Reference in discourse: R-expressions as pronouns in Malayalam and Bangla, and beyond

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The Interaction of Formal Means and Functional Categories in the Coding of Reference

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1   Introduction

- Languages encode reference to the participants of a discourse, or the relationship shared between them, in the utterances spoken.

- This is done by a variety of grammatical items appearing in both the nominal spine and the clausal spine: pronouns, honorifics and allocutive markers.

  (1)   Bangla politeness pronouns

      tumi **/apni** ki tʃa kʰabe /kʰaben
      3.SG.L2 /3.SG.L3 PQ tea consume.3.L2 /consume.3.L3

      'Will you (non-formal) / you (formal) have tea?'

  (2)   Korean honorific (Portner et al, 2019, p. 3, ex. (3))

      wuli pwumonim-**kkeyse** ecey o-si-ess-ta
      our parents-NOM.HON yesterday come-HON-PST-DECL

      'My parents came yesterday.'

  (3)   Basque allocutive marking (Portner et al, 2019, p. 3, ex. (7))

      a. Jon etorri **duk**
          Jon come aux.3ABS.2M.ALLOC
          'Jon has come.' **(to a familiar male addressee)**

      b. Jon etorri **dun**
          Jon come aux.3ABS.2F.ALLOC
          'Jon has come.' **(to a familiar female addressee)**

- Here, we look at language data from Bangla (Eastern Indo-Aryan), Malayalam (Dravidian), English and Spiti (Sino-Tibetan), to show that the nominal periphery is rich across languages, encoding speech-act information just as the clausal periphery does.

- We use five kinds of evidence to argue for this:

  – Kinship address terms used as the 1st person **(Person switch)**

  – Proper nouns/Kinship address terms used as the 2nd person **(Person Switch)**

  – Speaker using addressee's address term for referent **(Speaker solidarity with addressee)**

  – Formality switch **(Speaker solidarity with addressee)**

  – Pronouns and reflexives that agree with the addressee

2 Evidence supporting a discourse layer in the nominal periphery

2.1 Kinship address terms used as the 1st person

- Motherese or caregiver speech in languages like English and Bangla permits sentences like the one in (4), where the speaker refers to themselves in the third person.

  (4) a. Mummy loves you so much ('Mummy' refers to the speaker)

  b. *Bangla*

  ma   taratari pʰire   ashbe.   (tumi) tʃinta
  mother quickly return.NF come.FUT.L2. 2.SG.L2 worry
  korona
  do.IMP.NEG

  'Mother will return soon. (You) do not worry' ('ma' refers to the speaker)

- The third person nominal used is specifically the kinship term used by the addressee to refer to the speaker. Thus, the speaker is, in a way, speaking "from the perspective" of the addressee. This is a common strategy of referring to oneself in Malayalam when speaking to one's children no matter how old they are [see (5)].

  (5) *Malayalam*

  atʃtʃan paraɲɲille ni   paɾiikṣajil toottum ennə
  Father said.NEG   2.SG.L2.NOM exam.LOC fail   REL.PRO.

  'Didn't father say that you would fail in the exam?' (speaker is the referent of 'Father')

2.2 Proper nouns/Kinship address terms used as the 2nd person

- Malayalam allows for another interesting property of R(eferrential)-expressions. Proper nouns and titles, which are usually considered third person renditions, can be used to refer to the second person. Therefore, a sentence like (6) is ambiguous. *Ikbal/Sir* may refer to a third person or the addressee (second person).

  (6) *Malayalam*

  ikbaal/saar entha innale   varaathe
  Iqbal/sir   what yesterday come.PST.NEG

  'Why didn't Iqbal/Sir come yesterday?' ('Iqbal/Sir' can either refer to the addressee or a third person.)

2.3 Speaker using addressee's address term for referent

- Languages also allow for constructions where the addressee refers to a third person or things using the kinship term that the addressee associates them with, rather than what the speaker associates them with. This again is an example of the speaker expressing themselves from the perspective of the addressee.

- In (7), if the speaker is a person older than the addressee, and not the addressee's sibling, *maa* cannot refer to the speaker's mother. It must refers to the the addressee's mother. If the speaker is younger than the addressee, (7) is infelicitous if the speaker and the addressee are not siblings. Therefore, *maa* in the first case is uttered from the perspective of the addressee and in the second case from the perspective of the speaker + addressee as they share a mother.

  (7) *Bangla*

  maa   kotʰaje
  mother where

  'Where is Mother?' (= Where is your/our mother?)

- In case of younger (child) addressees, adults tend to speak from the child's perspective when talking about the people in the child's world. Therefore, if a child, *Sarah*, christens her toy hippopotamus "Hippo", and her mother utters (8) to *Sarah*, "Hippo" can be argued to be uttered from the perspective of the addressee, *Sarah*.

  (8) Sarah, where is Hippo?

- Along similar lines, the utterance in (9), is felicitous if the speaker shares a close relationship with the addressee i.e. is the addressee's or the speaker + addressee's parent, grandparent, neighbour. If the

addressee is young, say, a child, the utterance is felicitous even if the speaker is a stranger to the child. But if the addressee is a grown man/woman, for (9) to be felicitous, the speaker must share a close relationship to the addressee, and cannot be a stranger. If the speaker were a stranger, they would have to use a possessor, thus explicitly defining the relationship between the possessor and the possessum. They would thus use an utterance such as that in (10).

(9) Could you ask Dad to meet me at 5?

(10) Could you ask your dad to meet me at 5?

2.4 Formality switch

- The final example, used in real time over a telephonic conversation, is one that proves that perspective must be represented in the nominal spine, either as an independent projection or in the form of Interlocuter-Addressee and Speaker projections. In this example, the speaker is informing the addressee about the referent's health. The speaker, who is the referent's spouse utters (11). In the first clause, he addresses her formally, as is the relationship between the addressee and the referent. In the second clause, he addresses the referent non-formally, as is the relationship between him (the speaker) and the referent. These types of "formality switches" are common in Bangla.

(11) *Bangla*

uni   bʰalo-i atʃʰen   okʰane jawa-te
3.SG.L3.NOM good-i be.PRS.INDF.L3-ADD there go-NF

or-o   tʃoʃma-ʈa   hoje gælo   ar ki
3.GEN-O spectacles-CLF be.NF go.PFV.3 and what

'She is well. Owing to going there (an eye hospital) her glasses too were made.'

2.5 Pronouns and reflexives that agree with the addressee

In languages like Thai (Kra–Dai), Malay (Austronesian) and Spiti (Sino-Tibetan), first person pronouns agree with the addressee. In Spiti, even the reflexives, which have a pronoun followed by SELF structure, agree

with the addressee. First person pronouns and anaphors agree with the A(ddressee) in the degree of intimacy/formality shared between the S(peaker) and the addressee.

(12) a. Addressee older, higher in social status to, or intimate with the speaker

ŋu   kʰaŋba-lə doĩ jin
1.SG.[S $\geq$ A/R]/F/NIN house-LOC go be.PRS.1

'I am going home.'

b. Addressee younger, lower in social to, or non-intimate with the speaker

ŋ̌a   kʰaŋba-lə doĩ jin
1.SG.[S $\leq$ A/R]/NF/IN house-LOC go be.PRS.1

'I am going home.'

In fact, in Spiti, first person pronouns and reflexives in all syntactic positions (subject, direct object, indirect object, possessive position) agree with the addressee [see (13)].

(13) Addressee older or higher in social status than the speaker

ŋu$_i$ sonəm-lə
1.SG.[S $\geq$ A/R]/F/NIN Sonam-OBJ

ŋu-r-i$_i$ pʰoʈo tɨn-b-in
1.SG.[S $\geq$ A/R]/F/NIN-REFL-GEN photo show-B-PFV.1

'I$_i$ showed Sonam my$_i$ photo.'

3 Literature on the pragmatic layer in the nominal periphery

- There is a long tradition of proposing functional layers above lexical projections

  – The D-layer above the NP (Abney, 1987)

  – The v-layer above the VP (Pollock, 1989)

  – Dissolving the C-layer into ForceP, TopicP and FocusP (Rizzi, 1997)

Figure 1: Speech act layer for declaratives (Speas & Tenny 2003, p. 320)
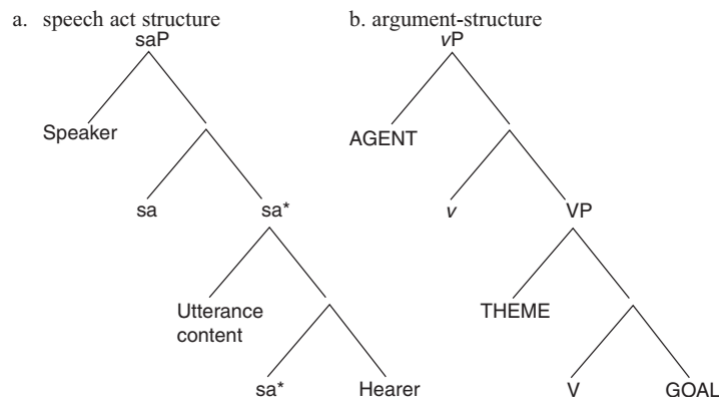
- First argued for was that this information is visible in the clausal periphery.

  - Ross (1970): performative analysis, quotative analysis and pragmatic analysis + observations on hearer agreement in Arabic

  - Miyagawa (1987): the Japanese politeness affix *-masu* is raised at LF to a position that governs the C containing the question particle ka in both yes/no questions and wh-questions. He clarifies that this raising is independent of question formation and rather the politeness affix has a "performative" function, marking the entire sentence for politeness.

  - (Speas & Tenny, 2003): They argue that there is compelling evidence from languages that represent speaker or hearer agreement that the roles 'speaker' and 'hearer' need to be represented in syntactic structure and not in discourse representation. Their speech act head projects a maximal structure with a specifier, a complement and an external argument [see Figure 1].

3.1   The Universal Spine Hypothesis

- Wiltschko (2014): "...In particular, the phrases that appear in the A'-domain are often characterized by functions such as topic and focus (Rizzi 1997), which may broadly be characterized as discourse roles,

that is, roles that are defined in terms of the ongoing discourse. That is, they serve to structure the information flow in the ongoing conversation. Again, the postulation of discourse roles distinct from grammatical or event roles is justified by the fact that the former cannot be defined based on the latter two. While subjects often bear the topic role, this is not necessarily so..." (p. 67).

- There are heads associated with each of these domains. Ex. Halkomelem

  - verbs that come with only a theme argument i.e. unaccusatives - bare roots

  - agent oriented intransitive predicates i.e. unergatives - morphologically complex

  - transitive predicates - morphologically complex

- Viewpoint aspect appears as a syntactic head (Asp) immediately above the vP and immediately below INFL. Evidence: Hindi split nominative/accusative and absolutive/ergative case systems.

- INFL licenses the realisation of the grammatical subject role. It determines whether the subject receives nominative case from it, or accusative case from a higher V.

- The domain of discourse roles: Two types of heads to be found here (Rizzi, 1997). (1) a head that introduces the illocutionary force of the sentence, (2) a head that is sensitive to finiteness distinctions in the IP domain. Both head positions can be occupied by complementizers [see (14)].

(14)   Turin Piedmontese (Italian dialect)

A venta **che** gnun **ch'a** fasa bordel
It needs comp nobody comp¼cl do.subj noise

'It is necessary that nobody makes noise.'

- "The three areas correspond to the classic division into theta-positions, A-positions, and A'-positions, which each of these roles [thematic, grammatical and discourse] occupy. The roles themselves are tightly connected to the head positions available in each area: v, INFL (or T) and C." (Wiltschko 2014, p. 72). [see Figure 2]

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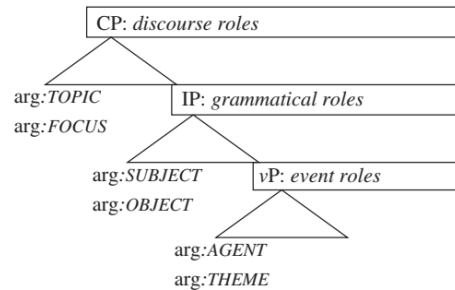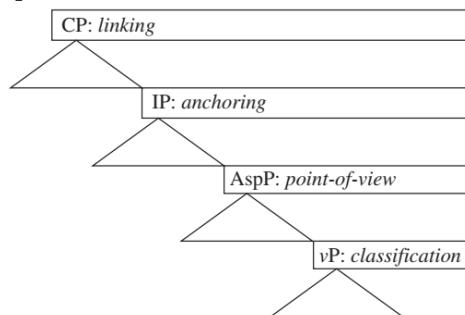Figure 2: Areas of the clausal spine (Wiltschko 2014, p. 68)

CP: *discourse roles*

arg:*TOPIC*
arg:*FOCUS*

IP: *grammatical roles*

arg:*SUBJECT*
arg:*OBJECT*

vP: *event roles*

arg:*AGENT*
arg:*THEME*

Figure 3: Core functions associated with the areas of the clausal spine (Wiltschko 2014, p. 75)

CP: *linking*

IP: *anchoring*

AspP: *point-of-view*

vP: *classification*

- "we may identify a core function with each of the areas in the spine...I refer to these functions as the spinal functions. And second, the spinal functions are tightly connected to the abstract arguments. In particular, within the (articulated) projection of the VP, the event is introduced and classified – hence I refer to this as the domain of classification. The next domain serves to locate the event in time. In terms of its function, this domain may be split into two sub-domains. Aspect introduces a reference time, which serves as the point of view from which the event is characterized. Hence I refer to this domain as the point-of-view domain. Tense introduces the utterance time, which serves to anchor the event to the utterance. I refer to this domain as the anchoring domain. And finally, the domain for discourse roles is a domain where the existing structure is linked to the larger structure. Hence I shall refer to this domain as the linking domain." (Wiltschko 2014, p. 74-75). [see 3]

- Parallels exist between the clausal and nominal domains (Chomsky, 1970; Wiltschko, 2014, 2021) [see Figure 4]

  (15)   from *Remarks on Nominalization*

      a. John is eager to please (clausal)

      b. John's being eager to please (gerundive nominalization; derived syntactically)

      c. John's eagerness to please (nominalization via derivational morphology; derived in the lexicon)

- The possessor may be viewed as the nominal equivalent of clausal subjects (?, ?) - there is an affinity between nominative subjects (built in the clausal projection) and genitive possessors (built in the nominal projection).

- D as a nominal anchoring category, like INFL is in the clausal domain: In languages that encode definiteness, D relates the refent to the discourse by marking if it serves as a novel or a familiar referent.

- verbal Aspect is parallel to nominal number.

- "the verbal system of complementizers is replicated by some case-assigning elements such as the dummy preposition of, which we may analyze as occupying K." (p. 77)

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Figure 4: Parallels between the clausal and nominal spines (Wiltschko 2014, p. 78)
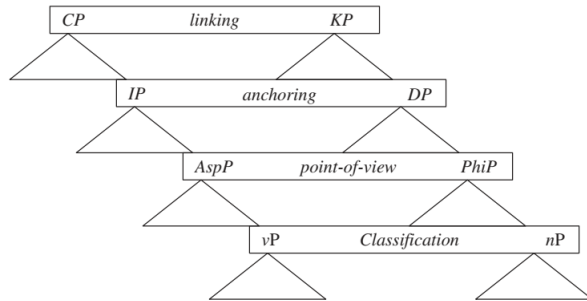
- **Universal Spine Hypothesis:** Both verbal and nominal projections are dominated by functional structure with identical spinal functions. Thus the spine is intrinsically category neutral.

- we therefore head towards category neutral roots, and features making up linguistic items.

3.2 The Duality of Person Hypothesis

Figure 5: The Duality of Person Hypothesis
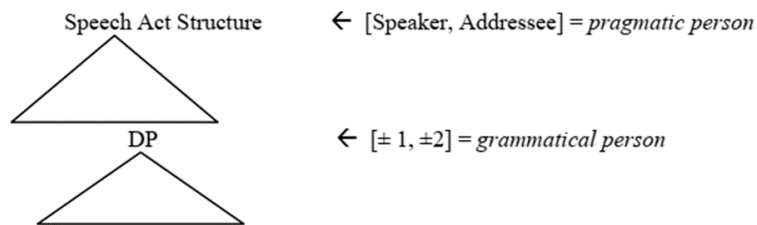
- Based on the universality and variation in types and values found in the pronominal systems of the world's languages, the DPH argues for two distinct types of person features, which occupy different structural positions. The first, consisting of speech act roles, they call pragmatic features [see Figure 5].

Figure 6: Portner et al. (2019) on the structure on French *tu*
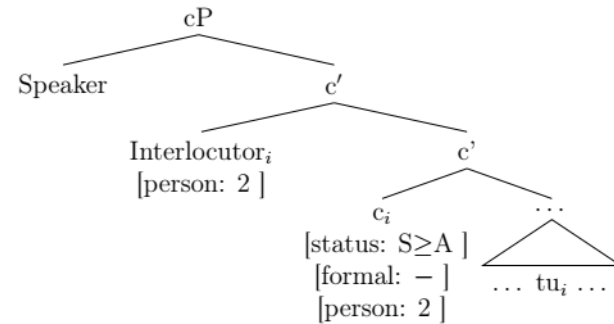
- The argument for a pragmatic person umbrella or a disintegrated nominal periphery over the DP is not very different from Portner, Pak, and Zanuttini (2019)'s proposal of a context phrase in the periphery of the nominal phrase [see Figure 6].

3.3 The Interactional Spine Hypothesis

- "I argue that traditional sentence structure, which represents propositional meaning, is embedded within structure dedicated to language in interaction: the interactional spine. Specifically, I propose that the interactional spine consists of two layers: grounding and responding, as in [Figure 7]. The core function of the grounding layer is for the speaker to configure the propositional content of the utterance so that the addressee can update their knowledge state to include it. The core function of the response layer is to manage the moves that serve to synchronize the interlocutors' knowledge states. I refer to this hypothesis as the Interactional Spine Hypothesis (ISH)." (Wiltschko 2021, p. 72) [see Figure 7]

- The common ground not only contains propositions, but also contains discourse referents, thus this too must be associated with grounding structure (Ritter & Wiltschko, 2019). [see Figure 8]

- "nominal grounding comes in two guises: one is relative to the speaker (GroundSpkrP), the other is relative to the Addressee (GroundAdrP). The specifier of each GroundP hosts the role for one interlocutor

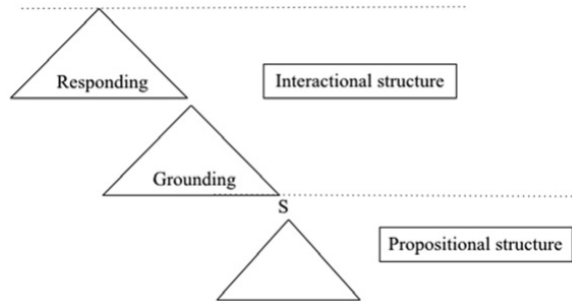Figure 7: Interactional Spine Hypothesis (Wiltschko 2021, p. 72)

Figure 8: Functions of the universal spine (Ritter & Wiltschko 2019, p. 3)
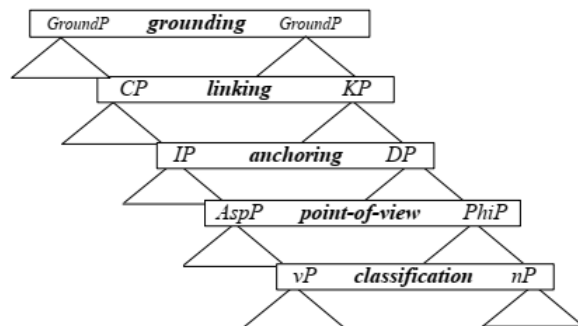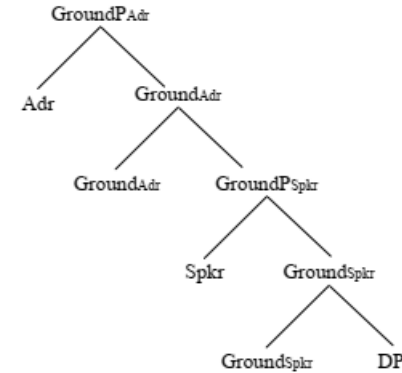

Figure 9: Nominal speech interactional structure (Ritter & Wiltschko 2019, p. 4)

(Speaker in GroundSpkrP and Addressee in GroundAdrP)" (Ritter & Wiltschko, 2019, p. 3) [see Figure 9]

4 The analysis

- we assume that nouns (both pronouns and R-expressions) can be born underspecified for Person. Person is specified by the context

- 1st person is introduced and valued by the Ground(spkr) head and 2nd person is introduced and valued by the Ground(adr) head.

- Person valuation can be argued to either happen as a consequence of Agree (Chomsky, 2000, 2001) or via Predication (Kratzer, 2009). In case valuation happens via predication, the ϕ-P must move to the specifier of the respective Ground head.

  – Predication (Specifier-Head Agreement under Binding): When a DP occupies the specifier position of a head that carries a -operator, their feature sets unify. (Kratzer, 2009, p. 196)

4.1 Structure for third person to first person switch

(16) atʃtʃan paraŋɲille ni   pariikṣajil toottum ennə
      Father said.NEG   2.SG.L2.NOM exam.LOC fail   REL.PRO.

Figure 10: Structure of *atʃtʃən* 'father'

Figure 11: Structure of 'Ikbaal'
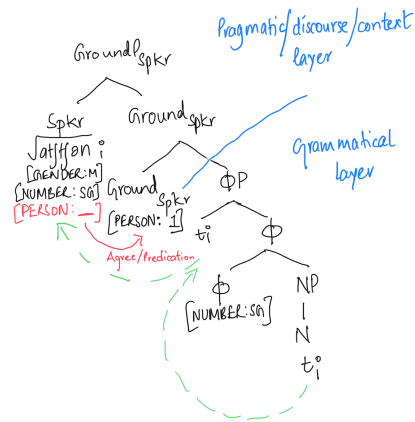
'Didn't father say that you would fail in the exam?' (The speaker is the referent of 'Father')

4.2 Structure for third person to second person switch

(17) ikbaal/saar entha innale varaathe
Iqbal/sir what yesterday come.PST.NEG

'Why didn't Iqbal/Sir come yesterday?' ('Iqbal/Sir' here refers to the addressee)

4.3 Structure of second person formal pronouns

4.4 Structure of pronouns that agree with the addressee

Figure 12: Structure of second person formal pronouns like Bangla *apni* 'you (form.)'

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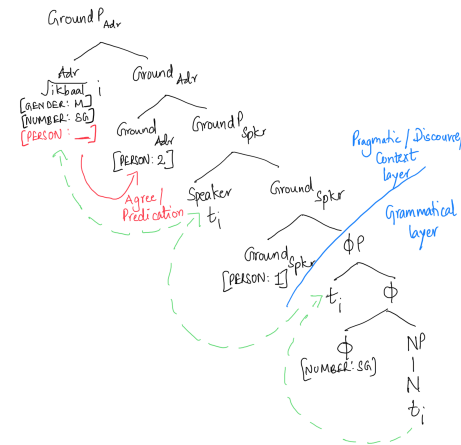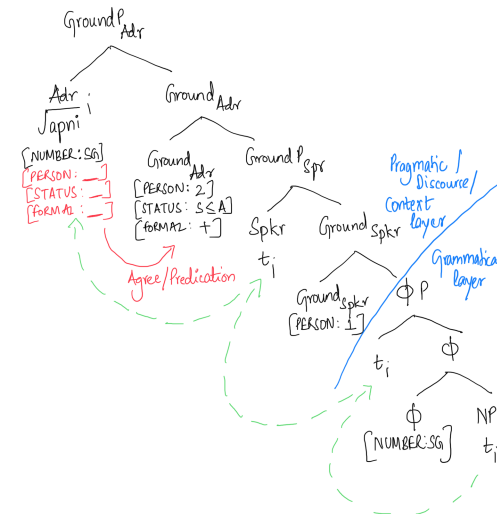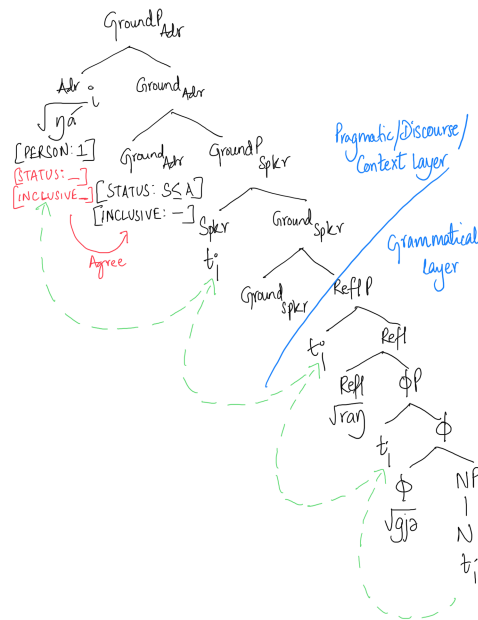
Figure 13: Structure of Spiti *ŋá raŋ gjə* 'we all (excl.)', where the speaker is either equal or lower in age/social status relative to the addressee'

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