

Medium-distance reflexives and movement

Reflexives such as Icelandic *sig* are “medium-distance” (MD): when they are in infinitival clauses, they may be bound not only by the infinitival’s subject but also by the next subject up (as in (1)).

1. Pétur_i bað Jens_j um að raka sig_{i/j}/*hann_{i,j} [Icelandic]
Peter asked Jens to shave sig/*him (Thráinsson 1991: 51)

I will argue against accounts such as Reuland 2001 in which *sig* forms a chain with its antecedent via feature-checking. Such accounts will wrongly predict that *sig* should only take the local subject as an antecedent. As an alternative, I propose that *sig*’s antecedent enters the derivation with *sig* and moves from inside the infinitival to its surface position, picking up its matrix theta-role along the way.

Reuland 2001a proposes that *sig* checks its third-person feature with its antecedent by adjoining to v° for Case, and then head-moving with v° until it is in a Spec-head relation with its antecedent. Once v°+*sig* have adjoined to the embedded I°, *sig* is in a Spec-head relation with *Jens* (2a). Assuming that this head-movement can continue up to the first finite I° (as in Reuland 2001b), then *sig* could continue to move until it is adjoined to the matrix IP. Thus, *sig* can move into a Spec-head configuration with both the local subject (2a) and the higher subject (2b).

2. a. Pétur I° asked [IP Jens [I°+... +FFsig] ... [vP ... sig]]
b. [Pétur [I°+ ... + sig] ... [vP ... [IP Jens ... [vP ... sig]]]

This will not work if checking is assumed to happen as soon as a checking configuration is established (as in Chomsky 1995). Since head-movement goes through every intervening head, *sig* will always enter a checking relation with the lower subject before the higher one. Therefore, *sig* should always form a chain with the lower subject before reaching the higher one.

This problem is avoided if *sig* and its antecedent are related directly by movement, with *sig*’s antecedent first merged with *sig* and then moving to its theta- and Case-positions (similar to Hornstein’s accounts of control and local binding). If the antecedent is local, then the lowest vP phase will contain *Jens* but not *Peter* (3a). However, if the antecedent is non-local, both *Peter* and *Jens* will be in the lowest vP phase.

3. a. [vP Jens shave Jens + sig]
b. [vP Jens shave Peter + sig]

Consequently, the local and medium-distance readings of (1) will have different Numerations, and will not compete. To account for the possibility of binding outside an IP, I’ll assume that a non-local antecedent may A-move (through escape hatches) out of an infinitival, though not a finite CP.

References

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