

Semantic effects on the interpretation of pronouns and reflexives: Avoiding the unknown

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In this talk, I will discuss a series of psycholinguistic experiments investigating the syntax-semantics interface in the domain of reference resolution, focusing on issues linked to logophoricity, specificity and perspective-taking. The well-known syntactic complementarity of pronouns and reflexives breaks down in certain environments, such as picture-NPs (PNPs, e.g. *the picture of her/herself*), where both forms can refer to the subject. In earlier work, we showed that pronouns and reflexives in PNPs (ex.1a,b) are guided by contrasting syntactic and semantic preferences: reflexives prefer subjects and sources-of-information; pronouns prefer objects and perceivers (Kaiser et al., 2009). However, this ‘persistent complementarity’ idea is at odds with observations pointing to similar preferences: Kuno (1987) claims that PNP reflexives are sensitive to *Point-of-View (POV)*; Tenny (2003) suggests PNP pronouns also refer to the person whose POV is being represented.

In a series of new experiments, we investigated the extent to which pronouns and reflexives are governed by shared vs. opposing biases. To manipulate Point-of-View, we used names vs. indefinite ‘someone’. This is because if someone’s identity is unspecified/indefinite, that entity is not a suitable POV-anchor (e.g. Kuno 1987): If a particular form is used to refer to the person whose POV is being represented, that form should show a dispreference for ‘someone’. In the experiments, participants read sentences like ex.(2a,b) and indicated who is in the picture. Because ‘someone’ can receive a specific reading, we also tested other referentially-unspecified elements, namely bare ‘who’ and ‘which of the X’ (ex.3). (If time permits, I will also discuss data for speaker-linked ‘someone’, e.g. ‘someone I know from high school.’)

The results replicate Kaiser et al.’s complementary subject/object and source/perceiver biases, but they also show that pronouns and reflexives share a dislike of unspecified, non-POV antecedents. This suggests that pronouns and reflexives are guided by some shared and some non-overlapping constraints. This points to a decompositional/multi-constraint account, e.g. Sell’s (1987) view that logophoricity stems from three interacting primitives.

- (1a) Peter told John about the picture of {him/himself}. [Peter = source-of-information]
- (1b) Peter heard from John about the picture of {him/himself}. [Peter = perceiver-of-info]
- (2a) Nick told someone about the picture of {him/himself}.
- (2b) Someone told Nick about the picture of {him/himself}.
- (3a) {Who/Which of the men} told Nick about the picture of {him/himself}?
- (3b) {Who/Which of the man} did Nick tell about the picture of {him/himself}?

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