Licensing reflexives and pronouns in Spec DP
Probing what adults know

Yangchen Roy

Centre for Linguistics
Jawaharlal Nehru University

9th August 2019 at Naslilansi

The canonical binding theory

The following are Principles A, B and C from a version of the binding theory (BT) from Chomsky (1986, p 166).

(1)　a.　Principle A: an anaphor is bound in a local domain

　　　b.　Principle B: a pronominal is free in a local domain

Rule I

- Consider the following possible readings of pronouns:

    (2) Bound reading: $[_{CP}$ John$_i$ likes $[_{DP}$ his$_i$ violin$]]$

    (3) Free reading: $[_{CP}$ John$_i$ likes $[_{DP}$ his$_j$ violin$]]$

    (4) Coreference reading: The men who killed *him* hated *John*

- Reinhart (1983) pointed out that Principle B only accounts for semantic binding. When two NPs that are referential pick the same referent in a given world, we get coreference. This is how, for instance, him and John in (4) may end up referring to the same person. Principle B plays no role here.

- Grodzinsky and Reinhart (Grodzinsky & Reinhart, 1993, p 79) propose the pragmatic rule below to account for coreference.

    (5) Rule I: Intrasentential Coreference NP A cannot corefer with NP B if replacing A with C, C a variable A bound by B, yields an indistinguishable interpretation.

The study in question

This study discusses two language tasks that were designed to study the syntactic and pragmatic distribution of the reflexives and pronouns in the specifier of Bangla DPs. The tasks were administered online with 142 adults native speakers of Bangla.

Objectives of the study

- to investigate if speakers permit the reflexive and both pronouns in Spec DP to be bound [as in (6)], as Sengupta 1990) would also predict. If they do so, we were interested to see if they have equal preference for both the reflexive and the pronoun in this syntactic position and what their choices tell us about their knowledge that pronouns also having free readings?

  (6) mala$_i$ nidʒer$_i$/or$_i$ boi portʃtʃʰe
      mala self's/her book reading
      'Mala$_i$ is reading her$_i$ book'

- to see if speakers show the potential to use Rule I

Task 1: the Spec DP "Match-Mismatch" task

eta Shamir   eta Shamirer school bag

(i)

Shamir nijer bag gochhachhe

Based on what you now know about the character above, judge if the picture given below matches the description underneath it. If there is a match, mark MATCH. If there is a mismatch, mark MISMATCH.
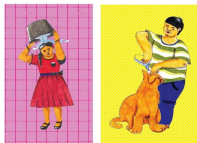
◯ MATCH
◯ MISMATCH

(ii)

Figure: *(i) This is Shamir, this is Shamir's school bag (ii) Shamir$_i$ is packing his$_i$ school bag*

Task 1: the Spec DP "Match-Mismatch" task

- Six transitive predicates with a potential to have a reflexive or one of the two pronouns in the specifier of the object DP were selected. The predicates selected are given in (7). x in it stands for either the reflexive or one of the two pronouns.

  (7) a. B13, B14, B15: *torun x-er baba-r hatʰ dʰore atʃtʃʰe* "Tarun is holding x's father's hand"

       b. B16, B17, B18: *ʃomir x-er bag gotʃʰatʃtʃʰe* "Shamir is packing x's bag"

       c. B19, B20, B21: *ʃiba x-er bon-ke hug kortʃtʃʰe* "Sheba is hugging x's sister"

       d. B22, B23, B24: *riʃi x-er colour pencil-ta meye-take ditʃtʃʰe* "Hrishi is giving x's colour pencil to the girl"

       e. B25, B26, B27: *murgi-ʈa x-er dim-gulo-ke dekʰtʃtʃe* "The hen is looking at x's eggs"

       f. B28, B29, B30: *sæm x-er trofi-r ʃonge tʃʰobi tultʃtʃʰe* "Sam is taking a photograph with x's trophy"

Task 2: the Spec DP "Fill-in-the-blank" contrast task

Above is a set of two pictures. Based on what you see depicted in the pictures, fill the blank in the sentence with the appropriate option.

meyeta _____ gaye jol dhalchhe. kintu chheleta beraltar gaye jol dhalchhe.

- ⬭ nijer
- ⬭ or
- ⬭ tar

(i)

Above is a set of two pictures. Based on what you see depicted in the pictures, fill the blank in the sentence with the appropriate option.

chheleta beraltar gaye jol dhalchhe. kintu meyeta _____ gaye jol dhalchhe.

- ⬭ nijer
- ⬭ or
- ⬭ tar

(ii)

Figure: *the two tokens of the predicate set "the girl is pouring water on x's body" (i) The girl is pouring water on __'s body. But the boy is pouring water on the cat's body. (ii) The boy is pouring water on the cat's body. The girl is pouring water on __'s body.*

Task 2: the Spec DP "Fill-in-the-blank" contrast task

- Three predicates were selected for this task. The three predicate-descriptions of the task, where x stands for the blank that was either to be filled with the reflexive or one of the two pronouns, are given in (8).

  (8)　a.　B31, B32: ʃatʰi x-er tʃul atʃratʃtʃʰe "Shathi is combing x's hair"

  　　　b.　B33, B34: tʃʰele-ʈa x-er dʒib tantʃʰe "the boy is pulling x's tongue"

  　　　c.　B35, B36: me-ʈa x-er ga-e dʒol dʰaltʃʰe "the girl is pouring water on x's body"

Results of Task 1

- 58.46% to 70.80% accepted the reflexive, *niʤer*, and both pronouns, *or* and *tar* (the predicted response-set).
- 5.84% to 13.85% accepted only the reflexive, and considered both pronouns a "MISMATCH".
- 22.22% to 38.46% accepted the reflexive, but did not accept at least one out of the two pronouns.

Results of Task 1

Item Index	no. that answered all three tokens	% that answered all 3 tokens + marked "MATCH"	no. that accepted all three, *niʤer, or, tar*	no. that accepted *niʤer* and at least one out of *or* and *tar*	% that accepted all three, *niʤer, or, tar*	% that accepted *niʤer* and at least one out of *or* and *tar*
B16		100.00%				
B17	137	79.56%	92	33	67.15%	91.24%
B18		78.83%				
B19		91.11%				
B20	135	88.15%	93	19	68.89%	82.96%
B21		80.74%				
B22		98.54%				
B23	137	90.51%	97	30	70.80%	92.70%
B24		75.91%				
B25		97.83%				
B26	138	74.64%	87	33	63.04%	86.96%
B27		78.26%				
B28		96.92%				
B29	130	76.92%	76	32	58.46%	83.08%
B30		69.23%				

Table: Majority of the participants accepted all three *niʤer*, *or* and *tar*, as predicted

Results of Task 1

Item In-dex	no. that answered all three tokens of the predicate triplate	no. that accepted *nidʒer* and *or*, but not *tar*	no. that accepted *nidʒer* and *tar*, but not *or*	no. that that did not accept either pronoun	no. that accepted *nidʒer* but did not accept at least one out of *or* or *tar*	% that did not accept either pronoun	% that accepted *nidʒer* but did not accept at least one out of *or* or *tar*
B16 B17 B18	137	17	16	12	45	8.76%	32.85%
B19 B20 B21	135	14	5	11	30	8.15%	22.22%
B22 B23 B24	137	25	5	8	38	5.84%	27.74%
B25 B26 B27	138	14	19	15	48	10.87%	34.78%
B28 B29 B30	130	20	12	18	50	13.85%	38.46%

Table: The variation in the data from Task 1, contrary to predictions

Discussing the results of Task 1

- The participants who did not accept the pronoun(s) did so because they assigned the free reading to the pronoun instead of the bound one, and given the pragmatic context this interpretation was ruled out.

- The reflexive on the other hand did not yield any such ambiguity, having only a bound reading. It was, therefore, chosen by all these participants.

Results of Task 2

- Both when the blank preceded the linguistic context (LC) and when it succeeded it, a high majority (93.48% to 100%) of the participants picked the reflexive over the pronouns.

- For all three predicate sets, there was a higher preference for the reflexive when the blank succeeded the LC (97.12% to 100%) than when the blank preceded it (93.48% to 96.38%).

Results of Task 2

	B31	**B32**	**B33**	**B34**	**B35**	**B36**
	blank preceding LC	**blank succeeding LC**	**blank preceding LC**	**blank succeeding LC**	**blank preceding LC**	**blank succeeding LC**
total responses	138	139	139	139	138	139
no. in analysis	138	139	139	139	138	139
no. of *nidger*	129	135	133	135	133	139
no. of *or*	5	2	5	2	2	0
no. of *tar*	4	2	1	2	3	0
% of *nidger*	93.48%	97.12%	95.68%	97.12%	96.38%	100.00%
% of *or*	3.62%	1.44%	3.60%	1.44%	1.45%	0.00%
% of *tar*	2.90%	1.44%	0.72%	1.44%	2.17%	0.00%

Table: Why do more participants prefer the reflexive when the blank succeeds the LC?

Discussing the results of Task 2

- A reflexive can only have a bound reading, but a pronoun has three potential readings: (a) a bound reading (b) a free (diectic) reading and (c) a coreference reading.

- Picking the pronoun when the linguistic context (henceforth, LC) succeeds the blank has two potential outcomes [(9) and (10)], but picking it when the LC precedes the blank has three potential outcomes [(9), (10) and (11)]. Participants, aware of these outcomes, chose the option that resulted in least ambiguity.

(9) the pronoun gets bound by the subject DP (available both when the blank precedes and when it succeeds the LC): pragmatically felicitous
"...$[_{CP}[\ [_{DP}$ the child$]_i\ [...[$his$_i$ tongue$]]]]$..."

(10) the pronoun gets a free reading (available both when the blank precedes and when it succeeds the LC): pragmatically infelicitous
"...$[_{CP}[[_{DP}$ the child$]_i\ [...[$his$_j$ tongue$]]]]$..."

(11) the pronoun gets a coreference reading (available only when the blank succeeds the LC): pragmatically infelicitous
"$[_{CP}\ [[_{DP}$ the girl$]_k\ [[[_{DP}$ the dog$]_l$-s$]...]]\ ]...[_{CP}[[_{DP}$ the child$]_i\ [...\ [$his/her$_{k/l}$ tongue$]]]]$"

Conclusion

- Bangla speakers accept both the reflexive and the pronouns in the specifier of the object DP such that it is bound by the subject.
- They are also aware of the potential of pronouns to be have a free, deictic reading i.e. pick a referent from the given world.
- When asked to choose between a reflexive and a pronoun in a context of contrast (using a disjunction), a large majority of the speakers picked the reflexive.
- However, when more DPs (potential co-referents) preceded the point of choice there was a higher chance of picking the reflexive, suggesting that speakers are aware of the coreference reading and therefore have the potential to use Rule I.

References

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