Did Vedic Sanskrit have anaphors? The case of *svá-*

The aim of this paper is to determine the anaphoric status of the Sanskrit possessive adjective *svá-* 'one's own; SELF's' (cognate with Lat. *suus*, Russ. *svoj*, Icelandic *sinn*, etc.), and to explain its distribution in Rigvedic Sanskrit.

The literature is divided on whether or not *svá-* is a genuine reflexive possessive as in its related languages or an emphatic adjective meaning 'own'. Furthermore, it has been variously described as topic (Pinault (2001)), rheme (Vine (1997)) or agent (Hock (2006)) oriented. As for its distribution, *svá-* can take first, second and third person antecedents. However, Sanskrit also has designated pronominal forms for first and second person possessors, namely the genitive of the personal pronoun paradigm. These forms are usually used when the possessor and the subject of the clause are not identical, and it seems at first glance that the distribution between these forms and *svá-* can be predicted by the traditional principles A and B of the Binding Theory.

However, there are additional factors complicating this picture. For example, when the subject of the clause and the possessor are identical, no special possessive form is used (both for alienable and inalienable posession):

(1)   RV 10,95,12a:

        kadā́   sūnúḥ   pitáram   ... ichā́c
        When son-N.sg. father-A.sg.   search-3.sg.subj.

        'When will the son look for [his] father?'

Arguing that *svá-* suppletes the paradigm of the possessive pronoun for the third person cannot explain why it is missing in cases like (1) or the fact that it can take 1. & 2. person antecedents.

Based on the data from the oldest Sanskrit text, the Rigveda, I will argue in this paper that the distribution of *svá-* can be better understood by distinguishing at least three synchronic uses, 1) 'emphatic', 2) adjective 'own' and 3) possessive anaphor. Furthermore, I will argue that in the latter case, *svá-* needs to be locally bound by a c-commanding antecedent. That 'agent'- or 'subject-orientation' alone is not an adequate characterization is clear from cases like (2):

(2)   RV 6,20,11:

        mahé   pitré   dadā́tha   sváṃ   nápātam
        great-D.sg. father-D.sg. give-2.sg.pf. SVÁ-A.sg. nephew-A.sg.

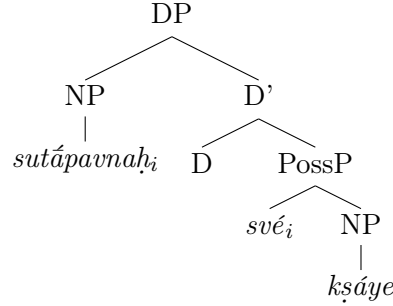   'You have given the grandfather$_i$ his$_i$ nephew.'

I will furthermore show that constructions that had previously been problematic for 'subject-oriented' approaches, constructions with genitive antecedents and participial constructions, can be explained in this approach assuming that it is the genitive possessor that binds *svá-* in the former:

(3)   a.   8,2,7:
        ... sómāḥ   sutā́saḥ   santu   devasya své$_i$ kṣáye
           Soma-N.pl. pressed-N.pl. be-3.pl.ipv. god-G.sg. SVÁ-L.sg. home-L.sg.
        sutapā́vnaḥ$_i$
        soma.drinker-G.sg.

        'Let the Somas of the god be pressed in the soma-drinker's$_i$ own$_i$ house.'

b. (before movement)

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                         DP
                        /  \
                      NP     D'
                      |     /  \
              sutā́pavnaḥᵢ  D   PossP
                             / \
                          svéᵢ  NP
                                |
                               kṣā́ye
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As for the latter participial constructions, the antecedent is the PRO of the participial phrase:

(4)   RV 1,1,7/8:

emasi	rā́jantamᵢ	...	[PROᵢ vardhamā́naṃ	svéᵢ	dáme]
approach-1.pl.pres.	ruler-A.sg.		growing.up-A.sg.mid.ptcp.	SVÁ-L.sg.	house-L.sg.

'We are approaching the ruler$_i$ (...) [PRO$_i$ growing up [in his$_i$ (own) house]]'

Based on this, I will argue that Vedic *svá-* behaves as a possessive locally bounded anaphor in the Rigveda. However, this is only one of its uses. I will show that hierarchy-based approaches like Kiparsky (2002) and (2011) and Safir (2004) which hierarchically order referentially dependent material are more adequate for predicting the synchronic distribution of Vedic *svá-* than classical approaches to Binding Theory like Reinhart and Reuland (1993). Based on these approaches, I will end with briefly sketching out a dependency hierarchy for encoding reflexivity in early Sanskrit, especially with respect to the status of two other potential anaphors in Vedic, grammaticalized *tanū́-* 'body' and *ātmán-* 'soul'.

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