Blending, subjectivity and deixis: evidence from English and Brazilian Portuguese

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Abstract

This paper takes a cognitive approach to person deixis through an analysis of English and Brazilian Portuguese first and second person singular personal pronouns. It is assumed that these deictic pronouns are organized as 'radial categories' which include prototypical and less prototypical deictic terms. Following Marmaridou (2000), it is shown that prototypical deictic meanings build up a ground space structured by the deictic ICM. In search of an explanatory approach to less prototypical deictic meanings, an analysis is presented that draws on the notion of conceptual blending. More specifically, it is claimed that first person blended pronouns make explicit reference to the Speaker, but implicitly refer to the Hearer and/or other non-ground participants, whereas second person blended pronouns make explicit reference to the Hearer, but implicitly refer to the Speaker and/or other non-ground participants. The final section of the paper discusses the relations between non-prototypical deictic meanings and subjectivity.

Key words: deixis, personal pronouns, first person singular, second person singular, conceptual blending, subjectivity

1. Introduction

Despite the identification of several categories of deixis in the relevant literature (Lyons, 1977; Levinson, 1983, 2004), it is often recognized that rigid distinctions between deictic and non-deictic usages in traditional accounts have precluded a comprehensive account of deictic data. Taking a cognitive perspective, Marmaridou (2000) proposes that deixis can be analyzed in terms of an Idealized Cognitive Model - the deictic ICM. According to this proposal, deictic categories are 'radial categories', structured by prototypical deictic terms (which match perfectly well the deictic ICM), and by less prototypical members (which match this ICM less well). It is also assumed that prototypical deictic meanings build up a *ground* space structured by the deictic ICM.

Going a step further, this paper proposes that the relations between prototypical and less prototypical deictic meanings involve conceptual blending. The analysis focuses on person deixis, relying on English and Brazilian Portuguese attested data on first and second person singular personal pronouns. It is shown that first person blended pronouns explicitly refer to the Speaker, but implicitly refer to the Hearer and/or other *non-ground* participants, while second person blended pronouns invert this situation by explicitly referring to the Hearer, but implicitly referring to the Speaker and/or other *non-ground* participants. Finally, it is claimed that non-prototypical uses of these first and second person pronouns can be related to the notion of *subjectivity*, defined as implicit (or relatively unprofiled) reference to the Speaker, Hearer and their physical and temporal discourse setting (Langacker, 1990; Sanders, Sanders and Sweetser, 2009; Ferrari and Sweetser,2012).

By drawing on constructs such as conceptual blending and subjectivity, this paper attests that Cognitive Linguistics provides solid tools for describing and analyzing phenomena which although traditionally attributed to the field of pragmatics, have not yet been fully explored in the pragmatic literature.

2. Methodology

The phenomena under investigation are non-prototypical uses of first and second person singular personal pronouns in English and Brazilian Portuguese. The study takes the following hypotheses:

(i) non-prototypical uses of first and second singular personal pronouns are built up through blending processes which take a *ground* space structured by the deictic ICM as Input 1, and another locally relevant space as Input 2.

(ii) non-prototypical uses of first and second singular personal pronouns are more subjective than prototypical ones.

The data reported here were collected from English and Brazilian Portuguese journalistic texts available at the British National Corpus (http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/) and at the Portuguese Corpus (http://corpusdoportugues.com.br).

3. Some remarks on deixis

Deixis is traditionally defined as the use of certain linguistic expressions to locate entities in spatiotemporal, social and discourse context (Levinson, 1983, 2004). Since deictic expressions cannot be interpreted unless contextual parameters are taken into account, deictic phenomena have received

considerable attention in pragmatic approaches (Anderson and Keenan, 1985, Diessel, 1999). Yet, as Marmaridou (2000: 66) points out, "no single and comprehensive theory of deixis has ever been proposed".

Taking a mental space perspective, Rubba (1996:231) recognized that deictic expressions designate some entity (a person, object, time, or location) within the *Ground* (roughly: Speaker, Hearer(s), speech event's location and time). Figure 1 illustrates the basis for deictic meanings:
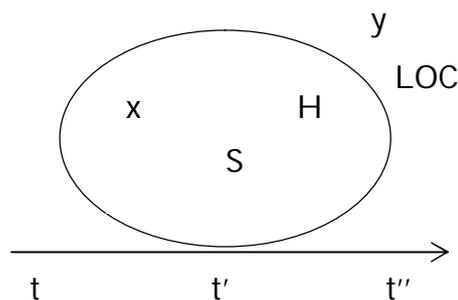
Figure 1. *Ground*

Given the speech situation (the oval in the diagram), S stands for the speaker, H for the hearer; LOC represents the location where the speech event takes place; the arrow represents time (and t' is the time of the speech event). In English, these entities are normally coded by 'I' (*Speaker*), 'you' (*Hearer*), 'here' (*speech event location*) and 'now' *(speech event time).*

Following Marmaridou (2000:100), it is assumed that the ICM of deixis involves the linguistic act of pointing to an entity in the *ground* space, performed by an authorized speaker (deictic center) and directed to an unfocused addressee. Therefore, if a particular linguistic item fits this ICM perfectly well, it is a prototypical member of the deictic category. Figure 2 illustrates meaning construction in prototypical deictic uses:
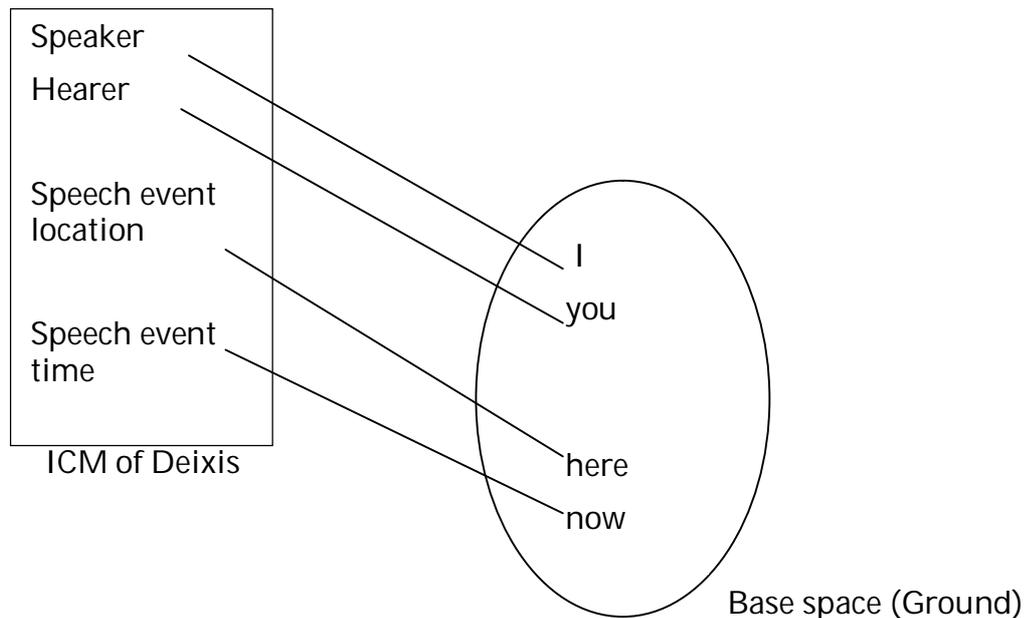
Figure 2. Prototypical deictic meanings

The deictic ICM introduces and structures a mental space, which is built in discourse by the use of specific linguistic expressions, such as the pronouns 'I', 'you' and the adverbials 'here' and 'now'. These deictic elements build up a mental space which assumes the co-presence of the Speaker and the Hearer at a point in time containing coding time.

However, deictic meanings cannot always be characterized by the above representation. As Marmaridou (2000:106) noticed, 'you' may take a general reading, whereby the Hearer is not precisely specified, as in (1):

(1) You can never tell what youngsters actually want nowadays.

The use of 'you' in (1) can be considered marginally deictic in that the deictic ICM only partly structures the mental space built by the personal pronoun. In the remainder of this paper, it will be shown that not only second person pronouns like (1), but also first person singular pronouns, which prototypically indicate the Speaker, may exhibit non-prototypical uses. It is claimed that these uses can be explained via conceptual blending.

4. Blending and deixis

Conceptual blending can be illustrated by one of Fauconnier's classic examples (Fauconnier, 1997: 18): the "computer virus". The expression "computer virus" blends hackers' nefarious computer programs and biological viruses. The cross-space mapping for this blend is based on shared properties (e.g., the element is present but unwanted (harmful); the element is able to replicate; the element disrupts the intended functioning of the system, and so on). Moreover, the blend has rapidly developed to create a much richer category of computer virus, with associated categories like disinfectant, vaccine, and so on. The "computer virus" example shows that novel conceptual blends do not generally need novel forms of expression; the phrase uses existing grammar (Noun-Noun compound) and existing vocabulary ('computer' and 'virus') to prompt for the new blend.
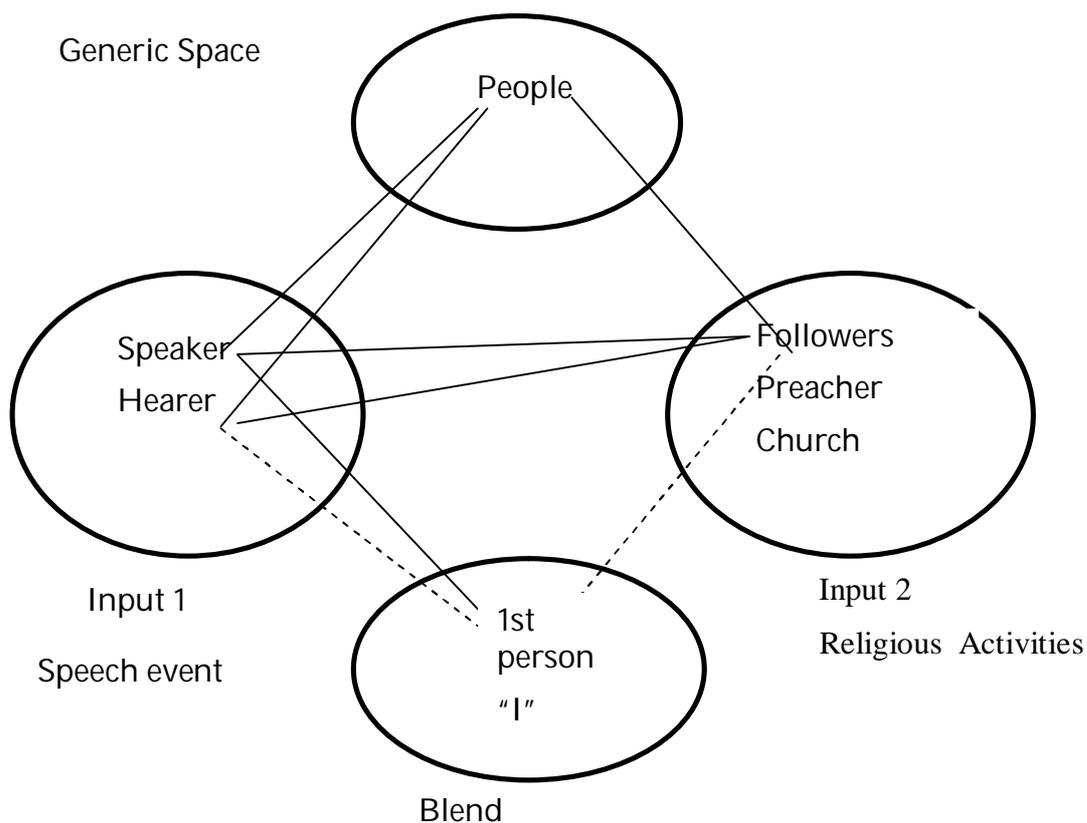
Similarly, blended first and second person singular pronouns use existing vocabulary (the pronouns 'I' and 'you', in English, and 'eu' and 'você' in Portuguese) to prompt for new integration networks, whose components will be detailed in the next section.

4.1. Blended first person pronouns

The analysis has shown that blended first person singular pronouns explicitly code the Speaker, but implicitly refer to the Hearer and/or other participants not located in the *Ground*. In example (2), the speaker gives her opinion about street preachers. The conditional ("*If I want to hear a preacher*") builds up a hypothetical space, which is then expanded ("*I go to a church*"):

> (2) Now the council is demanding that preachers apply for prior permission to use council property and they can only spread the "good news" at specified times and one at a time. But Mrs Kinghan fears this will not end the racket: "I'm afraid they'll just move onto the public pavement and keep up their din. I'm beginning to think the only answer is to ban them altogether. **If I want to hear a preacher I go to church,** it's a matter of personal choice. The problem with these street preachers is that you don't get the choice not to hear them." (*British National Corpus*).

Although the Speaker uses 'I' in the bold example above, she is not only referring to herself; first person deictic reference here indicates anyone who wants to hear a preacher. The pronoun departs from its prototypical meaning: it codes the Speaker, but implicitly refers to the Hearer and other participants who are located in the *Religious Activities* space. The following diagram represents meaning construction in (2):

Generic Space

People

Speaker
Hearer

Input 1

Speech event

Followers
Preacher
Church

Input 2

Religious Activities

1st
person
"I"

Blend

Diagram 1. Blended first person 'I' in example (2)

Diagram 1 shows that first person singular "I" explicitly codes the "Speaker" (solid line), but implicitly refers to the "Hearer" and to "Followers" in the *Religious Activities* space (dotted lines). Since Speaker and Hearer can be contextually assumed to take part in the group of people that normally "hear a preacher", both participants, in Input 1, can be projected to "Followers", in Input 2; in the blend, Speaker, Hearer and Followers are fused in the first person pronoun "I".

If the Speaker and the Hearer were known to be non-religious persons, example (2) could also be interpreted as excluding the Hearer, and partially including the Speaker. In this case, only the Speaker's perspective (not the Speaker's religious beliefs) would be projected and fused with "Followers" in the blend.

A similar process can be observed with respect to first person singular "eu" in Portuguese, as illustrated in the following comment on abortion, taken from an interview given by Marta Suplicy, a well-known politician in Brazil:

(3)

Desde 1940 a mulher brasileira teria   direito a fazer o aborto   em caso
Since 1940 the woman brazilian would:have right to make the abortion in case

de risco de vida ou se ela   ficasse   grávida por estupro.
of risk of life or if she become:pret imperf:subj.   pregnant by rape.

Mas por artimanhas da   Igreja Católica   e   de outras igrejas evangélicas,
But by influence   of:the Church Catholic and of other churches evangelical,

a gente não consegue regulamentar   essa lei. Em consequência disso, **se eu**
we   not able   practice:inf.   this law. In consequence of:this, if I

for   estuprada e   ficar   grávida, eu não encontro um
be:fut:subj. raped   and become:fut.subj. pregnant, I not find:pres.   a

hospital público que faça   o aborto   a que eu tenho direito.
hospital   public   that make the abortion to that I have   right.

"Since 1940 Brazilian women have had the right to have an abortion to the mother´s life or in case of rape. But influenced by the Catholic Church and other evangelical churches, we are unable to practice this law. As a consequence, **if I'm raped and become pregnant, I can´t find a public hospital to perform the abortion I have the right to**."

In the speech above, Marta Suplicy criticizes Brazilian laws on abortion. As a politician, she manifests disagreement with the current abortion policy and points out that equivocal policies have affected Brazilian women's lives. Interestingly enough, she chooses the first person singular deictic reference ('eu'), even though, as a sixty year old woman, she would not normally be in a situation of pregnancy after rape. Once again, first person reference departs from its prototypical use: it codes the Speaker, but actually refers to Brazilian women in general[2].The following diagram represents this interpretation:
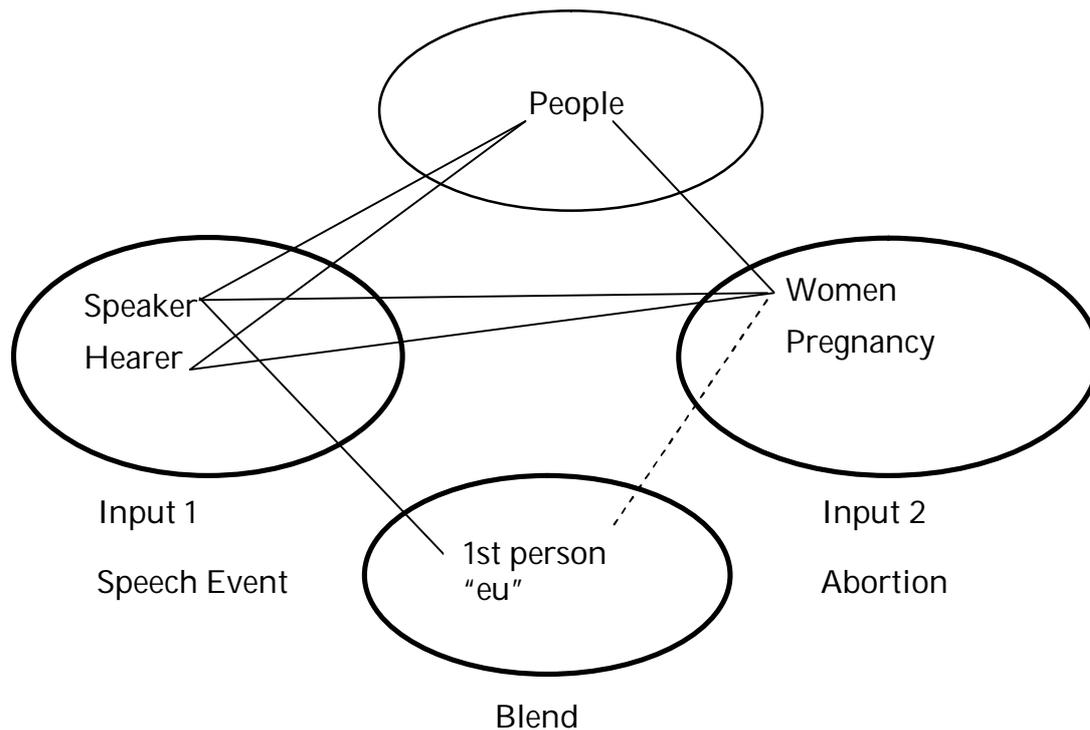
**Diagram 2. Blended first person 'eu' in example (3).**

Diagram 2 shows that first person pronoun "eu" implicitly refers to women in general; differently to the preceding example, the Speaker's perspective is projected, but not the Speaker's personal dispositions. In this example, blended first person "eu" means roughly "Brazilian women in general (as viewed by the Speaker)".

4.2. Blended second person pronouns

As for blended second person pronouns, the analysis shows that these pronouns explicitly code the Hearer, but implicitly indicate the Speaker and/or other *non-ground* participants. In the example below, the Speaker makes a general comment on affective relationships:

> (4) "All relationships go in phases" she says. "And after the first few years, **when you get over all that being in love**, **then it's: "Oh, this is the person I am living with."** You get to know that person then." (*The Daily Mirror.* London: Mirror Group Newspapers, 1992).

In (4), the pronoun 'you' explicitly codes the Hearer, but implicitly refers to anyone who is in a relationship, including the Speaker. Meaning construction can be represented as follows:
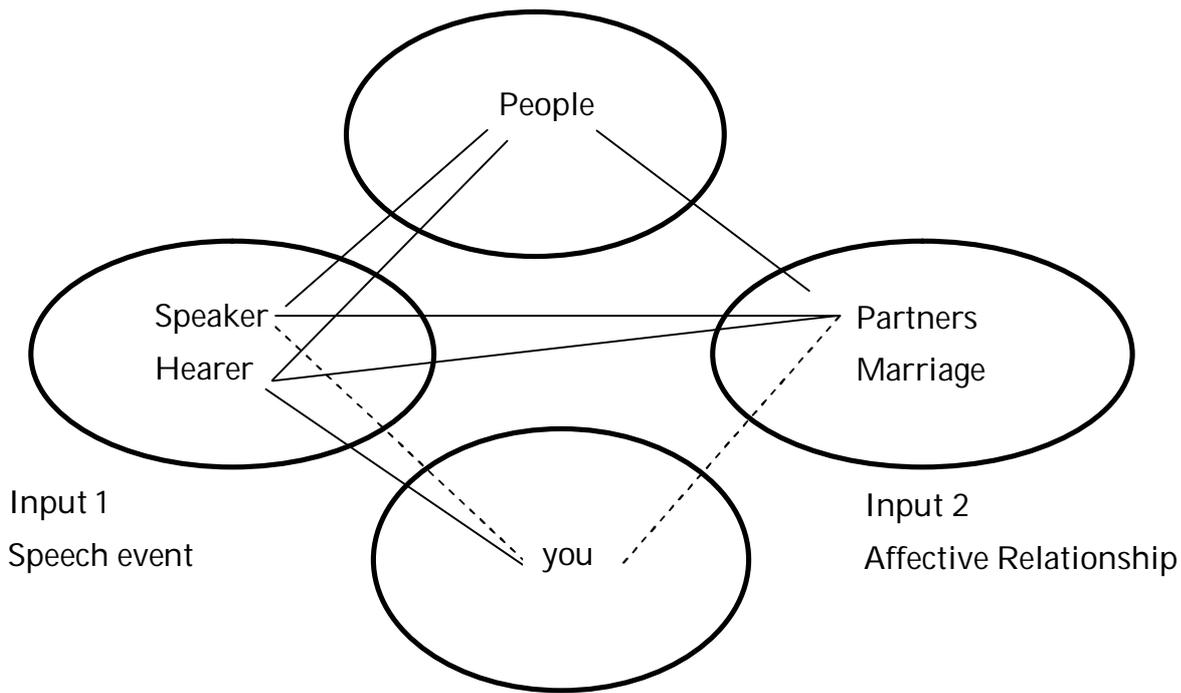
Diagram 3. Blended second person 'you' in example (4).

Diagram 3 shows that second person singular "you" explicitly codes the "Hearer" (solid line), but implicitly refers to the "Speaker" (Input 1), and "Partners", in the affective relationship space (dotted lines). Since Speaker and Hearer may be assumed to have affective relationships, both participants can be projected to "Partners", in Input 2; in the blend, "Speaker", "Hearer" and "Partners" are fused in the first person pronoun "I".

In Brazilian Portuguese, blended second person pronouns also occur, as illustrated in the example below which is part of a complaint about hospital care:

(5)
Se você machuca   a   canela   e   vai para o hospital, ocupa
If   **you**   fracture:pres.   the tibial:bone   and   go to   the hospital, occupy:pres

 uma vaga só para receber três   pontos", afirma Massarollo.
 one   bed   just   to   get:inf.   three   stitches, says Massarollo.

*"If **you** have a tibial bone fracture and go to hospital, **(you)** occupy one bed just to get three stitches", says Massarollo".*

The diagram below represents the blending process in (5):
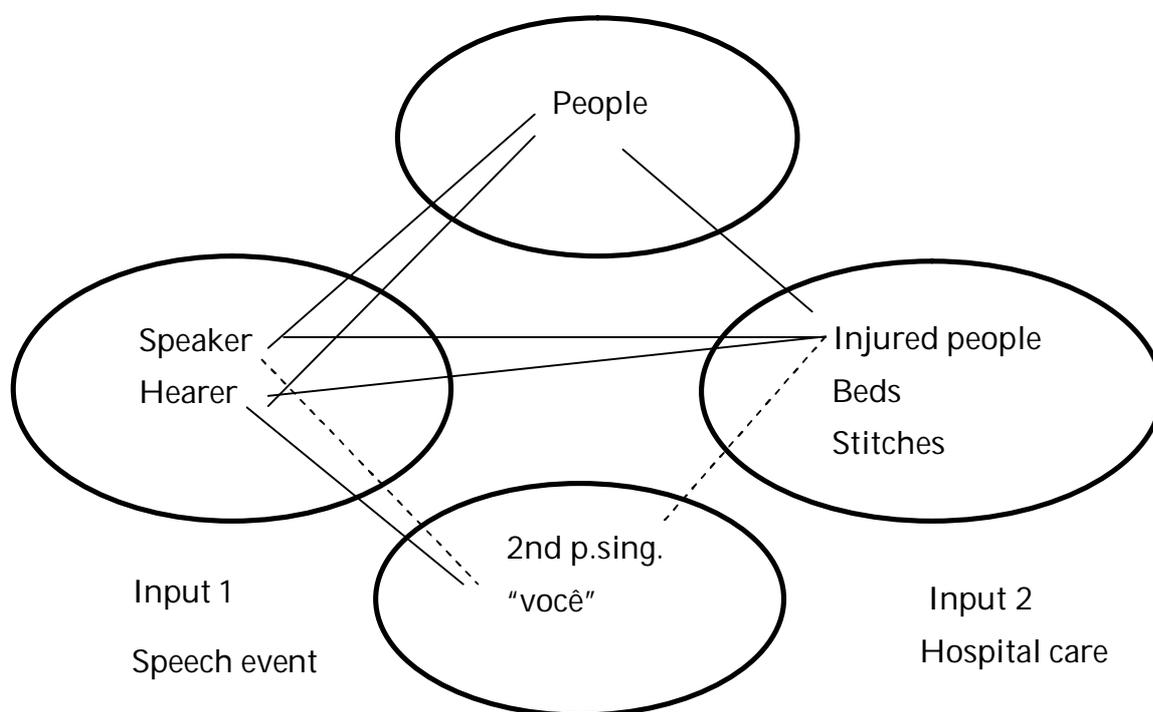
Diagram 4. Blended second person 'você' in example (5).

Diagram 4 shows that Speaker and Hearer can be projected to "Injured People", since both participants may be assumed to eventually get injured. In the blend, 'você' explicitly codes the "Hearer" (solid line), but implicitly refers to the "Speaker" (Input 1) and to "Injured people", projected from the *Hospital Care* space (dotted lines).

5. Blending and subjectivity

Research on subjectivity and subjectification has used these words to define implicit (or relatively unprofiled) reference to the *Ground* - Speaker, Hearer and their physical and temporal discourse setting (Langacker, 1990; Traugott, 1989, 1995; Traugott and Dasher, 2002[3]). For example, demonstratives such as *this* and *that* can be considered subjective in that they have reference to the Ground built into their meaning and implicitly refer to the Speaker's and/or the Hearer's locations relative to the referent object (e.g. *this* or *that* book).

In recent work on mental space structure, subjective aspects of meaning are formalized in terms of *degrees* of subjectivity (Sanders, Sanders and Sweetser,

2009). Thus, definiteness markers (e.g. *the* book), which have been largely attested cross-linguistically to be historically derived from demonstratives, can be considered more subjective than their historical sources. As Ferrari and Sweetser (2012) pointed out, definite articles in English involve implicit reference not just to the relationships involved in the Ground, but to the less accessible speech act context and discourse record.

This kind of meaning structure is not unique to grammatical markers, and need not be always attributed to historical subjectification. Synchronically, prototypical and non-prototypical deictic pronouns can also be analyzed in terms of degrees of subjectivity. As we have seen throughout this paper, while prototypical 1st and 2nd person personal pronouns explicitly refer to Speaker and Hearer, respectively, their non-prototypical uses also implicitly refer to other *ground* and/or *non-ground* participants. Given that implicit reference to the *Ground* indicates subjectivity, non-prototypical deictic pronouns can be taken to be more subjective than their prototypical counterparts.

Also, since non-prototypical 1st and 2nd person pronouns fuse Speaker, Hearer and/or other participants in the blend, one question that could be asked is: What is the pragmatic difference between them? In fact, it seems that in choosing one of the two blended pronouns, the Speaker attains different goals in communication.

As for 1st person pronouns, the Speaker's goal seems to be to highlight the importance of making *individual personal choices*. Let's get back to examples (2) and (3):

(2) If **I** want to hear a preacher **I** go to church.

(3) If **I**'m raped and become pregnant, **I** can't find a public hospital to have the abortion **I** have the right to.

In example (2), the Speaker defends the right of making a personal choice regarding participation on religious events. Example (3) criticizes the impossibility of making a personal choice regarding abortion. In both cases, individual decision-making is highly valued.

As for non-prototypical 2nd person pronouns, it has already been pointed out in the literature that impersonal *you* is a metaphor whose target domain is *normative behavior* (Bolinger, 1979). Thus, the activities of the person designated by impersonal *you* conform to norms for particular situations. In cognitive-model terms, Rubba (1996:249) proposes that "impersonal *you* identifies a role in a script or frame – an idealized cognitive model or ICM". Let's return to examples (4) and (5):

(4) When **you** get over all that being in love, then it's: "Oh, this is the person I am living with."

(5) If **you** have a tibial bone fracture and go to hospital, **(you)** occupy one bed just to get three stitches.

Differently from blended *I* in examples (2) and (3), blended *you* seems to highlight general social and/or psychological patterns which influence individual lives. Thus, in (4), the person who "gets over being in love" participates in a behavior that is considered normal (a general psychological disposition) in the ICM of affective relationships. Similarly, in (5), the Speaker implies that the individual designated by *you* would normally engage in the described behavior in the appropriate circumstances. As it would be the case if blended "I" were used[4], the point of (4) and (5) is not to highlight that individuals should have the right to decide about specific issues (nor to criticize their lack of freedom in taking such decisions). Through the portrayal of individuals within culturally normative models, the Speaker's rhetorical goal seems to be either to recognize the existence of these models, as in (4), or even to criticize the way they are structured, as in (5).

6. Concluding remarks

This paper has explored what Cognitive Linguistics can contribute to the understanding of deictic phenomena, with special emphasis on first and second person singular personal pronouns. Drawing on data from English and Brazilian Portuguese, it is argued that these pronouns are organized as radial categories with prototypical central members (indicating Speaker and Hearer, respectively), and peripheral extensions which come to bear via conceptual integration. It is claimed that blended first person singular pronouns explicitly code the Speaker, but implicitly refer to the Hearer and/or other participants not located in the *Ground*, while second person singular pronouns explicitly code the Hearer, but implicitly indicate the Speaker and/or other *non-ground* participants.

Since they make implicit reference to some aspect of the *Ground*, both first and second person blended pronouns have been taken to be more subjective than their prototypical counterparts, which explicitly point to the Speaker and Hearer, respectively. In terms of rhetorical goals, it has been suggested that first person blended pronouns highlight individual personal choices, while second person blended pronouns indicate conformity to normative behavior.

By showing that the pronouns under investigation have abstracted conceptual meanings, which can be described by means of the same theoretical tools employed in cognitive semantics for the meanings of other expressions (e.g. speaker-hearer interaction, conceptual blending and subjective vs. objective

construal), this paper contributes to a better understanding of deictic phenomena. Further investigation may show that conceptual blending and subjectivity can be recruited to explain non-prototypical uses of other deictic elements, including other personal pronouns, possessives, demonstratives, adverbs and tense markers.

Notes

[1] The paper is the result of research undertaken within the project "*Mental Spaces, conditionality and (inter)subjectivity*", funded by the Brazilian *National Council for Scientific and Technological* Development (CNPq).

[2] It cannot be determined if the reference would include the Hearer, since it is not clear if the person who interviewed Marta Suplicy was also a woman.

[3] Although Traugott's and Langacker's definitions of subjectivity/subjectification are not equivalent, Traugott clearly takes into account *implicit* reference to the Speaker-Hearer interaction, as in tense markers and modals.

[4] This is not to say that blended "I" could not occur in these cases; in fact, if the speaker´s rhetorical goals were to highlight (or criticize) the fact that individuals should be free to "getting over being in love" or "having a tibial bone fracture", blended "I" would be appropriate.

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