An Analysis of Counteridenticals in Terms of Dream Reports

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Counteridenticals are counterfactual conditional sentences whose antecedent clauses embed an identity statement, e.g.:

(1)   If I were you, I'd buy the blue dress.
(2)   If Peter were Angela Merkel, he'd be the chancellor of Germany.

In this paper, I argue that counteridenticals are best analyzed along the lines of dream reports. The analysis opposes existing proposals of counteridentical meaning (Lakoff (1996); Kocurek (2016)), both of which constitute variations of Lewis' (1973) counterpart theory. First, I show that counteridenticals and dream reports exhibit striking grammatical as well as perceptual parallels. Then, I suggest an analysis of counteridenticals on a par with Percus and Sauerland's (2003), henceforward P&S, analysis of dream reports. In contrast to the existing theories, this proposal is able to account for the correlations between the two linguistic structures.

Counteridenticals and dream reports exhibit at least four parallels with regard to their grammatical and perceptual make-up. Some of these correlations have already been noted in the literature by Arregui (2007), and this paper provides two novel arguments in favor of an analysis which treats the two constructions on a par.

1. Both allow for sequences to occur which violate the binding principle B (cf. (3-c)) with respect to first person pronouns (3), but not second and third person pronouns (4).

(3)   a. I_i dreamed I_i was Brigitte Bardot$_j$ and $I_{i\oplus j}$ kissed me$_i$.   c.   *I_i kiss(ed) me$_i$.
        b.   If I_i were you$_j$, $I_{i\oplus j}$'d kiss me$_i$.

(4)   a.   *Peter$_i$ dreamed [he$_i$ was Brigitte Bardot$_j$ and] he$_{i\oplus j}$ kissed him$_i$.
        b.   *If Peter$_i$ were Sarah$_j$, he$_{i\oplus j}$'d kiss him$_i$.   (cf. Arregui 2007: 31)

In dream reports and counteridenticals, pronouns with the same features may have multiple referents, (indicated in the examples via distinct indices). Whereas the subscripts i and j are used for pronouns referring to entities which inhabit the actual world in addition to the counterfactual one, the subscript $i \oplus j$ designates pronouns referring to a non-actual entity composed of a combination of the antecedent clause's subject's and object's properties, i.e. the subject's dream/counterfactual self. The availability of multiple referents enables the circumvention of the binding principle's application in (3)/(4).

2. Both enable us to comprehend clauses which, under canonical circumstances (i.e. excluding role playing situations, etc.), seem irremediably false in extensional contexts (e.g. *I dreamed I was you*/*If I were you, I would be happier* in contrast to **I am you*) (cf. Arregui 2007: 31). When evaluated against the facts of the actual world, the identification of two inherently different individuals seems clearly infelicitous. Nevertheless, in the cases of dream reports and counteridenticals, we can easily make sense of such a relation, since we derive that instead of consulting our knowledge of the actual world we are to imagine worlds which differ from ours with regard to some contextually relevant presuppositions, here: the identity of the speaker/the addressee.

3. The pronouns of both constructions obey the Oneiric Reference Constraint (ORC),

a syntactic constraint on pronoun movement that rules out any LF for dream reports in which some pronoun referring to the dream-self is asymmetrically c-commanded by a pronoun referring to the actual entity (cf. P&S 2003: 5). The ORC explains why dream reports involving two pronouns with the same agreement features (e.g. *John dreamed that <u>he</u> was marrying <u>his</u> grand-daughter*) are ambiguous between only three readings, even though there are four possible combinations of the consequent pronouns' referents (i.e. the actual-John and his dream-self): It disallows that reading in which the first pronoun refers to the actual self of the dreamer, while the second one refers to that person's dream-self (**In John's dream, John marries the dream-self's grand-daughter*) (cf. ibid.: 4). In counteridenticals, we find a similar pattern (cf. (5)): Those pronouns which can be interpreted ambiguously between referring to the speaker's actual self and the person s/he counterfactually identifies with obey the ORC. (Note that the first consequent pronoun, $I_{i\oplus j}$, is excluded from the constraint in this example since it can never refer back to the actual speaker). In (5), the ORC renders that reading infeasible, or at least marginal, in which the actual speaker's son shall play with the counterfactually imagined daughter.

(5)   If I were you, I'd encourage <u>my</u> son to play with <u>my</u> daughter.
    a.   If I_i were you$_j$, $I_{i\oplus j}$'d encourage my$_{i\oplus j}$ son to play with my$_{i\oplus j}$ daughter.
    b.   If I_i were you$_j$, $I_{i\oplus j}$'d encourage my$_{i\oplus j/i}$ son to play with my$_i$ daughter.
    c.   *If I_i were you$_j$, $I_{i\oplus j}$'d encourage my$_i$ son to play with my$_{i\oplus j}$ daughter.

4. Both structures presuppose that the speaker has taken over the entire set of (contextually relevant) properties of the person s/he imagines to be. Any deviation from that expectation has to be made explicit, otherwise the listener is expected to object (e.g. *I dreamed I was you. I lived in NYC . . . – Wait, but I don't live there*).

In particular the similarity of dream reports and counteridenticals with respect to the ORC calls for an analysis along the lines of P&S (2003). Following their proposal, I suggest to make use of concept generators in their realization as centered worlds. To this end, I propose that *if* sets up an environment in which the proposition *x is y* is taken under a certain attitude; it is interpreted via a 'counterfactually imagine'-relation, by means of which the speaker predicates, in the cf-imagine mode, the consequent property to his/her counterfactual-self (cf. (6)) (cf. Moltmann 2003).

(6) $[\![$If x were $y]\!]^g = [\![$cf-imagine $(x$ be $y)]\!]^g = \lambda Q.\ \lambda x.\ \lambda w.\ \forall <y, w'>$ in CF-IMAGINE$_{x,w}$, $Q(y)(w') = 1.$ (based on P&S 2003: 8)

Whereas P&S's proposal of dream reports restricts the analysis of the embedded proposition to those worlds in which the speaker completely identifies with the person s/he dreams to be (i.e. to that set of pairs $<y, w'>$ such that w' is a world compatible with x's dream in w, and y is the individual in w' who x, in w, identifies as himself (ibid: 8)), matters are more complex for counteridenticals. In counteridenticals, the degree of identification between the speaker and his/her counterfactually imagined self may vary. In (1), the speaker assumes the addressee's external properties while keeping his/her internal properties in tact, a strategy which enables him/her to give advice. By contrast, in (2), the consequent clause is true if Peter is either completely identified with Angela Merkel in the counterfactual worlds or if he is merely identified with her with respect to her profession. Hence, the contribution of y may differ in a context-dependent way. To capture the different degrees of identification, and, thus, the different denotations of the counterfactual self, I propose CF-IMAGINE$_{x,w}$ to have the following interpretation:

(7)   CF-IMAGINE$_{x,w}$ = {$<y,w'>$| w' is a world compatible with the worlds x counterfactually imagines in w, and y is the individual in w' from whom x, in w, takes over a contextually relevant set of properties (meaning that $P_{(w,y)}(w')(x) = 1$, where $P_{(w,y)}$ of type $<s, et>$ represents the coersion of the individual y into a contextually salient set of properties in w)}.   (based on P&S 2003; Percus&Sharvit 2014)

Under these assumptions, multiple pronoun reference can be accounted for as in P&S, via different pronoun interpretations: Reference to the actual person is achieved through their usual interpretation as a variable, analyzed in situ (cf. me$_2$ in (8)). Reference to the dream-self is realized via a starred pronoun which behaves similar to a relative pronoun (cf. I* in (8)): it moves to the left periphery of the complement clause, which triggers a predicate abstraction over the trace it leaves behind (cf. P&S 2003: 7f). If CF-IMAGINE is assumed to quantify over centered worlds, taking a property (the meaning of the complement clause) as an input, the movement leads to an identification of the starred pronoun with the center of those worlds compatible with agent's counterfactually imagined ones, i.e. with the person the speaker adopts properties from, y (cf. (6)).

(8)   (If I were you,) I$_{\text{cf-imagine-self}}$'d love me$_{\text{actual-self}}$.
    a.   (I) cf-imagine [I* λ_3 [λw_1 [$_{VP}$ w_1 t_3 love [me$_2$ w_1]]]]
    b. λx. λw. $\forall <y,w'>$ in CF-IMAGINE$_{x,w}$, y loves $g(2)(w')$ in w'.
    c.   *This "property" will hold, e.g., of the speaker, if for all of his/her cf- imagined world, at which s/he takes over contextually relevant properties from the addressee, his/her counterfactually imagined self loves his/her actual self.*
                                                                    (based on P&S 2003: 8)

The proposed analysis of counteridenticals on a par with dream reports thus predicts both the conceptual and the grammatical parallels between the two linguistic structures.

Selected References: • Arregui, A. 2007. Being Me, Being You: Pronoun Puzzles in Modal Contexts. • Kocurek, A.W. 2016. Counteridenticals. • Lakoff, G. 1996. Sorry, I'm not myself today. • Moltmann, F. 2003. Propositional attitudes without propositions. • Percus, O. & Sauerland, U. 2003. Pronoun Movement in Dream Reports. • Percus, O. & Sharvit, Y. 2014. Copular asymmetries in belief reports.