Features, Identity, and ‘Yourself’

1. Introduction

- English reflexive nominals are composed of two distinct nominals:
  (1) We will not embarrass ourselves/\*one self

2. Generalization on \(\varphi\)-Matching

In English reflexives, pronouns \(\varphi\)-match their antecedent:
- This is introduced in textbooks and presupposed by researchers across a spectrum of analyses (cf. discussion in Sundaresan 2018)
- Perhaps because bound pronouns are \(\varphi\)-deficient
  (e.g., Heim 2006, Reuland 2006, Kratzer 2009, Rooryck and Vanden Wyngaerd 2011)

Empirical Question: How valid is the generalization in (2)?

Theoretical Question: How do we derive this generalization (to the extent it is valid)?

2. Referential Construal

- English anaphors contain two nominals (pronominal possessor + \(\sqrt{SELF}\); English reflexive nominals are composed of two distinct nominals:

- \(\varphi\)-mismatches exist!
  - Imposters (Collins and Postal 2012)
  (3) a. Your majesty must protect yourself/himself.
  b. Mommy and Daddy need some time to ourselves/ourselves.

- Context in quantified expressions / group nouns
  (4) a. [Spoken by a single woman in a group of women]
    Each of us is doing itself/ourselves/herself/\*himself.
  b. [Spoken to a group of women]
    At least one of you believes in yourself/\*herself/\*himself.
  c. [Spoken about a mixed-gender group]
    Everyone loves themselves/\*herself/\*himself.
  d. [Spoken about a group of individuals]
    The football team organizes the weekly tailgate itself/\*themselves.

- ‘Singular they’ (judgments are known to vary here)
  (5) a. [Spoken about an individual of unknown gender]
    Whoever that is ought to control themselves/\*herself/\*himself.
  b. [Spoken about an individual with non-binary gender identity]
    Kim wrote a book by \*herself/\*himself.

3. Weak Identity Condition in English

The bound pronoun in an English reflexive must be able to be construed as (weakly) interpretive identical to its antecedent:

- Something like (6) is necessary for proxy readings
  (6) BUT (6) is not enough: 3.5g anaphors never occur with a 1st/2nd person or PL antecedent.

4. A Dual Approach to \(\varphi\)-Features

- Reflexive anaphors do not uniformly get their \(\varphi\)-features valued in the derivation
  - Premise: Reflexive anaphors structurally contain a (bound) pronoun
  - Premise: Not all (bound) pronouns are \(\varphi\)-deficient
  - Premise: Whenever a pronoun’s \(\varphi\)-features are derivationally valued, those \(\varphi\)-features must match the antecedent’s
  - Observation: Reflexive pronouns do not always match the \(\varphi\)-features of the antecedent

- Reflexive pronouns are not always \(\varphi\)-deficient

- Unlike others, 3.5g reflexive pronouns never mismatch their antecedent
  - (Note: this is about \(n\) and \(\varphi\), not about person alone; recall ‘them’)
  - This suggests their \(\varphi\)-features are derivationally entangled with those of the binder

- 3.5g reflexive pronouns require a unique derivation

- 3.5g is different from other pronouns in gender \(\varphi\)-features

Gender-specification in English pronouns

- Idea: \(\gamma\)-feature values trigger additional derivational steps

5. Conclusions

- Different English bound pronouns are subject to different derivations, depending on the pronoun’s \(\varphi\)-feature specification in the morphosyntax

- What we now know about building reflexive anaphors in English

- Bound pronouns’ \(\varphi\)-features are interpreted
  - ‘construal’, context-defined gender, CID contexts

- \(\varphi\)-features must be active at LF
  - Weak identity has to interpret pronoun’s \(\varphi\)-features
    (see also Heim 2008, Safir 2014; pace e.g. Drummond et al. 2011:399)

- Morphosyntax builds reflexive anaphors
  - Bound pronouns’ \(\varphi\)-feature values influence the derivation and where mismatch is possible

- We ought to replace (2) in English with (6) and (12)
  - There are 2 types of reflexive pronouns in English
  - Most do not need to \(\varphi\)-match their antecedent
  - What’s required of them is weak identity
  - But 3.5g ones always \(\varphi\)-match their antecedent
  - Requiring separate grammatical machinery

- Considering only 3.5g reflexive pronouns, English has no violations of (2)
  - 3.5g is different because how its \(\varphi\)-features (especially \(\gamma\)) are valued
  - These \(\varphi\)-feature differences lead to different derivations

- Properties of binding are not solely the product of syntax
  - English reflexive anaphors are defined partially syntactically
    - Building the \(\varphi\)-bundles for the pronoun
    - Partially postsyntactically (based on syntactic input; see Ahn and Kalin forthcoming)
  - The case form of the reflexive pronoun
  - Partially semantically/pragmatically (based on syntactic input)
    - Determining whether a bound pronoun can be construed as weakly identical to an antecedent or not, on the basis of \(\varphi\)-features
  - A multi-module approach to binding, whose name makes this obvious:

“Distributed Binding Theory”


