Binding and Deixis in Dravidian and Indo-aryan Languages

Data and problems. In many South Asian languages the pronominal system carries deictic features (in the 3rd person) that derive directly form demonstratives. These systems have a pair of 3rd person pronouns that contain a morphologically overt marker indicating closeness or distance to the speaker. The former is labelled proximal (PX) and the second distal DX. Among those languages, Bangla is exceptional: not only it has markers for proximal and distal features, but it also has a third marker, usually labelled *sequent*, which is non-deictic and has the role of anaphoric marker.

Interestingly, the distribution of distals and proximals in bound variable reading (BVR) contexts is different: in all the languages in my sample, proximal pronouns are never bound. In addition to that, Bangla does not allow a distal pronoun to be bound; here only the sequent pronoun can be variable bound. The situation is exemplified in (1) for Hindi:

(1) [Saare students]$_i$ apne$_i$/ onna$_i$/ enna$_{*i}$ de teacher nu pyaar karde ne [Hindi]
all students SELF/ DX.PL/ PX.PL GEN teacher.SG ACC love do be
[All the students]$_i$ love their$_i$ teacher

A proximal pronoun can be coreferent with a DP or a proper name if they are accompanied by gesture or if the antecedent contains a proximal demonstrative (which is morphologically related to the pronominal deictic marker).

(2) [yah ladki]$_i$ classroom mein thi. mai-ne isko$_i$/ usko$_i$ dekhaa. [Hindi]
this girl classroom in was I PX.SG.ACC DX.SG.ACC saw
[This girl] was in the classroom. I saw her$_i$.

This means that proximal pronouns might not be available for BVR for feature matching reasons. However, if a quantified expression contains a proximal demonstrative, the effect does not change: only a collective reading is obtained, not a distributive one. Only distals (and the sequent in Bangla) allow a distributivity reading and hence variable binding:

(3) **yehe** sab chaTra **uske/** ***iske** adheapac ka samman karte he [Hindi]
PL.PX all students DX.SG.GEN PX.SG.GEN teacher of respect make are
[All these students]$_i$ respect their$_i$ teacher

BVR is not available for proximal pronouns also in different scenarios: with a Wh antecedent or in sloppy elliptical contexts, as I will show during the discussion.

Analysis I propose, starting from a suggestion made by Kayne (2010), that a proximal item, like the English *this*, might contain an element akin to a 1st person feature. Kayne's main goal is to account for the unavailability of *this* as a relative pronoun, but his proposal can be adapted to the cases in exam in the following way:

- a proximal element incorporates a 1st person feature in its semantic value because of its "strong" link to the context of utterance (in Kaplan's (1989) sense) realized by the context feature Place of Utterance. The deictic value of this feature is not "1st person", but it is dependent on it, since it expresses the proximity to the speaker. Data from indexical shifting languages, like Amharic, Tamil and Punjabi show that Place of Utterance and Speaker are not the same feature, as I will explain.

- The contextual dependency is optional for distal items in two-ways demonstrative systems, but it is not for proximals: a proximal item needs to be specified for Speaker's location, while a distal does not (i.e: distals are underspecified). I will argue that the dependency of proximals from the context is the key element to explain their status as non-variable bound items. Crucially, this approach makes two predictions that are borne out by the data: a) whenever a distal is used ostensively, a context dependency is established and it cannot be variable bound; b) in a system like Bangla, where the sequent demonstrative is already underspecified for Place of Utterance, the distal is deictic and resists BVR. Bangla data will be provided in support of this proposal.

I will conclude by showing that the contextual dependency or proximal pronouns can be resolved in technical terms using Mayer's (2009) proposal. His semantic model implements two crucial mechanisms:

- Higher-Order Unification, which assigns the correct values to indexicals when they give rise to a sloppy (bound) interpretation; the over-generation of such a treatment is amended by

- a pragmatic blocking rule, which prevents the bound variable interpretation of "heavy" referents, like proper names and definite descriptions when a "lighter" referent (like a pronoun) is available, like in the pair *Only John did John's homework* vs *Only John did his homework.*

Following this logic, a treatment of proximal pronouns as heavy referents and distal pronouns as light referents will be provided during the talk. The analysis will be supported by data from three Indo-aryan languages (Bangla, Hindi and Punjabi) and three Dravidian languages (Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu).

References

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