Coreference and self-ascription

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Abstract:

Although the classical binding theory stipulates complementary distribution of pronouns and reflexives, there are famous cases of non-complementarity: for example, a pronoun may have a local antecedent in certain contexts, obviating Condition B, as in John and Mary have a lot in common: he loves her and shei loves heri (Evans, 1970). Reinhart’s standard account contends that Condition B obviation through coreference is possible only if the sentence at issue has an interpretation that is distinguishable from its bound alternative. The paper presents new empirical and conceptual problems to the coreference rule, and proceeds to pursue a new perspective: A pronoun and a local antecedent may have common reference iff the result makes for a non-self-ascriptive reading of the pronoun. Previously unnoticed empirical evidence that supports this view comes from several sources: I. There is a meaning difference between sentences that allow a pronoun to be locally coreferential, and their bound alternatives: coreferential pronouns, but no other anaphoric expression, allow non-self-ascriptive readings (resulting, I argue, in de re readings, on a par with those in belief contexts). This meaning difference enables Local Coreference (a.k.a Condition B obviation).

II. The distribution of coreferential pronouns is narrower than previously supposed? in standard contexts, only a restricted class of (mostly intensional) predicates allows coreference. E.g., a coreference reading can be squeezed out of John and Mary have a lot in common: he adores her and shei adores heri; but in John and Mary do the same thing on Tuesdays: he tells her stories and shei tells her#i stories, coreference in the second conjunct is much more difficult to obtain. This restriction appears to stem from the unavailability of non-self-ascriptive readings of pronouns when the predicate is non-intensional (like tell). I show how a revised coreference rule, in which Condition B obviation is triggered by a non-self-ascriptive (or de re) pronoun, handles all these new facts. I then proceed to discuss additional phenomena:

III. A quantified subject of an ECM verb and the pronominal subject of this verb’s complement can have common reference, with the pronoun assuming a collective (as distinct from distributive) interpretation, contrary to Chomsky’s (1986) observations. These facts lead to a revised coreference rule: Condition B obviation is possible iff the resulting meaning is different from the bound reading.

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