in Chinook (Boas 1911: 584). While the 2nd → 1st combinations are regular, the 1st → 2nd ones require replacement of the usual first person marker. 1ExDu and 1ExPl are replaced by *q(a)-*, apparently identical to a prefix *q-* marking indefinite transitive subject. The usual 1Sg prefix is replaced by *y(a)-*, which may be taken as a dummy morpheme filling the obligatory transitive-subject slot for the relevant verbs (Silverstein 1976: 133), or perhaps as a special 1Sg allomorph. Analogies to types (2a) and (2d) are apparent.

Another Amerindian language, Aymara, uses the morphological '2nd → 1In' forms with the objective meaning '2nd → 1Ex', cf. (2e) in our list of types. In Quechua (Cuzco dialect), there is a systematic syncretism between 2Sg (polite) and 1InPl, though this is not a specific feature of 1st → 2nd transitive combinations. On these languages see Mannheim (1982) and further references there.

Though peripheral to his papers, DeLancey (1981a; 1981b: 641–644) describes in passing a number of irregularities in 1st ↔ 2nd combinations in Tibeto-Burman languages, including use of first inclusive morphology (1981a: 88–89), special forms of first or second person markers (1981a: 86–87, etc.), and collapsing of second with third person forms in the presence of a first person (1981a: 94–95), in addition to an overall structure that disfavors joint occurrence of first and second person morphemes.

Perlmutter's well-known paper on surface constraints on pronominal-clitic combinations in Spanish and French (1970) describes patterns of avoidance of logically expectable sequences; most of the excluded strings happen to involve first plus second person pronominals (in accusative and dative function).

## 5. Discussion

The data presented here are obviously problematic for any theory claiming a strong universal propensity for “one form, one meaning” morphological systems. The categorial skewings, formal irregularities, and reduction of surface information seen in the Australian 1st ↔ 2nd combinations are not simply historical debris passively carried forward — say, the result of historical phonological contractions that the languages have not yet gotten around to reshaping. The overwhelming impression one gets is that the languages actually favour such “chaos”, and in several cases the irregularities are demonstrable recent morphological innovations unrelated to historical phonology (indeed, the phonology of most northern Australian languages has been remarkably stable over time, except here and there on the coasts and islands).

These patterns have been a notable thorn in the side of grammarians, who have merely noted their opacity or have attempted ingenious formal analyses to reduce the level of chaos. However, there is method in the languages’ “madness” (and, correspondingly, madness in the “method” of some grammarians!). The assorted mechanisms in (2) have in common the fact that they *obscure* the “objective” relationship between speaker and addressee.

Thus, they are entirely comparable to the numerous ways in which personal pronouns, bad news, imperatives, and other delicate or dangerous phenomena are masked in everyday speech, being hinted at rather than overtly uttered; see, e. g., Brown—Levinson (1978) on the various notions of “face” and their linguistic consequences, also Brown—Ford (1961) on names and titles (particularly on “no-naming”). The 1st ↔ 2nd combinations are doubly dangerous because they not only contain the most pragmatically sensitive pronominals, they also combine them into a syntagmatic structure and thereby necessarily focus attention on the speaker-addressee relationship. The Australian languages provide, in most cases, sufficient hints to ensure recovery (by the addressee) of the intended objective referents, but play down the speaker-addressee relationship by omission, substitution, or skewing of the normal, most transparent, hence also bluntest first and second person morphemes.

Such irregular and problematic combinations are more, not less, highly-valued than regularised alternatives would be; the latter would make life easier for grammarians, but more difficult for flesh-and-blood native speakers engaged in actual communicative acts. In order to comprehend such phenomena, it is insufficient to study pure morphological theory, especially if the latter is based on socially unrealistic formal and logical principles. It is

much easier to uncover the principles involved by first studying the linguistic anthropological literature. For example, the masking patterns identified here in PRON prefixes in ordinary speech are of the same kind as those applied to the lexicon in affinal-respect ("mother-in-law") registers (Dixon 1971, Haviland 1979) and in ritual-initiation registers (Hale 1971), which also involve heavy semantic neutralisation, skewing, and disguise.

### Notes

1. I will generally use conventional terminology for grammatical categories in this paper, such as "first, second, third" persons, "exclusive" versus "inclusive" (abbreviations: Ex and In) first person plural, etc. I am aware of criticisms of such terminology (e.g. Plank 1985), and I trust it will be clear to readers by the end of this paper that I have a rather plastic conception of pronominal categories.
2. The following material on individual languages is from the following sources: Alawa (Sharpe 1972), Anindilyakwa (Heath field notes), Jawony (Francesca Merlan, unpublished materials), Kunwinyku = Gunwinggu (Oates 1964), Mangarayi (Merlan 1982), Mara (Heath 1980a), Ngalakan (Merlan 1982), Ngandi (Heath 1978), Nunggubuyu (Heath 1984), Rembarnga (McKay 1975), and Warndarang (Heath 1980b). Fieldwork by myself, and most of the authors cited in this note, was financed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

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