Interpretable but not interpreted

Orin Percus

Université de Nantes/
LLING EA 3827
orinalt@yahoo.com

This paper takes the position that the interpretive procedure may selectively ignore pieces of an LF that on other occasions it associates with an interpretation. I cite arguments (from earlier work) that pronouns in particular can go uninterpreted.

1. Introduction

Is the procedure that interprets syntactic structures obliged to interpret everything it sees? No, I suggest in this note. Even items that are in principle associated with an interpretation may go uninterpreted.

In what follows I summarize recent work that points to this conclusion. This work argues that, if we start from a view of interpretation along the lines of Heim and Kratzer 1998, and we take the position that the interpretive procedure treats pronouns and traces as variables, then in certain cases it seems that these elements are just ignored. I will limit myself here to arguments that pronouns can go uninterpreted. My concern will be with pronoun-containing constituents that have the meaning we would obtain with a variable in the position of the pronoun and a binder at the top ((1b)). I will present reasons for thinking that the meaning comes from an LF where an item that contributes nothing on its own moves from the surface position of the pronoun, leaving (as movement does) a binder and a trace ((1c)). And I will present reasons for thinking that this item is in fact the pronoun itself ((1d)).

(1) a.   [... pronoun ...   ]
     b.   [**1** [... **var$_1$** ...   ]]
     c.   [∅ [**1** [... **t$_1$** ...   ]]
     d.   [(pronoun$_i$) [**1** [... **t$_1$** ...   ]]

   (Parentheses around the pronoun indicate that the pronoun goes uninterpreted.)

2. Uninterpreted pronouns in dream reports (P[ercus and]S[auerland 2003])

Dream reports like (2a) are ambiguous, though to see this one needs to consider complex scenarios -- scenarios where John dreams that he is someone else, and where, in his dream, he himself appears as another character. (2a) can report that the "dream ego" got hit by an avalanche or that that other character did. Let's focus on the former reading. In PS we take the position that in this case the complement clause has the meaning that we would obtain with a variable in the position of the pronoun and a binder at the top ((2b)). The idea is that the complement of *dream* gives us the property that the subject attributes to the dream ego -- here, the property of being hit by an avalanche. How do we arrive at this meaning for the complement clause? Notice that a pronoun that "stands for the dream ego," just like a pronoun that "stands for the dreamer," takes the form that a variable bound by the subject would take. In essence, we argue that we arrive at this meaning for the complement clause when, at LF, a pronoun bound by the subject moves to the top of the embedded clause and goes uninterpreted ((2c)). Summarizing, we take "dream ego" pronouns to be pronouns whose positions are occupied at LF by variables bound at the top of the complement clause. And we argue that the way the binder gets there is by movement of a bound pronoun which then goes uninterpreted.

(2) a. John dreamed [that an avalanche hit him]
   b.   ...   [**2** [that an avalanche hit **var$_2$**]]
   c. John [1 t$_1$ dreamed [(him$_1$) **2** [an avalanche hit **t$_2$**]]

   The argument is that, if we assume this, an otherwise surprising constraint on the readings that dream reports exhibit gets explained naturally in terms of a familiar constraint on movement. We show that dream reports with more than one pronoun exclude readings on which a "dreamer" pronoun c-commands all the "dream ego" pronouns. John could not use (3a), for example, to describe a dream in which he revisited his own wedding from the perspective of his wife's grandfather. Why should this be? Assuming that "dreamer" pronouns are just pronouns bound by the subject, to arrive at such a reading we would have to move one variable bound by the subject (the "dream ego" pronoun) over a c-commanding variable bound by the subject ((3b)). This is a classic superiority violation: one element is moving to the edge when there is a closer identical element around that could move instead. Note that for this explanation not only must movement occur from the surface position of "dream ego" pronouns, but also the *pronoun itself* must be moving: superiority concerns competition between two like items.

(3) a. I dreamed that I was marrying my grand-daughter.
   b. * I [1 t$_1$ dreamed [(my$_1$) **2** I$_1$ was marrying **t$_2$** grand-daughter]]

3.   Uninterpreted variables in resumption (D[emirdache and]P[ercus], to appear)

Jordanian Arabic contains resumptive constructions like the relative clauses in (4a,5a), where we find a clitic pronoun and the epithet *ha-l-Hmar*, a complex term made up of a pronominal item *ha* and an expressive. These relative clauses admit meanings of the kind we would obtain from structures like (4b,5b). In DP we argue that these meanings arise via movement of a pronoun which then goes uninterpreted ((4c,5c)).

(4) a. kull walad [illi fakartu   ?innu Layla bitHibb-uh] ...
       every boy   that you.thought   that Layla loves-him
    b. [**2** [you thought that Layla loves **var$_2$**]]
    c. [(uh$_1$) **2** [you thought that Layla loves **t$_2$**]]

(5) a. kull walad [?umm-oh   fakkart ha-l-Hmar   bi-l-bajat   ] ...
       every boy   mother-his thought pro-the-donkey at-the-house
    b. [**2** [**var$_2$**'s mother thought that [**var$_2$** the donkey] is at home]
    c. [(oh$_1$) **2** [**t$_2$**'s mother thought that [**ha$_2$** the donkey] is at home]

   One argument of ours (recapitulating Demirdache 1991) is, again, that an otherwise surprising constraint on readings gets reduced to a familiar constraint on movement. In certain environments, a clitic pronoun and an epithet can only "behave as cobound variables" when the clitic *precedes* the epithet -- the relative clause in (6a) does *not* describe individuals whose mother thinks they will end up in prison. Importantly, these environments (all quantificational) are environments where an epithet could not appear as the sole resumptive element. On our perspective, this means that something is preventing movement from the position of the epithet's pronoun. And in that case, when the clitic follows the epithet as in (6a), the only remaining way of generating the "cobound" reading is to move from the clitic's position, violating crossover constraints ((6b)):

 (6) a. kull walad [?um   ha-l-Hmar   fakkart ?innu rah   yzittu-u bi-lHabs]
      every boy   mother pro-the-donkey thought that they.will put-him in-prison
    b. * [(u$_1$) **2** [[**ha$_2$** the donkey]'s mother thought that they will put **t$_2$** in prison]

   This argument is fundamentally an argument that resumptive constructions involve movement from the surface position of a pronoun, and not that what is moving is a variable that goes uninterpreted. But this further step looks plausible in light of the dream report evidence, and also in light of the fact that, hidden in the Jordanian data, there is an argument that *traces* can go uninterpreted. Space limitations force me to refer the reader to DP for this latter argument. I will just enigmatically note that, if what we say there is correct, then this has the attractive consequence that, despite initial appearances, the movement of resumptive pronouns respects conditions on long distance movement.

4. Other uninterpreted pronouns ?

If binders could be freely inserted, then we would expect another structure for our pronoun-containing constituents where the pronoun remains in situ and gets bound by a freely inserted binder at the top. So our discussion until now suggests that binders can only get into the syntax via movement. Once we take this position, we find candidates for moved uninterpreted pronouns in a variety of other variable binding constructions.

English-style "intrusive" resumptive constructions are a prime example, and here there is evidence. For instance, (7a) and (7b) are perceived as differing in status when we try to understand them as involving two cobound variables, and this is what we would expect: since (8) indicates that the pronoun in the initial position can't move up, the difference in (7) comes out as the difference between weak and strong crossover.

(7) Who did {a. # his mother, b. ## he } wonder whether he had a rare disease?

(8) * Who did {a. his mother, b. he } wonder whether you had a rare disease?

Among other constructions, those with *have* (though notoriously tricky) deserve a look. One line takes sentences like *John has a daughter* to be paradigmatic: in *John has an X*, *X* is a relation. In (9a), then, *who he can rely on* should restrict the *daughter* relation, arguably by denoting a relation itself, and we now have a simple way to obtain this:

(9) a. John has a daughter who he can rely on.

    b. daughter [**(he$_3$) 1** [(who) 2 **t$_1$** can rely on t$_2$]]

5. Conclusion

Anaphora aside, we don't often imagine that an element's interpretation can depend on the context in which it appears. Here I explored a version of this hypothesis, suggesting that sometimes elements are just ignored. I looked at pronouns, in cases where ignoring them is actually of use -- if binders only arise via movement, interpreting them would have led to a type mismatch somewhere. I have other elements in mind too, though.

Bibliography

Demirdache, H.: 1991, *Resumptive Chains in Restrictive Relatives, Appositives and Dislocation Structures*, Ph.D. thesis, MIT, Cambridge Mass.

Demirdache, H. and Percus, O.: to appear, When is a pronoun not a pronoun? The case of resumptives, in *Proceedings of NELS 38*, GLSA, UMass, Amherst

Percus, O. and Sauerland, U.: 2003, Pronoun movement in dream reports, in M. Kadowaki, S. Kawahara (eds.), *Proceedings of NELS 33*, GLSA, UMass, Amherst