ALTERNATIVES TO REFLEXIVES IN THAI AND VIETNAMESE: BINDING THEORY AND LANGUAGE VARIATIONS[1]

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I discuss coreference phenomena in Thai and Vietnamese in the framework of Principles-and-Parameters developed originally by Chomsky (1981). In particular, I argue against Lasnik's (1986) proposed theory of parameterized Binding Condition C, in which Thai and Vietnamese data play an important role.

1. CHOMSKY'S THEORY OF BINDING CONDITION C. In Chomsky's Binding Theory, R(eferring) expressions, such as names and epithets, are subject to Binding Condition C stated as in (1):

> (1) Binding Condition C (Chomsky 1981)
> An R-expression must be free.

'Free' is defined as 'not bound', and 'bind' is defined as in (2):

> (2) α binds β if (i) α c-commands β, and (ii) α and β are coindexed.

I assume the following definition of 'c-command':

> (3) α c-commands β if every branching node dominating α dominates β, and neither α nor β dominates the other.

Coindexed NPs are interpreted as coreferential. Condition C was formulated to account for the unacceptability of English sentences such as those in (4):

(4) a. *$John_i$ visited $John_i$'s friend.
  b. *$John_i$ thinks that Mary likes the $idiot_i$.

In (4-a), the first name *John* binds the second name *John*, since they are coindexed, and the former c-commands the latter. In (4-

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b), the name *John* binds the epithet *the idiot*.. Both (a) and (b) violate Condition C. In addition, the unacceptability status of a sentence such as (5) is also accounted for by Condition C:

(5) *John$_i$ likes John$_i$.

2. LASNIK'S THEORY OF BINDING CONDITION C. Chomsky's Condition C cannot be universal, since there are languages that allow the binding relation contained in (4-a). According to Lasnik 1986, Thai and Vietnamese are of this type, as illustrated in (6):

    (6) a. (Thai data from Lasnik 1986)
        cɔɔn$_i$ khít wâa cɔɔn$_i$ chàlaàt
        'John$_i$ thinks that John$_i$ is smart'.
      b. (Vietnamese data from Lasnik 1986)
        John$_i$ tin John$_i$ sẽ thắng
        'John$_i$ thinks John$_i$ will win'.

Lasnik observes further that Thai and Vietnamese versions of (4-b), in which a name binds an epithet, are acceptable as shown in (7), but an epithet is not allowed to bind a name in these languages, as shown in (8):

    (7) a. cɔɔn$_i$ khít wâa ʔâybâa$_i$ chàlaàt .
        'John$_i$ thinks that the nut$_i$ is smart'.
      b. John$_i$ tin cai thằng chó đẻ$_i$ sẽ thắng
        'John$_i$ believes the SOB$_i$ will win'.
    (8) a. *ʔaybaa$_i$ khít wâa cɔɔn$_i$ chàlaàt
        'The nut$_i$ thinks that John$_i$ is smart'.
      b. *cai thằng chó đẻ$_i$ tin John$_i$ sẽ thắng
        'The SOB$_i$ believes John$_i$ will win'.

Lasnik points out that the notion of 'referentiality' is relevant to these binding facts: epithets are less referential than names, and the binding of a more referential expression by a less referential one results in unacceptability. He generalizes this as a universal principle in the following form:

    (9) Referential Hierarchy Condition (Lasnik 1986)
        A more referential expression must be free from a
        less referential one.

Then, the well-known universal phenomenon that an R-expression cannot be bound by a pronoun as illustrated in (10) also follows from (9):

(10) a.*He$_i$ visited John$_i$'s brother.
 b.*Khǎw$_i$ khít wâa cɔɔn$_i$ chàlaàt
  'He$_i$ thinks that John$_i$ is smart'.
 c.*Nó$_i$ tin John$_i$ sẽ thǎng.
  'He$_i$ believes that John$_i$ will win'.

The notion of 'referentiality' is incorporated in Lasnik's proposed feature analysis for nominal categories. He adds the feature [±r] to Chomsky's analysis with two binary features [±a(naphor)] and [±p(ronominal)]. Both anaphor and pronominal categories bear [-r], and names and epithets are categories of R-expression bearing [+r] but are distinct from each other by the value of the feature [p]:

(11) a. Anaphors: [-r, -p, +a]
  b. Pronominals: [-r, +p, -a]
  c. Epithets: [+r, +p, -a]
  d. Names: [+r, -p, -a]

Lasnik argues that language specific Condition Cs are needed in addition to the Referentiality Hierarchy Condition (henceforth RHC) in order to account for cross-linguistically varied Condition C effects. First, he generalizes the data in (4), that English forbids the binding of an R-expression even when RHC is met, and proposes Chomsky's Condition C as a condition specific to English, as in (12):

(12) Condition C for English (Lasnik, 1986)
  An R-expression must be free.

Lasnik observes the acceptability contrast in Vietnamese sentences in (13):

(13) a. John$_i$ tin John$_i$ sẽ thǎng.
   'John$_i$ believes John$_i$ will win'.
  b. *John$_i$ thương John$_i$.
   'John$_i$ likes John$_i$'.

(13-b) is a typical case of binding within a governing category (henceforth gc). For the present paper, I leave gc undefined except to note that what is relevant to my discussion is the minimal clause containing the target NP in an object position, as in (14):

(14) [NP V *NP*]

When the object NP is coindexed with the subject NP in the clause in (14), the object NP is bound in its gc. In order to account for the unacceptability of (13-b), Lasnik formulates Condition C for Vietnamese as in (15):

(15) Condition C for Vietnamese (Lasnik, 1986)
An R-expression must be free in its governing category.

Further, Lasnik observes that (16), the Thai versions of (13), are both acceptable:

(16) a. cɔɔn $_i$ khít wâa cɔɔn $_i$ chàlaàt
'John$_i$ thinks that John$_i$ is smart'.

b. cɔɔn $_i$ chɔɔp cɔɔn $_i$
'John$_i$ likes John$_i$'.

Thus, Lasnik concludes that Thai R-expressions are constrained only by RHC. To summarize, Lasnik proposes parameterized Condition Cs for English, Vietnamese, and Thai as follows:

(17) Parameterized Condition C (Lasnik, 1986)
a. English: An R-expression must be free.
b. Vietnamese: An R-expression must be free in its gc.
c. Thai: No requirement.

In Narahara 1991, I provided data which Lasnik's Condition C for English incorrectly disallows, and offered a modified version. I also discussed the fact that my consultation with native speakers of Vietnamese and Thai points to a generalization which is different from that of Lasnik's. In the present paper I follow up my argument against Lasnik's theory of parameterized Condition C for Thai and Vietnamese.