



## Defining a monster operator

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This work investigates the semantic concept of a *monster operator* as presented by Kaplan (1989) and by Schlenker (2003, 2010). Such an operator can shift the context of evaluation of indexicals in its scope and can be exemplified by attitude operators such as 'acho que' in Brazilian Portuguese (BrP).

The first concept of a monster operator has been proposed by Kaplan (1989) in the scope his high influential formal semantics approach to indexicals. Kaplan (1989, p. 511) states that operators "which attempt to meddle with the character<sup>1</sup>" (function from context to content) are monsters (operators). In this sense, an operator is a monster if it operates changing the context of interpretation of words (particularly, indexicals). But Kaplan explicitly prohibits the existence of monsters: "[...] no operator can control the character of the indexicals within its scope, because they will simply leap out of its scope to the front of the operator. I am not saying we could not construct a language with such operators, just that English is not one. And such operators could not be added to it." (1989, p. 510). The example used to comprove this idea is the following:

(1) In some contexts it is true that I am not tired now.

In (1), in principle, the operator 'in some contexts it is true that', prefixing sentences, could manipulate the context, consequently the character, of indexicals. Thus, (1) would be true if and only if some agent of some context is not tired at that time of that context. But this reading has nothing to do with me (agent of the utterance context) or the present moment (time of the utterance context). In other words, the interpretation of the indexicals 'I' and 'now' in a different context from the (actual) speech context is simply ruled out. Hence, (1) demonstrates that there are no monsters operators, as claimed by Kaplan.

Although Kaplan has denied the existence of monsters in natural language, he proposes a general concept of these structures that can be applied over different languages, including sentences of BrP.

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1. Character and content are two functions used to determine the meaning of indexicals in Kaplan's theory.



The theoretical framework established by Kaplan has been reformulated in Schlenker (2003, 2010). The author identifies some problems in the first theory, especially regarding Kaplan's prohibition against monsters. Schlenker has suggested that monsters can be found in natural language. He has presented examples of monsters in English – indexicals such as 'two days ago' in the scope of attitude operators such as 'told that'. Likewise, Basso and Teixeira (2011) and Teixeira (2012) have shown that BrP contains this same kind of monster operator.

But Schlenker (2003, 2010) presents a concept of monster operator in a very strict sense. According to Schlenker, a monster operator can shift the context of interpretation of indexicals only to a reported context. Hence, an indexical "depend[s] either on the context of the actual speech act [...] or on the context of the reported speech act" (SCHLENKER, 2003, p. 32). In other words, in Schlenker's proposal, indexicals can be evaluated only in two types of context – utterance context and reported context. When an indexical is being evaluated in a reported context, we can spot a monster operator which is changing the context of interpretation of that item.

Regarding to the BrP, some sentences, like (2), show that the Schlenker's idea of operator monster is suitable,

(2) João tem me **dito** repetidamente ao longo dos anos **que** vai me pagar em dois dias.  
*John has told me repeatedly over the years that will pay me in two days*

because 'em dois dias' may be evaluated either on the utterance context or on the reported context.

But a problem to Schlenker's concept of monster operators arises with respect to sentences like (3). Suppose an utterance situation as the following: after a theatrical dialogue, a reporter asks to an actress 'What do you think should be changed in order to the show to be more funny?'. The actress answers:

(3) Eu **acho que** eu poderia ser mais rica  
*I think that I could be richer*

In (3), the indexical 'eu' occurs twice: the first one refers to the actress, while the second one refers to the fictional character represented by her in the show. Thus, the second 'eu' is a monstrous indexical because its context of evaluation is shifted from the utterance context (non-fictional) to the fictional context, note also that the shift occurs in the scope of the attitude operator ('acho que')<sup>2</sup>. Roughly, the indexicals are interpreted in distinct contexts as represented in (3a):

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<sup>2</sup> Basso and Teixeira (2011) show that other solutions within a Kaplanian framework which do not invoke monster operators are not possible.



(3a) Eu<sub>c\*</sub> **acho que** eu<sub>c</sub> poderia ser mais rica.

The behavior of 'eu', in (3), has been extensively discussed by Basso and Teixeira (2011) and Teixeira (2012). If these analyses are correct, Schlenker's definition of a monster operators is too narrow and we need a broader concept of this kind of operator; this concept should not restrict the context of interpretation of indexicals to the actual speech situation or the reported speech situation.

Thereby, the remaining questions are: how can we characterize monster operators found in natural language? Is the right answer presented by Schlenker (2003, 2011) or by Kaplan (1989)?

Clearly the point of view of Kaplan (1989) about monster operators is more general and, thus, it allows a monstrous analysis of (3). This happens because Kaplan does not restrict the contexts of interpretation of indexicals as Schlenker does. Thus, if the necessity of a fictional context to interpret indexicals is an evidence of a monster operator intervention, then Kaplan (1989)'s concept of this kind of operator is the most suitable to (3) (not Schlenker (2003, 2010)'s one). In other words, although the approach of Kaplan remains incorrect with respect to the non-existence of monsters in natural language, his broader notions of monsters operators are necessary to explain the facts of natural language.

## References

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