

The 'Objectivity'/'Subjectivity' Spectrum in Joseph Surah

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating subjectivity and objectivity in some noble verses from the Joseph Surah in Holy Qur'an. One of the construal operations under perspective is Langacker's notion of subjectivity/objectivity. This refers to how one conceptualizes a scene that includes the speaker himself/herself. A common use of the notions of subjectivity and objectivity is to demarcate kinds of judgment (or thought or belief). Subjective information is generally considered to be a single person's opinion. It has a viewpoint, or possibly a bias, regardless of the information it provides. Objective information on the other hand is meant to be completely unbiased. The present study is a descriptive-analytic research. The analysis of Joseph surah as the corpus of this article showed that there are discourse situations in which the interlocutors avoid explicit mention of their relationship, yet they comment on this relationship indirectly while talking about a 'third party'. The investigation into patterns of reference to a third party has revealed their potential for significant impact on the interlocutor's mutual relations. Certain emotions, attitudes, and the interpersonal distance between speech act participants may be implicitly negotiated through a specific form of address used in reference to a third party. We have argued that the choice of one pattern rather than another depends not only on the relation between the speaker and the third party, but rather on the configuration of relations holding between the interlocutors and the individual in question. We have illustrated how the speaker may exploit referring expressions, specifically alternating proper names with certain kinship terms, in order to communicate some emotion or attitude towards the hearer. The discussion centers around factors which pertain to the speaker-hearer relation and which may influence the imposition of a particular perspective from which the third party individual is apprehended.

Key Words: subjectivity, objectivity, vantage point, Joseph Surah, Holy Qur'an

1. Introduction

One of two historically connected, but logically separable aspects of Cartesian or post-Cartesian dualism according to Lyons (1996) is the doctrine of metaphysical dualism: the doctrine that there are two radically different kinds of reality, matter and mind. The other is the dualism of

subject and object: in cognition, feeling and perception, on the one hand, and in action or agency, on the other. It is this latter dualism, of course, which explains, ultimately, the grammatical opposition of 'subject' and 'object' and also of 'active' and 'passive'. 'Subjectivity' in the empiricist tradition was associated with a certain kind of unscientific and untestable mentalism; 'objectivity', with a sturdy nineteenth-century (now outmoded) scientific materialism. Subjectivity denotes the property (or set of properties) of being either a subject of consciousness (i.e., of cognition, feeling and perception) or a subject of action (an agent). It denotes the property of being what Descartes himself called a "thinking entity" (in Latin, 'res cogitans') and identified, as others have done, with the self or the ego. The standard, post-Cartesian, view of the self or the ego is that of a thinking being, conscious of itself as thinking, as it is also conscious of itself as having certain beliefs, attitudes and emotions; a being which is distinct from the mental activity of which it is the subject, or agent, and from the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and emotions, of which it is the seat or locus. (Lyons, 1996: 337-338)

According to Langacker (as cited in Rybarczyk, 2011) we are able to describe the same conceived situation by numerous alternative expressions, each of which embodies a distinct image. Different ways of viewing a particular situation is called 'construal'. There is a correlation between the speaker's stance (epistemic or emotional), and his choice of words and constructions. One of the central claims of Cognitive Grammar is that meaning is critically dependent on construal, i.e. on our ability to conceptualize and describe the same situation in various ways. As Langacker explains:

Owing to construal, expressions that describe the same objective situation and convey the same conceptual content (or have the same truth conditions) can nevertheless be semantically quite distinct. (2002:3)

Klazema (2014) believes that generally speaking, there is a difference between fact (objective) and opinion (subjective). Objective information has the ability to be counted or described. Subjective information can consist of statements of judgment, assumption, belief, suspicion, or rumor. Objective information does not vary, whereas subjective information can vary greatly from person to person or day to day. Subjectivity can actually be wrong, or far from the truth, whereas objectivity means being as close to the truth as possible. (Klazema, 2014: 1)

Grobstein (2007) states that absolute objectivity is not achievable, i.e that all understandings are stories that inevitably have a personal context dependence (some subjectivity) to them. Many people are more attracted to stories with a personal element to them than they are to the dry stories told by scientists/academics. The purely subjective doesn't play well in the marketplace of ideas. In fact, the more convinced one is from one's own perspective of the excitement/juciness/richness of one's understandings, the more critical it becomes to examine them skeptically, to step outside one's personal excitement and ask in what ways one's own observations and interpretations of them might be challenged by other people looking at them

from perspectives other than one's own. To put it differently, a minimal reason to value a movement toward greater objectivity is to forestall criticism by others. It's better to oneself find the problems that can be seen from other perspectives than to be embarrassed by someone else noticing and pointing them out. (Grobstein, 2007: 1)

Croft & Cruse (2004) state that the more common subjective construal of the speaker is using a deictic personal pronoun, defining his/her identity relative to the speech act situation. But in objectification, the speaker describes himself/herself in terms independent of the speech act situation. (Croft & Cruse, 2004: 62)

According to Finegan, (as cited in Stein & Wright, 1995) subjectivity concerns the involvement of a locutionary agent in a discourse, and the effect of that involvement on the formal shape of discourse – in other words, on the linguistic expression of self.

The discourse sense of subjectivity is not now paramount in linguistic analysis, and has never been, in part because structural and formal linguistics more typically focus on language as the expression of objective propositions, on occasion displaying a curious indisposition even to recognize the self in discourse. As Lyons (1982:103) has noted, 'Modern Anglo-American linguistics ... has been dominated by the intellectualist prejudice that language is, essentially, if not solely, an instrument for the expression of propositional thought'. (Stein & Wright, 1995: 2)

As will be argued throughout this paper, different interpretations of the same cognitive content may arise as a result of different ways of referring to the same individual. Two aspects of perspective, 'vantage point' and 'subjectivity', will be relied on in explaining the data. A particular vantage point as well as a particular degree of subjectivity with which the 'profile' and the 'ground' are construed, correlate with a specific type of relation holding between the interlocutors. We will show how manipulating the vantage point and subjectivity may prompt some dynamics of the speaker-hearer relation.

2. Literature Review

2-1. Subjectivity/Objectivity as Explicit Presence of the Speaker in the Utterance

The terms 'subjective' and 'objective' are also used in a different sense, not entirely unrelated to that in which it has been used in the previous section. Verstraete (2001) believes that this different use of subjectivity does not refer to the question of whether a linguistic element is related to the speaker or not, but to the question of how explicitly the speaker is present in an utterance. This sense of 'subjective' and 'objective' has been elaborated most explicitly in the work of Langacker (1985, 1990). The basis of his distinction is the distinction between *conceptualization*, the meaning of a linguistic expression, and the *conceptualizer*, the speaker (and interlocutor) who is (are) responsible for this conceptualization. In terms of this distinction, the degree of subjectivity/objectivity of an utterance pertains to how explicitly the conceptualizer

is present in his/her own conceptualization. Ultimately, a conceptualizer is always present to some degree in a conceptualization as the one who is responsible for it, but there are different degrees of explicitness in this presence. For instance, if we consider the following two examples (based on Langacker, 1990: 9-15):

(a) This room was used by the king to receive important guests.

(b) The room we are in now was used by the king to receive important guests.

Both examples require reference to the speaker for their interpretation: in both cases, the speaker is the deictic centre which serves as a point of reference for the location of the room in question. The difference in (a) and (b), however, is that the speaker is present more explicitly in (b) than in (a): whereas in (a) the speaker remains an "offstage" (Langacker, 1990: 9-10) reference point for the interpretation of the demonstrative *this*, in (b) the speaker goes explicitly "onstage" (Langacker, 1990: 9-10) in the personal pronoun *we* in the postmodification of *room*. These different degrees of explicitness are what Langacker refers to as subjective and objective: the role of the speaker becomes more *objective* if the speaker figures more explicitly in the utterance, and more *subjective* if the speaker figures less explicitly in the utterance. It is important to note that Langacker defines 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' from the perspective of the conceptualizer rather than from the perspective of the conceptualization. The two perspectives are theoretically equivalent, but result in opposite classifications, which may cause some terminological confusion: when the speaker is more explicitly present in an utterance, the role of the conceptualizer becomes more objective, but the conceptualization as such might be argued to become more subjective. (Verstraete, 2001: 1512)

2-2. Vantage Point

One aspect of perspective as cited in Rybarczyk (2011) is the position from which the scene is perceived – the 'vantage point'. The choice between assuming the speaker's or the hearer's vantage point is often motivated by the kind of relationship which holds between the speech act participants. According to Langacker (as cited in Croft & Cruse, 2004) a particular vantage point imposes a foreground-background alignment on a scene. Consequently, the choice of a particular vantage point may become conventionally linked with a particular type of the speaker-hearer relation. Vantage point figures in the meaning of a variety of linguistic expressions such as relational nouns. The choice of an expression referring to the entity which is the focus of attention results in invoking one vantage point rather than another. (Rybarczyk, 2011: 124-125)

Kinship terms belong to the family of relational nouns. Undeniably, the existence of a relation is conditioned by the existence of the participants in the relation. We cannot conceive of an individual designated by a kinship term without conceiving of the second individual, with whom the profiled individual is linked via a particular kinship relation. The relationship obtaining between the speaker and the hearer motivates their choice of kinship terms in discourse. Kinship

terms portray the referent individual more subjectively than the proper names. A proper name allows the speaker and the hearer to observe the profiled individual with maximum degree of objectivity. The manipulation of various aspects of perspective, especially when accompanied by other factors (e.g. lexical choices), may produce interpersonal effects. (Rybarczyk, 2011: 125-126) An analysis of examples in the following section is aimed at illustrating the dynamics of the speaker-hearer relation brought about as consequences of a particular structuring of conceptual content evoked by the speaker's use of linguistic expressions.

3. Analysis and Discussion

As speakers, we often choose a particular expression to refer to some individual from the range of available options, on the basis of our relationship with the hearer. The specific interactive frames that we shall use to discuss the problem is that of 1) the prophet Joseph talking to his father, Jacob, about his dream; 2) **Joseph's brethren speaking with each other about Joseph and his brother, Benjamin;** 3) **One of Joseph's brethren speaking with his other brethren about Joseph and their father, Jacob** and 4) **Joseph's brethren speaking with their father, Jacob about their brother, Joseph.**

Rybarczyk (2011) mentions that by choosing a referring expression, the speaker can manipulate the construal of the conceptualization in order to affect the hearer's emotion or the interpersonal distance between the two. We shall concentrate on the use of different nominals with reference to the same individual. The interpersonal goals described in the present section reside in the mode of directing and focusing attention on an individual (other than the speech act participants). The examples involve the use of kinship terms or proper names in the context when members of the same family refer to a third-person individual who is related to each of them via family ties. The speaker has a number of options to choose from to refer to a given individual. These options are not equally prototypical and the speaker's choice has interpersonal effects, as far as the speaker-hearer relation is concerned. (ibid., 129) In the present section, examples from the family domain serve to illustrate selected implicit means of manipulating the emotional relation between the interlocuters.

Let us begin the analysis by considering the Qur'anic examples in the Joseph Surah and their English equivalents in below, which illustrate how the relationship obtaining between the speaker and the hearer motivates their choice of kinship terms in discourse:

(1) a. Joseph talking to his father about his dream:

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ رَأَيْتُهُمْ لِي سَاجِدِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

When Joseph said unto his father: O my father! Lo! I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves unto me. (4)

b. i. Jacob talking to Joseph about his brethren:

قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تَقْصُصْ رُؤْيَاكَ عَلَى إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿٥﴾

He said: O my dear son! Tell not thy brethren of thy vision, lest they plot a plot against thee. Lo! Satan is for man an open foe. (5)

In (1), the speaker and the hearer stand in the parent-child relation vis-à-vis each other. In (1b), Jacob is talking about third-person individuals who are related to each of them, via a different kinship relation (the parent-children or the speaker-brothers relation).

In the case of both Arabic and English examples in (1) a successful identification of the expression's referent seems to rely on the selection of the suitable vantage point, that is, the EGO from whose perspective the second participant of the particular kinship relation is specifically conceptualized as such. In turn, the way in which the vantage point is chosen appears to be directly linked to the type of the speaker-hearer relation. In (1) "أَبَتِي" (*my father*) and "بُنَيَّ" (*my dear son*) are kinship terms accompanied by a possessive pronoun, which explicitly specify the vantage point from which the profile of the kinship term is construed as such. Here, the speaker explicitly states that he is talking from his own vantage point, so the hearer should have no problems identifying the relevant referent of *father* and *son*.

According to Rybarczyk (2011), since possessive pronouns explicitly identify the landmark individual relative to whom the profiled individual bears a particular kinship relation, they can be exploited for manipulating the vantage point assumed for the observation of the same conceived individual.

b. ii. Jacob talking to Joseph about his brethren and his forefathers:

وَكَذَلِكَ يَجْتَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ وَيُنِيمُ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَى آلِ يَعْقُوبَ كَمَا أَتَمَّهَا عَلَى أَبَوَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦﴾

Thus thy Lord will prefer thee and will teach thee the interpretation of events, and will perfect His grace upon thee and upon the family of Jacob as He perfected it upon thy forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Lo! thy Lord is Knower, Wise. (6)

Here the kinship term "آلِ يَعْقُوبَ" (*the family of Jacob*) is used to refer to Joseph's brethren. Every speaker has a number of options to choose from to refer to a given individual. These options are not equally prototypical and the speaker's choice has interpersonal effects. The very purpose of a kinship term, as Langacker points out, "is to situate people – socially and genealogically– with respect to a reference individual". ((Rybarczyk, 2011: 124-125) In (b. i.), the speaker conceives the designated individuals as residing in the hearer's dominion; and the possessive determiner "your" directs attention from the speaker. But by using the

expression "آل يَعْقُوبَ" (*the family of Jacob*) in (b. ii.), Jacob is moving along the scale of warmth and kindness away from the hearer (i.e. Joseph) and distances the family of Jacob (i.e. Joseph's brethren) away from Joseph.

(2) Joseph's brethren speaking with each other about Joseph and his brother, Benjamin:

إِذْ قَالُوا لِيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيْنَا مِنَّا وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّ آبَاءَنَا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٨﴾

When they said: Verily Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are, many though we be. Lo! Our father is in plain aberration. (8)

The most natural way for children to refer to their brothers or sisters is to use a proper name. A proper name functions as a definite nominal and portrays the profiled individual as uniquely apparent to the speaker and the hearer within the current scope of discourse. (Langacker, 1991: 70-73) The interlocuters are familiar with the referent and capable of conceiving of the individual, each from their own vantage point. The use of the proper name in the context at hand does not seem to trigger changes in the speaker-hearer relation. Instead, it encourages each of the interlocuters to concentrate on the profiled individual only, not giving too much thought either to their relation to that individual or to their mutual relation. But the use of the kinship term "أَخُوهُ" (*his brother*) which refers to Benjamin who is not only the brother of Joseph but also a brother of all of them, but from their stepmother, indicates that they looked with envy at Joseph and Benjamin because their father, Jacob, paid more attention to them and Joseph's brethren thought that their father has neglected them since he was so much in love with Joseph and Benjamin. So by using the term "أَخُوهُ" (*his brother*) they are moving along the scale of warmth and kindness away from Joseph and Benjamin.

(3) One of Joseph's brethren speaking with his other brethren about Joseph and their father, Jacob:

اقتُلُوا يُوسُفَ أَوْ اطْرَحُوهُ أَرْضًا يَخْلُ لَكُمْ وَجْهَ أَبِيكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا مِن بَعْدِهِ قَوْمًا صَالِحِينَ ﴿٩﴾

(One said): Kill Joseph or cast him to some (other) land, so that your father's favour may be all for you, and (that) ye may afterward be righteous folk. (9)

Here by placing the designated individual (i.e. their father, Jacob) in the dominion of the hearers, the speaker is in a way holding him responsible for this discrimination. Jacob is implicitly blamed for the fact that he was discriminating between his children. By implying the element of judgment, the speaker is moving along the scale of warmth and kindness away from their father, Jacob.

(4) Joseph's brethren speaking with their father, Jacob about their brother, Joseph:

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَنَّا عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَاصِحُونَ ﴿١١﴾

They said: O our father! Why wilt thou not trust us with Joseph, when lo! We are good friends to him? (11)

By using the kinship term "أَبَانَا" (*our father*), the designated individual has been placed in the dominion of the speakers. Here, both elements of the nominal, *our* and *father*, point to the speakers as the reference individuals, called upon in the process of establishing mental contact with the profiled individual. When *our* and *father* are integrated, the two relations, as well as the profiled individual and the target in the reference-point relation, are put in correspondence.

4. Conclusion

Speaking always implies a choice of a particular perspective, vantage point, and a degree of subjectivity, which can be manipulated by the use of specific language. Not only does the language we choose to use convey information about the situations in which we find ourselves, but it also reveals our attitudes towards these situations and their participants. It can thus implicitly communicate certain emotions or distance towards the hearer. The manipulation of the various aspects of perspective from which a third party individual is apprehended, may prompt an implicit redefinition of the interpersonal relations between the speech act participants.

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