

Tu quoque, Brute, fili mi?

As Levinson (1983: 71) remarked, vocatives are an interesting grammatical category, but underexplored. Unfortunately, this situation has not changed dramatically in the last 25 years. In syntax, most work has focused on the DP vs. NP status of vocatives (a debate that was mainly fueled by French examples like (1), cf. Coene et al. (2005), and similar examples in Romanian). In the domain of semantics/pragmatics, the literature I am aware of mainly discusses the difference between *calls* and *addresses*, where calls are designed to catch the addressee's attention (cf. (2a)), whereas addresses serve to maintain or emphasize the contact between speaker and addressee (cf. (2b)). Generally, the main focus has been on *what* can be done with vocatives, and not on the linguistic mode of *how* they accomplish what they do. One special difficulty is that almost anything that can be achieved by a vocative could also be done by extra-linguistic means, such as eye- or body-contact, or elements like *hey!* or *uh-huh* (cf. Zwicky, 1974). This means that it is not always extremely clear whether a given effect has to be attributed to the vocative itself, and what is a contextually induced effect, possibly accompanied by the above mentioned extra-linguistic strategies.

My aim is to show that the call vs. address dichotomy does not represent a coherent categorisation w.r.t. the meaning of vocatives, and I will propose a new classification that is somehow orthogonal to it, but which is able to shed new light on the question and the data.

Vocatives are by definition in some sense 'about the addressee'. However, they can have quite different effects with respect to a group of addressees. Consider the examples in (3). Both sentences display a call-vocative, designed to attract the addressee's attention. Let us assume as a formal basis for the interpretation the one given by Portner (2004) (as illustrated in (4)). However, (4) does not fare equally well with respect to (3a) and (3b).

Let us consider first (3a). Assume that you are a person at the dinner table in (3a), but that you are not George. (3a) does not concern you, and you are not expected to pass the salt. This is predicted by (4).

However, such an analysis does not work for examples like (3b). Assume that, at a conference where you are participating, you are waiting outside a restaurant where the conference dinner is to take place. Assume further that you hardly know the speaker, or that you are an outright enemy of this person. In any case, you will not qualify as a "dear friend". But here, definitely, you should feel concerned and go inside. The vocative in (3b) does not set up as addressees the group of people which satisfy the description *dear_friend(x, speaker)*, and does not separate them from those who do not satisfy this description. In (3b), the speaker rather attributes globally a predication on a contextually pre-established set of addressees.

The dichotomy I propose is thus the following: on the one hand, we have got an *identificational* vocative, which sets up a person (or a group of persons) as the addressee of the speech act. The meaning of such a vocative can be paraphrased as follows: *iff you are x, then what I say is for you*. The second type of vocative could be called *predicational*, and its meaning can be paraphrased as follows: *presupposing that there is a unique x such that x is a (group of) addressee(s), I predicate P of x*.

If one considers what can unequivocally set up a referent as addressee, it is principally proper names that come to mind, with some borderline cases (such as *mum*, *dad*, etc.). This suggests that such vocatives should have a denotation of type *e*. Predicational vocatives, as already suggested by their name, should be of type $\langle e, t \rangle$.

Coming back to the call/address distinction, we have already seen that calls may be of identificational or predicational type. On the other side, all addresses must be predicational, since if contact between speaker and addressee(s) is to be maintained or emphasized, the addressee must already be set up as such. This can explain why expressions like *you*, which completely lack descriptive content, are not felicitous as predicational vocatives, and why they become felicitous once they get descriptive content (cf. (5)).

Finally, let us consider the title of the paper. Here, we have got both an identificational vocative (*Brute* 'Brutus') and a predicational one (*fili mi*, 'my son'). And as is predicted, a predicational vocative cannot

precede the identificational vocative, as is shown by the opposition in (6).

Examples

- (1) Bonjour, les amis!
Good day, the friends!
- (2) a. Hey lady, you dropped your piano.¹
b. I'm afraid, sir, that my coyote is nibbling on your leg.
- (3) a. George, could you pass me the salt, please?
b. Dear friends, let us go inside.
- (4) $[[\text{CALL}]]_{w,c}^c = [\lambda x. \lambda w. \text{speaker}(c) \text{ requests } x\text{'s attention in } w]^2$
- (5) a. Hey you, give me that boat hook.³
b. *What I think, you, is that we ought to take the money and run.
c. I'm afraid, you idiot, that your hair is on fire.⁴
- (6) a. You too, Brutus, my son.
b. *My son, you too, Brutus.⁵

Selected References

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¹Examples in (2) taken from Zwicky (1974).

²Taken from Portner (2004), p. 8.

³Examples in (5)ab taken from Zwicky (1974).

⁴Example (5c) taken from Zwicky (2004).

⁵In order to be acceptable, *My son* in (6b) has to be read as an identificational vocative, that is, as a referring expression (and not as a predication over an entity yet to arrive), which will lead to a condition C violation w.r.t. the proper name *Brutus*, which causes the infelicity of (6b).