

Vietnamese anaphora: Binding conditions & the lack thereof

Rudmila-Rodica Ivan (UMass Amherst) & Thuy Bui (UMass Amherst)

I. INTRODUCTION & PROPOSAL. Condition B of the Binding Theory prohibits coreference between a pronoun and an antecedent its binding domain (Chomsky, 1981, 1986; Büring, 2005, a.o.). We present novel data from Vietnamese and argue that i) Vietnamese is not subject to a grammaticized Condition B, ii) that Vietnamese supports competition-based accounts of Condition B (Rooryck & vanden Wyngaerd, 2011; Safir, 2014), and that iii) Condition B effects are observed as a matter of context-dependent preference. Finally, we look at an outlying puzzle for Binding Theory accounts, namely the optionality of the predicate reflexive particle *tu*.

II. BACKGROUND. While classic BT accounts treat Conditions A and B as universal, independent principles, other accounts assume Condition A and model Condition B as a side effect of the *competition* between reflexive and non-reflexive pronouns. This approach dates back to Reinhart (1983, 2006), who suggests that the choice of *himself* over bound *him* is an instance of *minimizing interpretative options*. Other approaches extend Reinhart (1983, 2006) to pronominal competition applying at a semantic (Schlenker, 2005) or a syntactic level (Rooryck & vanden Wyngaerd, 2011; Safir, 2004, 2014). Nevertheless, the leading idea remains the same: Condition B effects are a side effect of different pronominal forms competing for the same positions.

III. VIETNAMESE VS. CLASSIC BT ACCOUNTS. Vietnamese is not subject to grammaticized conditions on binding and coreference. Consider the data below which illustrates, that unlike in English, *mình*, the equivalent of *herself*, does not need to be locally-bound, and that the personal pronoun *nó*, the equivalent of *her*, can corefer with local antecedents. The Vietnamese data in (1) and (2) cannot be accounted for by classic outlooks on BT conditions as universal principles (Chomsky 1981, 1986; Büring 2005) on local binding.

- (1) a. Luna₁ nói là Ginny₂ trách **mình**_{1/2}. (2) a. Luna₁ nói là Ginny₂ trách **nó**_{1/2}.
Luna say that Ginny criticize SELF Luna say that Ginny criticize 3SG
'L said that G criticizes her/herself.' 'L said that G criticizes her/herself.'
b. Luna₁ said that Ginny₂ criticizes herself_{*1/2} b. Luna₁ said that Ginny₂ criticizes her_{*2/1}.

IV. VIETNAMESE VS. COMPETITION-BASED ACCOUNTS. Competition-based accounts predict that the presence of Condition B effects depends on whether a language has a dedicated reflexive form (Rooryck & vanden Wyngaerd, 2011), and recent data from Jambi (Cole, Hermon & Yanti, 2015) and Chamorro (Wagers, Chung & Borja, 2017) support this view: the absence of Condition B effects correlates with the absence of specialized reflexive anaphors. Since the reflexive pronoun *mình* is not subject to Condition A and, furthermore, it is a logophor which can pick out the perspective center (*mình* can also refer to the speaker in (1a)), it can be argued that Vietnamese does not have a 'dedicated reflexive pronoun', which, in theory, would not be competing with the non-reflexive *nó*. Under this view, the flexibility of either surface form expressing a reflexive relationship is due to the absence of a dedicated reflexive pronoun.

V. PUZZLE: CONDITION B EFFECTS AS A MATTER OF PLAUSIBILITY. What neither classic and competition-based accounts predict is that *context-dependent preference* should play a role in the availability of bound or disjoint readings. Although the predicate used in (1) and (2), *criticize*, readily gives rise to both reflexive and non-reflexive interpretations (including when the subject is a quantified expression like *every student*), certain verbs exhibit different *preferential* patterns.

- (3) a. Luna₁ yêu **mình**_{1/2}. b. Luna₁ yêu **nó**_{1/2}
Luna love SELF Luna love 3SG
'Luna loves herself / **me**.' 'Luna loves herself / **her**.'

(4) a. Mọi₁ đưa con gái yêu **mình**_{1/2}.
 every CL CL girl love SELF
 ‘Every girl loves herself / **me**.’

b. Mọi₁ đưa con gái yêu **nó**_{1/2}.
 every CL CL girl love 3SG
 ‘Every girl loves herself / **her**.’

For instance, in the case of verbs like *gossip about*, *kiss*, or *love*, although both bound and disjoint readings are available, the disjoint reading is strongly preferred for *nó*, because it is more plausible. Furthermore, the preferred interpretation for *mình* in these cases is that of a logophor, resolving to the perspective holder. Once again, the bound readings are grammatically available, preferential Condition B effects are a matter of context-dependent plausibility. This is supported by the fact that when changing the subject in (3) and (4) to *the arrogant woman* or *every arrogant woman* the preference for disjoint interpretation is weakened, due to the increased likelihood of self-love in the context. Although Vietnamese does not have a *grammaticalized* Condition B, the ‘hard’ constraint realized as Principle B cross-linguistically is a *softer constraint* (Bresnan, Dingare & Manning, 2001) in Vietnamese.

VI. PUZZLE: THE REFLEXIVE PARTICLE *tự*. Competition-based accounts hypothesize that the absence of Condition B effects is correlated with the absence of a dedicated reflexive anaphor. While *mình* can be argued to be a logophor (and hence not a *dedicated* reflexive), Vietnamese does employ a reflexive marker on predicates, *tự*, which unambiguously leads to a locally bound interpretation of the object pronoun, be it the logophor *mình* or the personal pronoun *nó*.

(5) a. Luna₁ tự yêu **mình**₁.
 Luna REFL love SELF
 ‘Luna loves **herself**.’

b. Luna₁ tự yêu **nó**₁.
 Luna REFL love 3SG
 ‘Luna loves **herself**.’

(6) a. Mọi₁ đưa con gái tự yêu **mình**₁.
 every CL CL girl REFL love SELF
 ‘Every girl loves **herself**.’

b. Mọi₁ đưa con gái tự yêu **nó**₁.
 every CL CL girl REFL love 3SG
 ‘Every girl loves **herself**.’

The sentences in (5) and (6) are minimal pairs of (3) and (4). While (3) and (4) could grammatically be construed as either bound or expressing disjoint reference, the presence of *tự* in (5) and (6) renders the utterances reflexive. Note that Vietnamese is not a null object language, so the presence of an object pronoun is mandatory. This differentiates the *tự* marker from *self* prefixes on predicates crosslinguistically, for instance English (*Everyone self-criticizes*), where an object pronoun is optional. Moreover, in Vietnamese both the logophor and the personal pronoun can and *must* be bound by the local subject, similarly to equivalent utterances in Romance languages with *se*-clitics (Sportiche, 1998). Consequently, we argue that the Vietnamese reflexive marker *tự* is the spell-out of a λ -abstractor (Heim & Kratzer, 1998; Reinhart, 2006) which is responsible for the binding relation. What is surprising for both classic and competition-based accounts is that this reflexive marker is optional, and a reflexive interpretation of either the logophor *mình* or the personal pronoun *nó* is available irrespective of the presence or absence of the reflexive marker. According to competition-based accounts, this specialized reflexive marker should lead to (2), (3b), (4b), (5b) and (6b) being necessarily interpreted as disjoint.

VII. CONCLUSION & OUTLOOK. The novel data presented in this talk fill a typological gap in the literature. We show that *mình* is a logophor (like Mandarin *ziji* – Huang & Liu, 2001) which is not subject to locality conditions, and that the pronoun *nó* is not subject to a grammaticized Condition B. The data would be in line with competition-based accounts, however, the context-dependent preferential binding patterns are surprising for the current literature, as is the availability of a specialized reflexive marker. Vietnamese would shed light on reinterpreting the binding conditions as *softer* constraints on preference, rather than strict grammaticality.