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

TOMIKO NARAHARA
Vassar College

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) \( \alpha \) binds \( \beta \) if (i) \( \alpha \) c-commands \( \beta \), and (ii) \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \) are coindexed.

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

(3) \( \alpha \) c-commands \( \beta \) if every branching node dominating \( \alpha \) dominates \( \beta \), and neither \( \alpha \) nor \( \beta \) 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\textsubscript{1} visited John\textsubscript{1}'s friend.
    b. *John\textsubscript{1} thinks that Mary likes the idiot\textsubscript{1}.

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-
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) *John₁ likes John₂.

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)

    คุณ₁ที่ว่าคุณ₁จะฉลาด
    'John₁ thinks that John₁ is smart'.

b. (Vietnamese data from Lasnik 1986)

    John₁ tin John₁ sẽ thắng
    'John₁ thinks John₁ 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. คุณ₁ที่ว่า ญี่ปุ่น₁จะฉลาด.
    'John₁ thinks that the nut₁ is smart'.

b. John₁ tin câu thắng chỗ đen₁ sẽ thắng
    'John₁ believes the SOB₁ will win'.

(8) a. *ญี่ปุ่น₁ที่ว่า คุณ₁จะฉลาด.
    'The nut₁ thinks that John₁ is smart'.

b. *ค้น้ำเต็มทอง chỗดำ₁ติน John₁ sẽ thắng
    'The SOB₁ believes John₁ 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. *Khāw$_i$ khīt wāa cɔɔn$_i$ chālāăt
       'He$_i$ thinks that John$_i$ is smart'.
    c. *Nọ$_i$ tin John$_i$ sē thāng.
       '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 $\pm r$ to Chomsky's analysis with two binary features $\pm a$ (naphor) and $\pm p$ (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$_i$ sē thāng.
    '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) \[ \text{NP V NP} \]

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. \text{coo}_i \text{ khít wàa coo}_i \text{ chàlaàt}
  'John\text{ }_i \text{ thinks that John}_i \text{ is smart}.'

  b. \text{coo}_i \text{ choop coo}_i
  'John\text{ }_i \text{ 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.
3. THAI AND VIETNAMESE REFLEXIVE CONSTRUCTIONS. In Vietnamese, one of the reflexive constructions involves a morpheme *tư, which precedes the verb, and a pronoun. An example is shown below:

\[(18) \text{ Nơi } \text{ tươ } \text{ dânh } \text{ nơi} \]
\[3 \text{ per RF}^2 \text{ hit } 3 \text{ per}^3 \]
\[\text{ 'Hei hit himselfi'.} \]

The Thai reflexive constructions involve *tua and *peng. These morphemes are used either by themselves or with a pronoun as illustrated below:

\[(19) \text{ a. Deewfit } \text{ chọp } \text{ TUA } \text{ ŞEENG } \text{ i} \]
\[\text{ David like RF RF} \]
\[\text{ b. Deewfit } \text{ chọp } \text{ TUA } \text{ KHAW } \text{ ŞEENG } \text{ i} \]
\[\text{ David like RF 3-per RF} \]
\[\text{ 'Davidi likes himselfi'.} \]

4. GENERALIZATION OF CONDITION B. Both Thai and Vietnamese informants whom I consulted reject pronouns and R-expressions without reflexive morphemes for the intended coreference as shown in (20) and (21):

\[(20) \text{ a. *coon } \text{ chọp } \text{ coon } \text{ i} \]
\[\text{ 'Johni likes Johni'.} \]
\[\text{ b. *coon } \text{ chọp } \text{ khāw } \text{ i} \]
\[\text{ 'Johni likes himi'.} \]
\[(21) \text{ a. *Johni dânh Johni} \]
\[\text{ 'Johni hit Johni'.} \]
\[\text{ b. *Johni dânh nơi} \]
\[\text{ 'Johni hit himi'.} \]

For Thai datum (20-a), my Thai informants’ judgments differ from Lasnik’s. For Lasnik, the complete grammaticality judgment on (20-a) by his informant as shown in (16-b) is crucial to his proposal of typological diversion between Thai and Vietnamese as shown in (17). Lasnik’s theory that Thai R-expressions are free to occur in their gcś predicts that (20-a) has perfect acceptability as do the reflexive sentences in (19) involving reflexive morphemes. My Thai informants
unanimously reject (20-a) over (19), just as Vietnamese informants reject (21-a) over (18). But Lasnik does not discuss either Thai or Vietnamese reflexive construction, and thus he does not compare acceptabilities between the full-fledged reflexive sentences with non-reflexive alternatives. I proceed with my discussion based on the unacceptability judgments on (20-a) by my informants. Then my descriptive generalization on the occurrence of R-expression in its gc is that it is disallowed in both Thai and Vietnamese. The generalization extends to many other languages, including English and Japanese. Thus, my first hypothesis is that the Condition C that Lasnik proposed for only Vietnamese extends to Thai and English as well:

(22) An R-expression must be free in its gc.

(22) shares the anti-locality condition with Chomsky's Binding Condition B stated as follows:

(23) Binding Condition B (Chomsky, 1981)
A pronominal must be free in its gc.

I proposed in Narahara 1991 to generalize (22) and (23) as a binding condition for non-anaphors:

(24) Generalized Condition B
A non-anaphor must be free in its gc.

Versions of Generalized Condition B have been proposed by Jackendoff 1972 and Kuno 1987. The Thai and Vietnamese data give independent evidence for it. Furthermore, by formulating the condition referring to a non-anaphor category, rather than to pronominal and R-expression categories, it renders the feature \([\pm p]\) superfluous, since no binding condition refers to it. The pronominal category can be instantiated by the default value of \([-a,-r]\). One of the consequences of eliminating the \([\pm p]\) feature is that names and epithet categories are no longer specified as distinct categories. One of the arguments that Lasnik presents for specifying the epithet category with \([+r,+p]\), distinguishing from names \([+r,-p]\), is the following contrast in acceptability status that he observed:

(25) a.  존이  적이 존
    John like  John
Lasnik argues that unacceptability of both (25-a) and (25-b) can be accounted for by Chomsky’s Condition B by assuming the epithet category to be bearing the feature [+p]. Lasnik’s theory that Thai names are free but epithets are subject to Chomsky’s Condition B predicts a sharp acceptability contrast between (25-a) and (26):

(26) ?âybâa_i choɔ p ?âybâa_i
    the idiot like  the idiot

Unfortunately, this datum is not examined in his article. My informants find (25-a) to be as unacceptable as (26)⁶. This shows that the categories of names and epithets need not be distinct, thus supporting the claim that the feature [±p] is superfluous in Binding Theory. Another of Lasnik’s arguments for distinguishing names and epithets as distinct categories is that the former is more referential than the latter. However, this would result in proposing numerous nominal categories among R-expressions, since there exist inter-categorial referentiality hierarchy between names or between epithets. For instance, John Smith is more referential than Mr. Smith since the former can bind the latter, but not vice versa, as the following acceptability contrast shows:

(27) a. John Smith_i will talk to those who are
    interested in the health care plan which Mr.
    Smith_i is advocating.
   b. *Mr. Smith_i will talk to those who are interested
      in the health care plan which John Smith_i is
      advocating.

Clearly, the feature [±p] is irrelevant to the referentiality hierarchy between the names. It is also useless in indicating the referentiality hierarchy between epithets. A wide range of data in Narahara 1991 shows that referentiality is not discrete, but a continuum. Thus, beyond [±r], referentiality of nominals must be indicated by non-categorial features.
5. ALTERNATIVES TO REFLEXIVES. The Vietnamese and one of the Thai reflexive constructions involve pronouns. My consultation with native speakers revealed contexts in which they accept an R-expression in place of a pronoun in the reflexive constructions. One of the contexts allows the use of R-expressions for a non-third party reference. Unlike English, and like many other Asian languages, Thai and Vietnamese allow proper names and common nouns such as kinship terms and titles for self-reference and addressee reference instead of using one of the first-person and second-person pronouns.\(^7,8\) The referent of \textit{Val} in (28) can be the speaker herself, the addressee, or a third party, depending whose name it is:

\[(28) \text{Val} \text{ wing rew} \]
\[\text{Val} \text{ run fast} \]
\[\text{‘Val runs fast’}.\]

Now, consider the following Thai reflexive sentences:

\[(29) \text{a. Val thii tua ʔeengi.} \]
\[\text{Val hit RF RF} \]
\[\text{b. Val i thii tua khāw ʔeengi.} \]
\[\text{‘Val i hit RF 3-per RF} \]
\[\text{‘Val i hit herself’}.\]

\textit{Val} in (29-a) can have a self-reference or addressee-reference reading in addition to the readily available third-party reading, while \textit{Val} in (29-b) can have only a third-party reading. These facts are accounted for if we assume that a self-referring or addressee-referring R-expression does not agree with the third-person. The object NP in (29-a) does not contain a pronoun, but the object NP in (29-b) contains the third-person pronoun \textit{khaw}. Thus, it can corefer with \textit{Val} only if its referent is a third-party. It is reasonable to assume further that a self-referring R-expression agrees only with the first-person, and an addressee-referring R-expression, with the second-person. Then, one expects (30) to be acceptable:

\[(30) \text{*Val thii tua chan ʔeengi} \]
\[\text{Val hit RF 1-per RF} \]
\[\text{‘Val (=the speaker) hit myself’}.\]
Contrary to the expectation, (30) is unacceptable. The cause of the unacceptability, however, is not that the self-referring R-expression disagrees with the first-person pronoun in the object NP, but rather a stylistic mismatch between the R-expression and the pronoun. Use of an R-expression for self-reference or addressee-reference is a stylistic choice that reflects the interpersonal relationship among the discourse participants, and it is mutually exclusive with a first-person pronoun or a second-person pronoun respectively.\(^9\) For a self-referring R-expression, then, there is no appropriate pronoun that can appear between tua and \(\tilde{eeng}\) in the reflexive constructions. Thus, for the intended meaning of 'I hit myself' with Val for self-reference, (29-a) appears to be the only choice. But there are native speakers who accept as Val’s utterance the R-expression itself appearing between tua and \(\tilde{eeng}\) as in (31):

\[
(31) \text{Val}_i \text{ thii tua Val } \tilde{eeng}_i \\
\text{Val hit RF Val RF} \\
'\text{Val}_i (=\text{the speaker}) \text{ hit Val-self}_i'.
\]

A similar phenomenon is also observed in Vietnamese. Consider again a reflexive construction in Vietnamese:

\[
(32) \text{Hoang}_i \text{ tu } \text{ danh no}_i \\
\text{Hoang RF hit 3-per} \\
'\text{Hoang}_i \text{ hit himself}_i'.
\]

If Hoang is talking to his mother, he would refer to himself as con, 'child'. It can corefer with neither no, a third-person pronoun, due to the person disagreement, nor toi, a first-person pronoun, due to the stylistic mismatch, but it can corefer with another con:

\[
(33) \text{a. *Con}_i \text{ tu } \text{ danh no}_i \\
\text{child RF hit 3-per} \\
'\text{Child}_i (=\text{I}_i) \text{ hit himself}_i'.
\]

\[
(33) \text{b. *Con}_i \text{ tu } \text{ danh to}_i i. \\
\text{child RF hit 1-per} \\
'\text{Child}_i (=\text{I}_i) \text{ hit myself}_i'.
\]

\[
(33) \text{c. Con}_i \text{ tu } \text{ danh con}_i. \\
\text{child RF hit child} \\
'\text{Child}_i.(=\text{I}_i) \text{ hit child}_i'.
\]
In Vietnamese, the use of third-person pronouns in the reflexive construction faces additional constraint. Like those of many other Asian languages, Vietnamese pronouns define the relative social status among the discourse participants. The use of the Vietnamese third-person pronoun nó presupposes the referent to be in a status inferior to the speaker. Thus, my informants say that they prefer using (34-b) to (34-a) when talking about their peer Hoang:

(34) a. \textit{Hoang} từ đánh nó.  
\textit{Hoang} RF hit 3-per  
\textit{Hoang} hit himself

b. \textit{Hoang} từ đánh \textit{Hoang}.
\textit{Hoang} RF hit \textit{Hoang}  
\textit{Hoang} hit Hoang-self

The occurrence of R-expressions in Thai and Vietnamese reflexive sentences reveals a complementary function of R-expressions to the pronouns since they are free to assume any of the first, second, or third-person roles. This contrasts with English R-expressions, which are inherently in the third-person. In English, an R-expression for a non-third party is observed in conversations involving younger children. But the R-expression can corefer only with a third-person pronoun, as the following examples illustrate:

(35) (Mother talking to Johnny)
   a. \textit{Mommy} ate her vegetables.
   b. \textit{*Mommy} ate my vegetables.
   c. Is Johnny going to eat his vegetables?
   d. \textit{*}Is Johnny going to eat your vegetables?

Also, the Vietnamese examples in (34) represent the nature of pronouns in Thai and Vietnamese which are specified for more than person, number and gender features.

6. NOMINAL CATEGORIES. If the acceptability of (31), (33-c) and (34-b) is an indication that they satisfy binding conditions, particularly Generalized Condition B, how do we account for it? One unworkable account is that Thai and Vietnamese R-
expressions are unconstrained in the presence of the acceptability contrast, as shown below:

(35) a. *Val₁ thiit Val₁
    Val hit Val

b. Val₁ thiit tua Val ʔeeng₁
    Val hit RF Val RF
    ‘Val₁ (=the speaker) hit herself₁’.

I suggest that the reflexive morphemes in Thai and Vietnamese turn non-anaphor categories into anaphor categories by affecting only the feature [-a] of the given nominal. For instance, the reflexive morpheme ʔeeng turns Hoang in (34-b) from non-anaphor R-expression category [-a, +r] into a distinct category of anaphor R-expression [+a, -r]. However, the fact that acceptability of (34-b) and other reflexive sentences involving the R-expression category is limited to special contexts, as discussed above, suggests that anaphorization of the [-a, +r] category is not unqualified. I leave the articulation of anaphorization for future research.

7. CONCLUSION. I have presented data to argue against Lasnik’s proposed parametric theory of Condition C which separates Thai from Vietnamese. The data I collected show that the R-expressions in these languages share basic distributional properties. The data led me to generalize Chomsky’s Condition B and Lasnik’s Condition C proposed for Vietnamese as Generalized Condition B, to which both Vietnamese and Thai are subject. As a result, Binding Theory is simplified, as Condition C consists only of Referentiality Hierarchy. My investigation of Thai and Vietnamese R-expressions occurring in reflexive sentences reveals how the systems of person-reference in Thai and Vietnamese interact with binding properties of nominal categories. I leave for future research a more detailed analysis of agreement phenomena of R-expressions in Thai and Vietnamese.

Notes
1 The earlier version of this paper was written while I was a post-doctoral fellow at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University. I thank the Institute for making it possible for me to write the earlier version of the paper and attend the SEALS III conference. I gratefully acknowledge John
Hinds for the discussion on Thai, and the audience at SEALS III, especially William O'Grady for constructive comments. I am also grateful to the native speakers of Thai and Vietnamese who provided me with the data. I, alone, am responsible for mistakes and shortcomings.

2 RF is an abbreviation for 'reflexive morpheme'.
3 3-per is an abbreviation for 'third-person pronoun'.
4 Tua literally means 'body', and ?eeng 'alone'.
6 There may be Thai native speakers who find (25-a) and (26) a little better than (25-b) and (25-c). According to my investigation of Japanese R-expression and pronoun alternatives to zibun , 'self', Condition B effects somewhat weaken when the nominals involved in the binding relation within a gc are morphologically identical as illustrated in the following:
   a. */?? Hanakoi-ga Hanakoi-o semeta
      Hanako-NOM Hanako-ACC blamed
      'Hanakoi blames Hanakoi'.
   b. * Hanakoi-ga kanozyo1-o semeta
      Hanako-NOM her-ACC blamed
      'Hanakoi1 blames her1'.
   c. */?? kanozyo1-ga kanozyo1-o semeta
      she-NOM her-ACC blamed
      'She1 blamed her1'.
7 While the use of names for self-reference is limited to a particular population, the use of kinship terms for self-reference and address is very common in these languages.
8 There are more pronouns for first, second, and third-person in Thai and Vietnamese.
9 It is unclear how strict this constraint is in Thai and Vietnamese. In Japanese, I have heard the following utterance in which a proper name for addressee-reference and a second person pronoun are mixed:
   Nobuyuki1-no sitai koto-wa nandemo
   Nobuyuki-GEN want to do thing-TOP anything
   antai-no sitai yooni site ii-no-yo
   2-per-GEN want to do like do fine
   'As for the things Nobuyuki1 (=the addressee) wants to
do, you1 can do as (you) like'.
The relative acceptability of this sentence may be due to the fact that addressing someone with his/her first name and address
someone with a second person pronoun *anta* both presuppose
the addressee to be equal or inferior to the speaker.

10 See Cooke 1968 for a detailed discussion.
11 According to Cooke 1968, there are two Vietnamese
pronouns for the third-person singular, *no*’ and *nguoi*.. The
latter is used for gods, kings, and highly respected persons.

References

Dordrecht: Foris Publication.
---------. 1982. Some concepts and consequences of the theory
of government and binding. Cambridge, Massachusetts:
MIT Press.

Cooke, John. 1968. Pronominal reference in Thai, Burmese
and Vietnamese. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University
of California Press.

Phaasaasaat 7 (Language and Linguistics). Thailand:
Thammasat University.

grammar. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

University of Chicago Press.

Lasnik, Howard. 1986. On necessity of condition C. Essays on

Narahara, Tomiko. 1991. Nominal categories and binding
theory. Doctoral thesis. Harvard University, Cambridge,
Massachusetts.

ms. University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Phaasaasaat 10.