

Commentary on Déchaine & Wiltschko (2009)

Seth Cable

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

1. Introduction

(1) Achievements of the Paper

- a. Generally speaking, it situates the phenomenon of bound local person pronouns within the broader, influential work that the authors have done on the structure of pronouns and their variation intra- and inter-linguistically.

(i) *The Background (As I Understand It)*

The are three possible structures a pronoun can have:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| (a) | Full DP: | $[_{DP} [_{\varphi P} [_{NP}]]]$ | (English) |
| (b) | φP : | $[_{\varphi P} [_{NP}]]$ | (Romance) |
| (c) | NP: | $[_{NP}]$ | (Halkomelem) |

(i) *The Proposal*

Whether a local person pronoun can be bound depends upon whether the local person features are still in φ or have moved all the way up to D

- b. Provides further systematic discussion, classification and treatment of the environments where local person pronouns in English *can't* be bound (or 'shifted').

(i) *Pronoun Taking an NP Complement*

Only we think that we linguists are smart.

(\neq We are the only ones with the property 'x thinks x linguists are smart')

(ii) *VP-Ellipsis, Where the Local Pronoun Isn't Possessive*

I know that the police saw me, and Mary does too.

(\neq ... and Mary knows that the police saw her too.)

(2) Outline of the Commentary

- a. The key prediction of the analysis and some potentially problematic data.
- b. A question about the diagnostics for 'focus'.
- c. Some questions on the nature of third person pronouns.

2. The Key Prediction and Some Potential Challenges

(3) Key Prediction of the Analysis

In English, a local person pronoun can function as a bound variable only if one of the following conditions hold:

a. *It is a possessor.*

I do my homework, and Sam does too.
(= ... and Sam does Sam's homework)

b. *It bears focus.*

Only I got a problem I could answer.
(= I'm the only one with the property 'x got a problem x could answer')

c. *It is in the scope of a distributive operator.*

We each think we are the smartest person in the world.
(= Each of us has the property 'x thinks x is the smartest person in the world')

In order to appreciate the empirical content of (3), we should take note of what environments in English allow us to in principle empirically determine whether a pronoun is bound.

(4) Environments Where T-Conditions Disambiguate Between a Bound and a Referential Reading of a Pronoun (Not Necessarily Exhaustive)

a. *When the Pronoun is in the Scope of "Only DP"*

Only Bill got a problem he could solve.

b. *When the Pronoun is in the Scope of a Distributive Operator*

They each think they are smart.

c. *When the Pronoun is in the Scope of a Purely Quantificational DP*

Few students think that they are smart.

d. *When the Pronoun is in the Antecedent of an Ellipsis Site*

Bill thinks that he is smart, and John does too.

(5) **Key Prediction of the Analysis, Recast**

In English, a local person pronoun should *not* be able to function as a bound pronoun if it is in the following positions and is neither focused nor possessive:

- a. In the Scope of a Quantificational DP
- b. In the Antecedent of an Ellipsis Site

There seem to be some data that *might* pose a challenge to this prediction...

...I emphasize “**might**”, because I’m unfamiliar with the authors’ background assumptions regarding focus and distributivity (a point I will return to later)...

(6) **Bound Local Persons in the Scope of a Purely Quantificational DP**

- a. Few students of mine think that we’re friends.
(= Few students of mine have the property ‘x thinks that x and me are friends’)
- b. No student of mine thinks that we’re friends.
(= No student of mine has the property ‘x thinks that x and me are friends’)

(7) **The Issue**

Under my understanding of the terms ‘focus’ and ‘distributive operator’, the bound local person pronouns in (6) are neither focused nor in the scope of a distributive operator.

- a. The pronouns in (6) are not focused.
To my knowledge, they aren’t receiving focus intonation.
- b. The pronouns are not in the scope of a distributive operator.
 - A ‘distributive operator’ has the semantics in (8) below
 - Consequently, in order to for the pronouns in (6) be in the scope of a distributive operator, the subject of (6) should denote a plural entity.
 - However, the subjects in (6) cannot be thought of as denoting plural entities (because they are right downward monotone).

(8) **The Distributive Operator I’m Familiar With (Simplified Version)**

[[DIST]] = [$\lambda f_{\langle et \rangle} : [\lambda x_e : \text{for all } y \leq x \text{ and ATOMIC}(y), f(y) = T]]$

CAVEAT:

I’m quite prepared to be corrected regarding the use of the term ‘distributive operator’...

(9) **Bound Local Persons in the Antecedent of VP Ellipsis**

- a. *Question:* Why are you and Dave so popular?
Answer: Well, I'm a person who's honest when you ask me things, and I guess Dave is too.
(= ...and Dave is a person who is honest when you ask **him** things...)
- b. *Question:* Why are you and Dave so nervous?
Answer: Well, I'm worried that I might get fired, and I guess Dave is too.
(= ... and Dave is worried that **he** might get fired...)

(10) **The Issue**

- The elided VPs in (9) allow for 'sloppy identity' readings (3 out of 3 non-linguist English speakers agree).
- The pronouns in the antecedent VP are neither focused nor in the scope of a distributive operator (see (8)).

(11) **My Own Hunch (Highly Tentative)**

- In any environment where we could in principle tell (from the T-conditions) whether a pronoun can be bound, a local person pronoun seems to admit of bound readings.
- *However*, while local person pronouns can generally be *bound* in English, they do *not* allow for so-called 'shifted interpretations' in logophoric environments.
 - a. Dave thinks that I saw Sam.
(≠ Dave thinks that Dave saw Sam.)
- The inability for local person pronouns in English to be *shifted* in logophoric environments may be due to the semantics of the propositional attitude verbs in English, and not to properties of the pronouns themselves (Schlenker 2003).

(12) **On the Other Hand...**

I definitely agree with the reported judgments below, which are key to D&W's account.

- a. Only we think that we linguists are smart.
(≠ We are the only ones with the property 'x thinks x linguists are smart')
- b. I know that the police saw me, and Mary does too.
(≠ ... and Mary knows that the police saw her too.)

Observation: The deviance of the bound reading in (a) is stronger than that in (b).
Maybe the deviance of (b) is tied to the factivity of *know*? (*cf.* (9b))

3. A Question on the Diagnostics for ‘Focus’

A key claim of D&W is that the bound pronouns in (13) are focused (F-marked).¹

(13) Bound Local Person Pronouns in the Scope of “Only DP”

- a. Only I got a problem I understood.
- b. I’m the only one who got a problem I understood.

(14) Question

On what empirical grounds are the bound pronouns in (13) said to be focused?

- They don’t seem to be receiving focus intonation.
- Indeed, in sentences like (13), they seem to be de-accented.
- The de-accented status of the bound pronouns is even clearer in examples like (15) (The position of pitch-accents are bold-faced)

(15) Bound Local Persons in the Scope of “Only DP”

Question: Why are you the only person who did well on the exam?

- a. Only **I** got a **problem** that made **sense** to me.
- b. **I’m** the only **one** who got a **problem** that made **sense** to me.
- c. Crucial Comparison
Only **I** got a **problem** that made **sense** to **Dave**.

(16) Follow-Up Observation 1

Bound readings are also possible in the semantically similar sentences below. However, the modifier *alone* is not (to my knowledge) thought to be a focus-sensitive operator.

- a. I alone got a problem that made sense to me.
- b. Dave alone got a problem that made sense to him.

(17) Follow-Up Observation 2

Under the ‘classic’ semantics for focus (Rooth 1985), obtaining the bound reading for a sentence like (17a) doesn’t require that the bound pronoun *he* be F-marked.

- a. *LF:* Only **Dave_F** [1 [got a problem that he₁ could solve]]
- b. *Predicted Meaning (Crudely Stated):*
Dave got a problem he could solve, and for all $x \in \text{ALT}(\text{Dave})$,
[$\lambda y : y$ got a problem y could solve](x) = F.

¹ This claim is similar to a somewhat different one made by Rullmann (2004, 2008), who claims that in examples like (13), the *binder* is crucially focused. I thank Irene Heim and Polly Jacobson for discussion of this point.

4. Some Questions Relating to Third Person Pronouns

In an earlier version of their talk, D&W observe that third person pronouns in English can generally be bound in ellipsis environments akin to (1b)/(12b)

(18) Third Person Pronouns Can Always be Bound

Dave knows the police saw him, and Mary does too.
(= ... and Mary knows the police saw **her**)

(19) Question 1

What distinguishes 3rd person pronouns from local person pronouns, so that 3rd person pronouns are always able to be bound?

(20) Proposal (Not Necessarily D&W's)

In English, the feature [3] is always in the ϕ P. It never moves to D.
(Compare to D&W's treatment of local person pronouns in Romance and local person possessors in English)

(21) Problem for This Proposal

This would seem to predict that 3rd pronouns in English should behave as local anaphors.

- a. * Dave [1 [loves him₁]]
- b. Dave [1 [loves his₁ dog]]
- c. Je [1 [m'₁ admire]]

These considerations raise the following more general question:

(22) Question 2

D&W claim that 'locally bound anaphora is bound variable anaphora'. However, third person pronouns seem to pose a challenge to this:

- (i) They are consummate bound variables, but
- (ii) cannot be locally bound.

Finally, I have a few questions regarding the general, increasingly popular notion that English pronouns are DPs or some kind of definite descriptions...

... these questions don't target D&W's proposals specifically, but I thought I might air them here, since much recent work on the semantics of pronouns shares/adopts this idea...

(23) **Question 3**

It's becoming increasingly common to think of pronouns as in some way 'definite DPs in disguise' (Elbourne 2002). What, though, are we to make of the fact that pronouns do not trigger Principle C effects?

a. *No Principle C Effects with Pronouns*

- (i) * He₁ thinks that [the boy]₁ is nice.
- (ii) He₁ thinks that he₁ is nice.

Relatedly, D&W build upon a long tradition of analyzing English locutions like *we linguists* as DPs headed by *we*. What, though, are we to make of the fact that *we linguists* also does not trigger Principle C effects.

b. *No Principle C Effects with 'We Linguists'*

- (i) We think that we linguists are so smart.
- (ii) * Those₁ think that those₁ linguists are so smart.