

L322 Syntax

Chapter 4: Binding Theory

Linguistics 322

1 Introduction

R-expression

An object or entity in the real or any imaginary or alternate world.

- (1) The unicorn saw himself in the sixth dimension in an alternate universe.

Unicorns do not exist (in our world). It is totally unclear how he could see himself in the sixth dimension, and it is most uncertain whether there is an alternate universe much less an infinite number of them. But we can talk about such things and consequently they are R-expressions.

An anaphor is a pronoun whose antecedent is within the same clause as the anaphor

- (2) a. Mary saw herself in the mirror.
b. *Mary said that John saw herself in the mirror.

(2b) is ungrammatical because the anaphor *herself* is not in the same clause as its expected antigenic *Mary*. Or we could say that its grammatical antecedent does not agree in gender with the anaphor.

Most anaphors in English are pronouns which include ‘-self’ adjoined to them, pronouns+’own’

- (3) a. John washed his own car, not Bill’s.
b. John washed himself.

‘Each other’ is also an anaphor:

- (4) John and Mary saw each other at the movies.

NOTE: not all these above mentioned pronouns function like anaphors. They must function like an anaphor to be one:

- (5) Herself was seen at the ball last night.

Here, 'herself' is used as a sarcastic or demeaning comment on some well know and not much appreciated socialite.

- (6) John and myself went to the movies last night.

While this form is not considered acceptable in Standard English, its use is becoming more common in substandard English.

- (7) a. It was John, himself, who wrote the book, not his ghost writer.
 b. *It was Mary, himself, who rejected the manuscript, not her boss.

Here, the reflexive form is functionally an anaphor. It is bound by its antecedent, as (7v) attests.

Locality Constraint

As mentioned above, anaphors are bound within the clause that contains them. This called the Binding Domain (to be modified):

- (8) **Binding Domain**

The clause containing a pronominal, anaphor, or R-expression.

An anaphor is bound in its binding domain means that the antecedent of it must be in the same clause containing it.

- (9) **Binding Principle A**

An anaphor a bound in the domain of the clause containing it (its binding domain).

2 Coindexation

Coindexation, while correct in concept, is garbled by many linguists.

If two R-expressions refer to the same referent (including the sense of the referent), they are coindexed. This means they have the same index. The index is an arbitrary sign referring each unique object or entity in this and all other worlds.

In the following example:

- (10) Mary read a book to her child.

All three nouns are R-expressions; they each refer to a different object in the real world.

In the following examples:

- (11) a. John looked at himself in the mirror.
b. John looked at him in the mirror.

there are only two R-expressions: *John* and *mirror*. *Himself* is an anaphor, and *him* is a pronominal.

The anaphor must be coindexed with an antecedent. The pronominal *him* has an unknown antecedent. I will mark this with the subindex 'x':

- (12) a. John_η looked at himself_η in the mirror_κ.
b. John_η looked at him_x in the mirror_κ.

This method of coindexation properly belongs to **interpretation**. A hearer hears a sentence such as (11a). He then associates *John* and *mirror* with a person and an object in the real or imagined world. The subindex represents these particular objects. To determine who *himself* is, he must find an appropriate antecedent for the anaphor. *John* is the only appropriate antecedent to the anaphor in (11a) which is now interpreted as (12a). In (11b) the hearer cannot find an antecedent for the pronominal *him*. He must go outside of the sentence to find it. Since the discourse or the real world context is not given here, the subindex is used.

When a sentence is being created, the situation is reversed to a large extent. He wants to refer to *John* in (12a). The subindex indicates this reference. Next he wants to refer to *John* again, as the object of *look at*. The grammatical rules of English (and many languages) do not permit two nouns with the identical reference to occur in the same clause. Hence, he cannot say:

- (13) *John looked at John in the mirror.

where both *Johns* refer to the same person. The speaker must use an anaphor in this situation.

3 The Distribution of Pronominals

The antecedent of a pronominal cannot occur in the same clause as the pronominal indexed to it:

- (14) a. *Mrs. Oglethorpe_i saw her_i in the mirror.
b. *Kyle₁ wrote a note to him₁.

That is, *her* cannot be coindexed with *Mrs. Oglethorpe* and *him* cannot be coindexed with *Kyle*.

It can be coindexed an antecedent in a higher clause:

- (15) a. Mrs. Oglethorpe_i said that Peter saw her_i in the mirror.
b. Kyle₁ believes that Santa Clause wrote a note to him₁

The term *free* in the context of pronominals, anaphors, and R-expressions means **not bound**. That is pronoun cannot be coindexed with an antecedent in the same clause.

(16) **Binding Principle B**

A pronoun must be free in its binding domain.

That a pronominal cannot be coindexed with an antecedent in its binding domain. It may be coindexed with an antecedent that is not in the same clause.

4 The Distribution of R-Expressions

An R-expression cannot be bound to anything:

- (17) a. *Willy_i heard Ignatius_i.
b. *Willy_i knows that Bill_j heard Ignatius_j.
c. *Willy_i knows that Bill_j heard Ignatius_j.

Willy, Bill, and Ignatius are each different R-expressions.

(18) **Binding Principle C**

An R-expression is free.

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