Dedicated Self-Ascriptions in Egophoric Constructions

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The recent search for dedicated *de se* pronouns invites a related question: Do natural languages have dedicated forms that designate *predicates* such as verb phrases for use in property self-ascription?  I will suggest that such forms may be found in ‘egophoric’ (also called ‘conjunct/ disjunct’) verbal systems.  In such systems the ‘egophoric’ (or ‘conjunct’) verb form co-occurs with first person in declaratives and second person in interrogatives (I snored-EGO; Did you snore-EGO?); and a distinct (unmarked, I will suggest) form is found elsewhere (You/He snored; Did I/he snore?).  Egophoric marking is also found in *de se* attitude reports (Syam[i] said that he[i] snored-EGO).  Evidentials can license the egophoric form if the evidential source is coreferential with the subject (Syam snored-EGO EVID; “According to Syam[i], he[i] snored-EGO”).  A variety of such systems are found scattered among the world’s languages (San Roque et al., 2015), subject to varying semantic conditions.  In Newari (Sino-Tibetan), for example, the egophoric form is restricted to verbs of intentional action (Hargreaves 2005).

            According to one common view, the egophoric marker is a special indexical indicating that the subject of the sentence refers to the ‘epistemic authority’ in the context.  Focusing on Newari, I will present a slightly different account, following Wechsler and Coppock 2016.  We introduce an agent parameter as a refinement on content (not context), which gives us a level of content that can serve as the object of an attitude *de se*: a centered proposition, i.e., a set of agent-world pairs.  Egophoric marking identifies the subject of the sentence with that agent parameter in the content (not with a contextual ‘authority’ parameter).   In a declarative statement, the assertor publicly commits to the centered proposition, which means that she commits to the belief that for any agent-world pair in that proposition, she may be that agent in that world.  As a consequence the subject is normally a first person pronoun, but if authority for a commitment is abdicated as in an evidential construction then the subject refers to the evidential source instead.  Questions should be asked in such a way that the addressee is able to commit to the centered propositions corresponding to the answers to the question (this is formalized by drawing upon recent proposals that track the discourse commitments of the interlocutors (Farkas & Bruce 2010; Krifka 2015)).  Thus interrogative flip arises as a consequence of the status of the predicate as a self-ascribed property.  This account also explains why licensing of the egophoric form is clause-bounded in Newari (Zu 2016).  In ‘Mary[i] said that Syam said that she[i] snored’, Mary does not commit to the proposition that she snored, so the egophoric form does not appear.