Subject Anaphors: Exempt or Not Exempt?

Haddad, Youssef A.
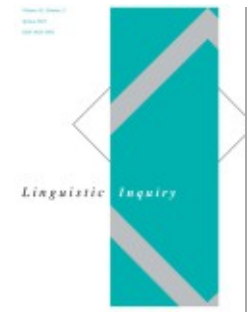
SUBJECT ANAPHORS: EXEMPT OR
NOT EXEMPT?
Youssef A. Haddad
University of Florida in
Gainesville

Pollard and Sag (1992) reformulate Principle A of Principles-and-Parameters binding theory in the framework of Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG) in order to account for anaphors that occupy an exempt position, as *himself* does in (1) (Pollard and Sag's (14b)).

(1) John knew that the reports about himself were fabricated.

Exempt positions are what Büring (2003) calls ''noncomplementary'' positions, where both reflexives and nonreflexives could be used; in other words, in such positions reflexives and nonreflexives are not in complementary distribution. If a reflexive is used, then it does not have a local binder—though, as Pollard and Sag hold, it may be subject to other, nonsyntactic constraints.

In HPSG binding theory, subject anaphors are predicted to be inherently exempt anaphors. Apparently, however, the theory limits subject anaphors to subject positions of ''non-finite ('small') clauses'' (Pollard 2005:2). The reason is that originally the theory's main focus was on English, where anaphors do not occupy the subject position of finite clauses. Pollard and Sag (1992:290) hold that ''in English, anaphors simply have no nominative forms'' and, thus, a sentence like (2) is ungrammatical.

(2) *Herself ran away.

Nevertheless, subject anaphors do occur in other languages, such as Thai and Chinese, as Woolford (1999) points out. Woolford, however, does not mention whether an anaphor in such a position can occur *without* a local binder and thus be exempt, as the theory predicts (Büring 2003:312). The purpose of this squib is to test this prediction by presenting an account of the behavior of subject anaphors in Thai and Chinese, using HPSG binding theory.

The Thai and Chinese anaphors examined here are local subject anaphors. Local anaphors take a clause-internal antecedent and are not subject to clause-external binding. Subject anaphors are predicted to be inherently exempt from clause-internal binding. Therefore, the prediction is that local subject anaphors should be exempt from any obligatory binding and that they are only subject to nonsyntactic constraints.

Section 1 presents an overview of the theory. Section 2 gives more relevant details about Woolford's (1999) account of subject anaphors. Section 3 presents Thai and Chinese data along with their analysis. Section 4 provides a summary and a conclusion.

1 HPSG Binding Theory: Exempt Anaphors

English displays structures in which reflexives and nonreflexives are in complementary distribution.

(3) John$_i$ admires himself$_{i/*k}$/him$_{*i/k}$.

But it also displays structures in which reflexives and nonreflexives are in noncomplementary distribution.

(4) John$_i$ saw a picture of himself$_i$/him$_{i/j}$.
(Büring 2003:291–292)

Pollard and Sag (1992) reformulate Principle A of binding theory in the framework of HPSG in order to account for reflexives that occur in noncomplementary positions. The authors hold that an anaphor that occurs in a noncomplementary position ''lacks a local o-commander'' and is thus ''exempt from principle A'' (p. 287). In Pollard and Sag's theory, Principle A reads as follows:

(5) ''A locally o-commanded anaphor must be locally o-bound.''
(Pollard and Sag 1992:287)

O stands for *obliqueness*, which is characterized in terms of relations between grammatical functions, whereby a subject is less oblique than a primary object, which is in turn less oblique than a second object (Pollard and Sag 1992:266). Local o-command and local o-binding are defined as follows:[1]

(6) A *locally o-commands* B just in case A is a less oblique coargument than B. (based on Pollard and Sag 1992:287, Pollard and Xue 1998:293)

(7) ''A *locally o-binds* B just in case A and B are coindexed and A locally o-commands B.'' (Pollard and Sag 1992:287, Pollard and Xue 1998:293)

Since a locally o-bound anaphor is by definition coindexed with a less oblique coargument, an object anaphor can be o-bound by a subject, but a subject anaphor (being the least oblique) cannot be locally o-bound at all. Therefore, an anaphor in a subject position—if a language allows such a thing—must be an exempt anaphor, trivially obeying Principle A.[2] This idea can be summarized as follows:

(8) A local subject anaphor is not locally o-bound and is therefore free from syntactic restrictions concerning the choice of antecedent.

---

[1] Pollard and Xue (1998, 2001) and Pollard (2005) extend the definitions to account for long-distance anaphors like Chinese *ziji*. However, since I focus here on anaphors that are locally bound, I will limit the definitions to local o-command and local o-binding.

[2] This idea was brought to my attention by an *LI* reviewer.

Although exempt, such anaphors are subject to certain nonsyntactic constraints that determine their referents (Pollard and Xue 1998: 293). One type of constraint relevant here is the discourse (*point of view*) constraint that Pollard and Sag (1992:271–279) explain as follows:

(9) ''It is natural to assume that the bearer of the experiencer role . . . is the individual whose viewpoint is being reflected.'' (p. 277)

Büring (2003) formulates the discourse constraints as the Exempt Anaphor Condition.

(10) ''A reflexive/reciprocal that doesn't have a less oblique coargument must denote a *designated participant*.'' (p. 292)

Speaker and hearer (1st or 2nd person) can automatically qualify as designated participants. Someone referred to by 3rd person, however, qualifies if he or she is an individual whose viewpoint is being reflected. Take these sentences, for example:

(11) The picture of himself$_i$ in *Newsweek* bothered John$_i$. (Pollard and Sag 1992:277, (61a))

(12) *The picture of himself$_i$ in *Newsweek* bothered John$_i$'s father. (Pollard and Sag 1992:277, (61b))

In (11), the reflexive pronoun does not have a less oblique coargument, but it still refers to John since he is the experiencer (the one who is bothered). Compare this with (12), where John's father is the experiencer/designated participant and the reflexive pronoun can therefore only refer to him and not to John.

2 Woolford 1999: Subject Anaphors

In this section, I summarize Woolford's (1999) account of subject anaphors.

Citing Rizzi 1990, Woolford maintains that anaphors do not occur in subject positions, not because they do not have a nominative form, but because they cannot agree.

(13) *The anaphor agreement effect*
''Anaphors do not occur in syntactic positions construed with agreement.'' (p. 257)

In this, Woolford contradicts Pollard and Sag by saying that ''it is the presence of agreement that blocks anaphors and not the presence of nominative Case'' (p. 262). She gives examples of languages in which subject anaphors are allowed simply because these languages are without subject-verb agreement; some of these are Khmer, Vietnamese, Korean, Thai, and Chinese.

(14) *Khmer*
Mɨt teǎŋ-pii neǎq$_i$ kɨt thaa kluən$_i$ ciə kounseh.
friend both   person think that self   be student
'The two friends$_i$ reasoned that they(self)$_i$ are students.'
(Huffman 1970:231; Woolford's (11))

(15) *Vietnamese*
Anh-ấy$_i$ e   rằng mình$_i$ cũng không khỏi tội.
he   fear that self   also not   avoid sin
'He$_i$ is afraid that he(self)$_i$ will not avoid punishment.'
(Trúóng Văn Chình 1970:202; Woolford's (12))

(16) *Chinese*
Zhangsan$_i$ shuo ziji$_i$ hui lai.
Zhangsan say self will come
'Zhangsan$_i$ said he(self)$_i$ will come.'
(Huang 1982:331; Woolford's (13))

(17) *Korean*
Kitil-in$_i$ sǝlo-ka$_i$ kyǝngcængha-nɨn-kǝs-il
they-TOPIC each-other-NOM compete-ASP-COMP-ACC
calangha-n-ta.
boast-ASP-DEC
'They$_i$ boast that each other$_i$ are competing.'
(Yang 1983:4; Woolford's (14))

(18) *Thai*
Sǒmmǎay$_i$ khít wâa tuaʔeeŋ$_i$ ca dây pay.
Somai   think that self   FUT get go
'Somai$_i$ thinks that he(self)$_i$ will get to go.'
(Grima 1978:120; Woolford's (15))

3 Data and Data Analysis

Bringing together HPSG binding theory and Woolford's (1999) observation, in this section I check whether local subject anaphors are in fact exempt anaphors. I focus on subject anaphors in two of the five languages mentioned above: Thai and Chinese.[3] I was not able to find native speakers of Khmer and Vietnamese, and it happens that Korean has long-distance anaphors, which makes it irrelevant to the present discussion.

A brief descriptive note about Korean is in order. In this language, anaphors are locally bound to the closest NP in the clause where they occur.

---

[3] The Korean data were collected from two native speakers during interviews. When a native speaker was uncertain about the grammaticality of a sentence, one or more other native speakers were consulted. The same applies to the Thai and Chinese data, except that one native speaker was interviewed per language.

(19) John-ŭn$_i$ Paul-ī$_k$ kŭ-chasin-ŭl$_{*i/k}$ sarangha-nta-go
John-SUBJ Paul-SUBJ himself-OBJ love-DEC-EMB
sangkakha-nta.
think-DEC[4]
'John$_i$ thinks that Paul$_k$ loves himself$_{*i/k}$.'

In case the closest NP is not an appropriate antecedent, the anaphor can be exempt, regardless of whether it is in a subject or object position, as (20) and (21) show.[5]

(20) John-ŭn$_i$ aydil-ī kŭ$_i$-/né-/nae-chasin-ŭl
John-SUBJ the-children-SUBJ him-/your-/my-self-OBJ
sarangha-nta-go sangkakha-nta.
love-DEC-EMB think-DEC
'John$_i$ thinks that the children love himself$_i$/yourself/my-self.'

(21) John-ŭn$_i$ kŭ$_i$-/né-/nae-chasin-i hangbokha-ta-go
John-SUBJ him-/your-/my-self-SUBJ happy-DEC-EMB
sangkakha-nta.
think-DEC
'John$_i$ thinks that himself$_i$/yourself/myself is happy.'

The object anaphor in (20) shows that Korean has long-distance anaphors that look for an antecedent either clause-internally or beyond. Since this squib is concerned only with the behavior of local anaphors, Korean anaphors are not considered.

3.1 Thai and Chinese Anaphors as Locally O-Bound

Unlike Korean anaphors, Thai and Chinese anaphors have to be locally o-bound, as (22) and (23) illustrate.

(22) *Thai*
Sue$_i$ k^{h}ít wâa Fiona$_k$ t^{h}amráj tuat^{h}ərʔee$\eta_{*i/k}$.
Sue think that Fiona hurt herself
'Sue$_i$ thinks that Fiona$_k$ hurt herself$_{*i/k}$.'

(23) *Chinese*
Zhangsan$_i$ juede Lisi$_k$ hui shanghai ta-ziji$_{*i/k}$.
Zhangsan think Lisi will hurt him-self
'Zhangsan$_i$ thinks that Lisi$_k$ will hurt himself$_{*i/k}$.'

---

[4] The following hints about Korean suffixes can be helpful:

- *nŭn/ŭn/ī/ga:* allomorphs of the same suffix indicating subject
- *go:* a verbal affix indicating that the verb belongs to the embedded clause
- *ta:* declarative for adjectives
- *nta:* declarative for verbs
- Abbreviations: DEC = declarative; EMB = embedded; SUBJ = subject; OBJ = object

[5] Testing the local/anaphoric nature of the relevant 'self'-pronouns via examples like (20) was suggested by an *LI* reviewer.

In both languages, an anaphor can only refer to the subject in the embedded clause; it cannot refer to the subject in the matrix clause. If the anaphor (1st, 2nd, or 3rd person) lacks an appropriate/relevant local o-commander, the whole sentence is ungrammatical, as illustrated in (24) and (25).

(24) *Thai*
  Sue$_i$ k^{h}ít wâa năŋ sŭɯm p^{h}im t^{h}amráj
  Sue think that the newspaper hurt
  tuat^{h}ərʔeeŋ$_i$/tuak^{h}unʔeeŋ/tuac^{h}anʔeeŋ.
  herself/yourself/myself
  'Sue$_i$ thinks that the newspaper hurt herself$_i$/yourself/myself.'

(25) *Chinese*
  Zhangsan$_i$ juede baozhi hui shanghai
  Zhangsan think newspaper will hurt
  ta-ziji$_i$/ni-ziji/wo-ziji.
  he-self/you-self/I-self
  'Zhangsan$_i$ thinks that the newspaper will hurt himself$_i$/yourself/myself.'

The above examples show that Thai and Chinese anaphors, unlike their Korean counterparts, can only take a clause-internal antecedent.

It is worth mentioning that the Chinese data do not involve the long-distance anaphor *ziji* as in Pollard and Xue 1998, 2001 and Huang and Liu 2001; rather, they involve the locally bound compound anaphor of the form {pronoun + *ziji*} (e.g., *ta-ziji* 'he-/she-self') as defined in Huang and Tang 1991:263.

As mentioned in the introduction, the locality of the anaphors is central because the purpose of this squib is to examine whether a subject anaphor in a finite clause is actually freed by the syntax because of being the least oblique in its o-binding domain, and to check whether, despite its locality, it is subject to other ''syntactic'' interference from NPs in higher clauses.

Now let us turn to subject anaphors in Thai and Chinese. We will examine each language with respect to the relevant parts of HPSG binding theory, as summarized here:

1. Are local subject anaphors in noncomplementary distribution with nonreflexive pronouns?
2. If the answer to question 1 is positive, are local subject anaphors actually exempt or are they bound to elements in the next higher clause?
3. If the answer to question 2 is positive, are local subject anaphors restricted by the discourse constraint (see (9)) or by the Exempt Anaphor Condition (Büring 2003)?

To put this another way: Our first step is to test whether a subject anaphor is in a noncomplementary position; if it is, we have one indication that it is exempt and a confirmation that it lacks a local o-com-

mander. The second step is to test whether it *is* actually exempt from any obligatory binding beyond its local domain. The third step is to test whether it is subject to any kind of constraint despite its ''exemptness.''

We are now ready to look at Thai and Chinese anaphors in light of these questions.

3.2 Thai

Thai subject anaphors are in noncomplementary distribution with nonreflexive pronouns, as exemplified in (26).

(26) Paul$_i$ bɔ̀ɔk John$_k$ wâa k^{h}ǎo$_{i/k}$/tuaʔeeŋ$_{i/*k}$ ca   dâj paj.
     Paul told John that he/self   FUT get go
     'Paul$_i$ told John$_k$ that he$_{i/k}$/self$_{i/*k}$ will get to go.'

Notice that *tuaʔeeŋ* always refers to the subject, which indicates subject orientation; in other words, Thai anaphors are bound by a subject NP.

Being in noncomplementary distribution with nonreflexive pronouns confirms one prediction, namely, that Thai subject anaphors do not have a local o-commander. The next step is to determine whether they are exempt or not. Sentence (27) shows that they are; the subject anaphor in the embedded clause can refer to the subject of the matrix clause, *Sue*, but it can also refer to elements outside the sentence, such as the speaker or the hearer.

(27) Sue$_i$ khít   wâa tuat^{h}ərʔeeŋ$_i$/tuak^{h}unʔeeŋ$_j$/tuach^{h}anʔeeŋ$_k$
     Sue thinks that herself/yourself/myself
     mohǒ.
     angry
     'Sue$_i$ thinks that she$_i$ (herself)/you$_j$ (yourself)/I$_k$ (myself) is/
     are/am angry.'

This leaves us with the third question: are these anaphors subject to the discourse constraint? Sentence (27) indicates that Thai subject anaphors reflect the point of view of the speaker or the hearer, each of whom, according to Büring (2003), automatically qualifies as a designated participant. Given enough context, however, Thai subject anaphors can refer to a sentence-external, 3rd person participant. For example, in (28) *tuat^{h}ərʔeeŋ* can refer to Sue, who is mentioned in an earlier sentence; it can also refer to another person—say, Sue's friend Fiona—as the index *m* shows, as long as the context lends itself to this reading—for example, if Fiona is the topic of earlier conversation.

(28) Sue$_i$ mohō. Nǎŋ sǔm p^{h}im bɔ̀ɔk wâa
     Sue angry the newspaper told that
     tuat^{h}ərʔeeŋ$_{i/m}$/tuach^{h}anʔeeŋ$_j$/tuak^{h}unʔeeŋ$_k$ cà   taj.
     herself/myself/yourself   will die
     'Sue$_i$ is angry. The newspaper said that herself$_{i/m}$/myself$_j$/
     yourself$_k$ will die.'

This shows that Thai subject anaphors are exempt and that their ante-

cedent can be determined by nonsyntactic factors, such as ''semantic, pragmatic, and discourse constraints'' (Pollard and Xue 1998: 293–294; Pollard 2005).

3.3 Chinese

Like their Thai counterparts, Chinese subject anaphors are in noncomplementary distribution with nonreflexives. For example, in (29) both the anaphor *ta-ziji* 'himself' and the nonreflexive *ta* 'he' are grammatical.

(29) Zhangsan$_i$ shuo ta-ziji$_i$/ta$_i$ hui lai.
Zhangsan say he-self/he will come
'Zhangsan$_i$ said himself$_i$/he$_i$ will come.'

Are Chinese subject anaphors exempt? Contrary to prediction, the answer is negative. Unlike (29), the following examples are ungrammatical because the subject anaphor refers to a participant who is outside the sentence:

(30) *Zhangsan$_i$ shuo wo-ziji$_k$ hui lai.
Zhangsan say I-self will come
'Zhangsan$_i$ said I (myself)$_k$ will come.'

(31) *Zhangsan$_i$ shuo ni-ziji$_k$ hui lai.
Zhangsan say you-self will come
'Zhangsan$_i$ said you (yourself)$_k$ will come.'

(32) Lisi$_i$ hen nanguo. Zhangsan$_k$ shuo ta$_{i/k}$/ta-ziji$_{*i/k}$/ziji$_{*i/k}$
Lisi very upset Zhangsan say he/he-self/self
bu shi yige hao tingzhong.
not be a good listener
'Lisi$_i$ is very upset. Zhangsan$_k$ said he$_{i/k}$/himself$_{*i/k}$/self$_{*i/k}$ is not a good listener.'

In (32), even the long-distance anaphor *ziji* cannot refer to *Lisi*. This is expected in the presence of *Zhangsan*, which, according to Pollard and Xue (1998:297), functions as a ''blocker'' or an intervening ''c-commanding animate subject.''

(33) *Blocker*
''Given distinct NP occurrences X, Y, Z in a sentence (in that order), . . . Y is an Animate Blocker for X, Z provided:
    a. Y is animate; and
    b. Y is a potential binder for Z.''
(Pollard and Xue 1998:310, (51))

(34) *Potential binder*
''X is a POTENTIAL BINDER of Y just in case X is a subject which o-commands Y.''
(Pollard and Xue 1998:310, (50))

This means that if we replace *Zhangsan* with an inanimate subject, it

should be possible to coindex *ziji* with *Lisi*. This prediction is correct, as (35) shows.

(35) Lisi$_i$ hen nanguo. Baozhi$_k$ shuo ta$_i$/ta-ziji$_{*i/*k}$/ziji$_{i/*k}$
     Lisi very upset newspaper mention he/he-self/self
     shi yige huai zongtong.
     is a bad/evil president
     'Lisi$_i$ is very upset. The newspaper$_k$ mentioned he$_i$/
     himself$_{*i/*k}$/self$_{i/*k}$ is a bad president.'

The same does not apply to the local anaphor *ta-ziji*, as (35) also shows. In the absence of a potential binder, the sentence is simply unacceptable. It seems that, unlike Thai subject anaphors, Chinese subject anaphors are not exempt from the syntactic factor that determines their antecedent, namely, the presence of a potential binder (see (34)). Even though they are not locally o-commanded, Chinese local subject anaphors are not exempt; they must be bound to the subject of the next higher finite clause.

4 Summary and Conclusion

HPSG binding theory predicts that subject anaphors are inherently exempt. The reason is that subjects are the least oblique elements in a clause—compared with direct and indirect objects—and, consequently, they have no local o-commander.

In this squib, we looked at two of the handful of languages that have local subject anaphors, Thai and Chinese (Woolford 1999). The prediction is that these anaphors are exempt from clause-external and clause-internal binding. Thai subject anaphors prove exempt as predicted, but Chinese subject anaphors do not. Another look at Pollard and Xue's (1998:310) definition of potential binders (''X is a POTENTIAL BINDER of Y just in case X is a subject which o-commands Y'') puts things in perspective. According to this definition, a subject anaphor in an embedded clause can have the subject of the next higher finite clause as a potential binder. The Chinese data show that the locality of the anaphor does not necessarily block the effect of (34). With this in mind, we can arrive at the following conclusion:

(36) A local subject anaphor X is considered an exempt anaphor if and only if, despite the presence of another subject Y such that Y is a potential o-binder of X, X is still free from syntactic restrictions concerning the choice of antecedent.

This implies that a local subject anaphor is not inherently exempt and that, despite its locality, it can have a potential o-binder in the higher clause.

Pollard and Sag's (1992) Principle A, ''A locally o-commanded anaphor must be locally o-bound,'' is assumed to be trivially met for local subject anaphors. The locality and subjecthood of such anaphors predict that they are freed by the syntax from any obligatory binding and that they are only subject to nonsyntactic constraints. The data

analyzed here, along with (36), show that this might not always be the case, and that more research is needed to confirm—or not—the inherent ''exemptness'' of local subject anaphors.

References

Büring, Daniel. 2003. The syntax and semantics of binding theory. Ms., UCLA, Los Angeles, Calif. Published as *Binding theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005).

Grima, John. 1978. Categories of zero nominal reference and clausal structure in Thai. Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Huang, C.-T. James. 1982. Logical relations in Chinese and the theory of grammar. Doctoral dissertation, MIT, Cambridge, Mass.

Huang, C.-T. James, and C.-S. Luther Liu. 2001. Logophoricity, attitudes, and *ziji* at the interface. In *Long-distance reflexives*, ed. by Peter Cole, Gabriella Hermon, and C.-T. James Huang, 141–196. San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press.

Huang, C.-T. James, and C.-C. Jane Tang. 1991. The local nature of the long-distance reflexive in Chinese. In *Long-distance anaphora*, ed. by Jan Koster and Eric Reuland, 263–282. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Huffman, Franklin E. 1970. *Modern spoken Cambodian*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Pollard, Carl. 2005. Remarks on binding theory. Paper presented at Lisbon Binding Theory Workshop.

Pollard, Carl, and Ivan Sag. 1992. Anaphors in English and the scope of binding theory. *Linguistic Inquiry* 23:261–303.

Pollard, Carl, and Ping Xue. 1998. Chinese reflexive *ziji*: Syntactic reflexives vs. nonsyntactic reflexives. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 7:287–318.

Pollard, Carl, and Ping Xue. 2001. Syntactic and nonsyntactic constraints on long-distance reflexives. In *Long-distance reflexives*, ed. by Peter Cole, Gabriella Hermon, and C.-T. James Huang, 317–342. San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press.

Rizzi, Luigi. 1990. On the anaphor-agreement effect. *Rivista di Linguistica* 2:27–42.

Trúóng Văn Chình. 1970. *Structure de la langue vietnamienne*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.

Woolford, Ellen. 1999. More on the anaphor agreement effect. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30:257–287.

Yang, Dong-Whee. 1983. The extended binding theory of anaphors. *Language Research* 19:169–192.