Agreement intervention: Logophoric selection in English epicene reflexivity

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An increasing development in English is the use of pronominal *they* in singular contexts (e.g., Arnold et al., 2021; Baron, 2020; Everett, 2011):

Singular antecedents

(1) John$_i$'s a great person. I met **them**$_i$ just last week.

(2) Taylor$_i$ is writing **their**$_i$ own autobiography.

(Conrod, 2022, p. 216)

However, singular *they* is not a recent phenomenon (Balhorn, 2004).

Traditional evidence

(3) [Swift in *Polite Conversation* (1738)]
Every fool$_i$ can do as they$_i$'re bid.
(Bjorkman, 2017: 2)

Historical Usage

- Singular *they* precedes prescriptive movements favoring epicene (gender-neutral) *he* (Bodine, 1975).
- Distinctions between typical and atypical use-cases can nonetheless be made.

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$$\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{ARB} \\ \text{GEN} \end{array} \right] \gg \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{DEF} \\ \text{SPEC} \end{array} \right]$$

Context-dependent

(4) [Context: Seeing an unidentified distant figure.]
They're waving at us.
(Bjorkman, 2017: 1)

Categorical Patterns

$$\text{Maxim of Quantity} \rightsquigarrow \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{ARB} \\ \text{GEN} \end{array} \right]$$

Unknown features

(5) Somebody$_i$ left their$_i$ sweater.
(Bodine, 1975: 139)

Categorical Patterns

Preferred choice for quantification (Conrod, 2019, 2022):

Quantificationally-bound

(6) [Any person who wants to succeed]$_I$ ought to try their$_{\forall[i] \in I}$ best.
(Conrod, 2022: 228)

$\rightsquigarrow \lambda P.\text{wants-to-succeed}' \subseteq P$

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Categorical Patterns

Sensitive to specificity (Bjorkman, 2017; Conrod, 2019):

Determiner choice

(7) ?[**That** syntax professor]$_i$ loves their$_i$ job.

(8) [**A** syntax professor]$_i$ must always love their$_i$ job.

(Conrod, 2022: 218)

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The most variable usage is $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{DEF} \\ \text{SPEC} \end{array} \right]$ singular *they* (dsT):
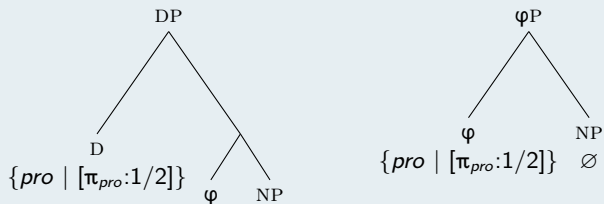
dsT-antecedents

(9) Proper names: Jayden$_i$ loves their$_i$ job.
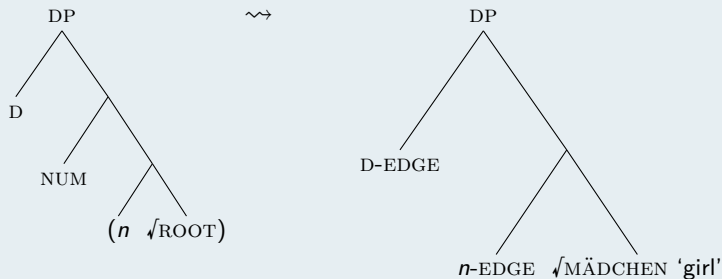(10) D-selection: [That syntax professor]$_i$ loves their$_i$ job.

(Conrod, 2022: 218)

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Pronominal Structure

Distinctions between projections

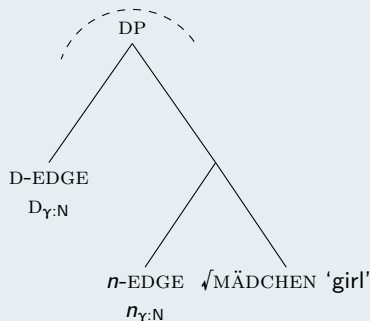(e.g., Dèchaine & Wiltschko, 2002; Sichel & Wiltschko, 2018)

Splitting open D and φ

(Sigurðsson, 2019: 737; Kramer, 2016, 2020; Panagiotidis, 2019)

Gender Locus

Mädchen 'girl.N': Arbitrarily neuter, semantically female.
Discourse-optional agreement: *es* 'it' or *sie* 'she'.

Valuation and probing for gender (γ)

(Sigurðsson, 2019: 737)

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Classification

Grammatical gender generally is …

Gender classification

- Sorting of nouns into $2 \geq$ classes.
- Reflected by agreement with other items.
- Assigned at times based on features
  {animacy, natural gender, … }

  (Kramer, 2020)

DsT Antecedent Representation

> ### Semantic gender in English
>
> (11) **John**$_{\gamma:N}$ wasn't looking and **they**$_{\gamma:N}$ fell.

- Semantic gender [iGen] lies higher than n (Panagiotidis, 2019).
- English is 'pronominal gender language' (PGL) (Sigurðsson, 2019: 734)

Interpretability:

CP-external

(12) At the halloween party, the cowgirl$_i$ left his$_i$ lasso in the kitchen.
(Ackerman, 2019: 2)

(13) Mary$_i$ said [$_{CP}$ that she$_i$ was happy.]
(Sigurðsson, 2019: 735)

Obligatorily predicated on CP-external content:

Context-scanning

(14) CONTEXT $[_{CP}$ ... $[_{DP}$ ... D/G_{γ} ... $]$ ... $]$

(Sigurðsson, 2019: 735)

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Reflexivity

- Conrod et al. (2022) find high variance in dsT-anaphor $\#$.
- 'Slight preference' for *-self* with SG.

Gender classification (Conrod et al., 2022)

(15) E.g., split-nominal: $[_{\text{DP}} [_{\text{DP}} \text{them}] [_{\text{NP}} \text{selves}]]$

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Binding Approach in English

Pronominal agreement and antecedent γ.

- CONDITION A: An anaphor must be bound locally.
- CONDITION B: A pronominal must be non-locally bound.
- CONDITION C: An R-expression must be free.

Gender agreement

(16) **John**$_i$ saw **himself**$_{i\ \text{(in the mirror)}}$.

(17) **Johannes**$_i$ liebt **sich**$_i$

  'Johannes loves himself.'

(Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd, 2011)

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φ on Logophors

- *themself* vs. *themselves* as syntactically deterministic.
- Locus of discourse-sensitive perspective, i.e. logophoricity.
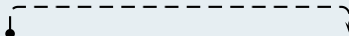

CONDITION A exemption

(18) According to John$_i$, the article was written by Anna and himself$_i$. (Charnavel & Zlogar, 2016, p. 87)

(19) [$_{\text{DOMAIN}}$ [OP$_{\text{deixis}}$ [OP$_{\text{empathy}}$ [OP$_{\text{attitude}}$ ... X ...]]]]
(Charnavel & Zlogar, 2016: 87; Charnavel, 2021)
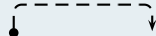
Reflexive root-selection for #

(20) ✗ They$_{i, \#:sg}$ **are** smiling at themself$_i$ (in the mirror).

(21) ✓ They$_i$ **are** smiling at $\#_{sg}$ them[self]$_i$ (in the mirror).

Implications and Direction

- Relations via Agree(ment) and reference?
- Further distinctions between pronominals and anaphors:

Discussion

- Locus of NumP?
- Interactions between $\#$ and γ.
- Relevance with v φ-Agree(ment) with DP_{obj}?

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Thank you!

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