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# Reflexives and Constraints on the Borrowing of Discourse Function: Creoles and Tahitian French

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## 1 Pronouns, Anaphors, and Distributional Strangeness in Creoles and Tahitian

This paper concerns some data from Tahitian French which pose potential problems for previous accounts of binding phenomena (Chomsky 1981; Reinhart & Reuland 1993). Traditional accounts seek to explain the apparent complementary distribution between pronouns and anaphors, as shown below:

- (1) a. Clint Eastwood<sub>i</sub> admires himself<sub>i/\*j</sub>  
b. Clint Eastwood<sub>i</sub> admires him<sub>j/\*i</sub>

In several creoles, however, anaphors and non-coreferential pronouns share both phonetic form and syntactic distribution. The following examples are ambiguous when taken out of an appropriate discourse context:

- (2)  $i_i$  bat  $li_{j/i}$  (Seselwa)  
he hit him(self)  
'He hit him(self)'
- (3)  $li_i$  fin pañdi  $li_{j/i}$  (Mauritian Creole)  
he made hang him(self)  
'He hanged him(self)'
- (4)  $a_i$  kii en<sub>j/i</sub> (Saramaccan)  
he kill him(self)  
'He killed him(self)'

These facts are not unexpected in creoles, which do not typically exhibit the full range of morphological contrasts often observed in other languages. But, perhaps more surprisingly, similar data occur in non-creole languages as well. In this paper I will pay particular attention to the Tahitian facts, as illustrated in (5):

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- (5) a. 'Ua tīahi 'oia 'iāna (Tahitian)  
 PST chase he PREP-him  
 'He<sub>i</sub> chased him<sub>i/j</sub>'  
 b. 'Ua horohorōi 'oia 'iāna teie po'ipo'i  
 PST wash-repeatedly he PREP-him this morning  
 'He<sub>i</sub> washed him<sub>i/j</sub> this morning'

In both the creoles and Tahitian, there is also an explicitly (non)-coreferential element which is interpreted unambiguously:

- (6) a. li<sub>i</sub> fin pañdi li<sub>j/i</sub> (Mauritian Creole)  
 he made hang him(self)  
 'He hanged him(self)'  
 b. li<sub>i</sub> fin pañdi **limem**<sub>i/\*j</sub>  
 he made hang himself  
 'He hanged himself/\*him'  
 (7) a. 'Ua aroha 'oia 'iāna (Tahitian)  
 PST love he PREP-him  
 'He<sub>i</sub> loved him<sub>i/j</sub>'  
 b. 'Ua aroha 'oia 'iāna **iho**  
 PST love he PREP-him self  
 'He<sub>i</sub> loved himself<sub>i/\*j</sub>'

Sometimes, as in Saramaccan, the unambiguous reference is non-reflexive, as shown in (8).<sup>1</sup>

- (8) a. a<sub>i</sub> kii en<sub>j/i</sub> (Saramaccan)  
 he kill him(self)  
 'He killed him(self)'  
 b. a<sub>i</sub> kii **hen**<sub>j/\*i</sub>  
 he kill him-emphatic  
 'He killed HIM(\*self)'

Further, there are some constructions in Tahitian which are inherently reflexive; when added to these constructions, the explicitly reflexive element **iho** yields another ambiguity:

<sup>1</sup>I am not aware of other languages which pattern like Saramaccan with respect to this data. It is difficult to say why the preponderance of languages with only one unambiguous referential form use that form to designate reflexivity.

- (9) a. 'Ua mutu 'oia ('i te tipi)  
 PST break-off he (with a knife)  
 'He<sub>i</sub> cut himself<sub>i/\*j</sub> with a knife.'
- b. 'Ua mutu 'oia iho ('i te tipi)  
 PST break-off he self (with a knife)
- i. 'He HIMSELF cut himself (with a knife). (No one else was responsible.)' or
- ii. 'He cut HIMSELF (with a knife). (No one else was cut.)'

Tahitian French shows a similar ambiguity which is not present in Standard or Canadian French. Standard French permits the first gloss of (10,11b) but not the second; as illustrated below, Tahitian French allows both:

- (10) a. Nous nous sommes mariés  
 We us are married  
 'We married each other'
- b. Nous nous sommes mariés nous-mêmes  
 We us are married ourselves
- i. 'We married each other ourselves (we performed our own marriage ceremony)' or
- ii. 'We married EACH OTHER (and no one else; we are not polygamists)'
- (11) a. Je me suis brossée les dents  
 I me am brushed the teeth  
 'I brushed my teeth'
- b. Je me suis brossée les dents moi-même  
 I me am brushed the teeth myself
- i. 'I brushed my teeth myself (no one else was responsible)' or
- ii. 'I brushed my own teeth (and no one else's)'

My eventual goal is to reconcile the above facts with some version of the binding theory. To this end, the remainder of this paper is organized as follows. I will begin with a brief reminder of the binding proposals put forth by Chomsky (1981) and the more recent account by Reinhart & Reuland (1993). I will suggest a way to extend the version of the binding theory defended by Reinhart & Reuland to account for the Tahitian and creole facts; the minor modification of their story which is required draws from corroborating evidence from Kananda reported in Lidz (1998). Finally, I will discuss the Tahitian French data in greater detail and ultimately I will suggest that the facts follow from the modified account of Reinhart & Reuland plus a Tahitian French information

packaging mechanism which is inherited directly from Tahitian. In the spirit of Prince (1992), this view has consequences for the borrowing of discourse function across linguistic boundaries more generally.

## 2 Binding Theory: Syntactic Accounts

The standard formulation of the binding conditions entails strict complementarity between pronouns and anaphors, as the relevant conditions (A and B) are the strict mirror image of one another (Chomsky 1981):

- (12) a. *Condition A*: An anaphor is free in its governing category.  
 b. *Condition B*: A pronoun is free in its governing category.

These conditions as stated above are adequate to cover many contexts where a pronoun is disallowed in an environment permitting an anaphor and vice versa:

- (13) a. David<sub>i</sub> criticized himself<sub>i</sub>/\*him<sub>i</sub>.  
 b. David<sub>i</sub> talks to himself<sub>i</sub>/\*him<sub>i</sub>.  
 c. David<sub>i</sub> said he<sub>i</sub>/\*himself<sub>i</sub> would be there.

However, as Reinhart & Reuland (among others) note, there are well-known contexts where this complementarity breaks down, most notably with adjuncts and NP anaphora. The following examples allow the use of either an anaphor or a pronoun:

- (14) a. Stella<sub>i</sub> saw a snake near her<sub>i</sub>/herself<sub>i</sub>.  
 b. I<sub>i</sub> counted seven criminals in the room apart from me<sub>i</sub>/myself<sub>i</sub>.  
 (15) a. Dominic<sub>i</sub> saw a picture of himself<sub>i</sub>/him<sub>i</sub> hanging in the hall.  
 b. Dominic<sub>i</sub> tells jokes about himself<sub>i</sub>/him<sub>i</sub> to entertain his guests.

Noting these problems with the standard account, Reinhart & Reuland (1993) (henceforth R&R) propose a binding theory of their own. I will briefly sketch their account here; for further detail the reader is advised to check Reinhart & Reuland (1993) and the references therein.

R&R crucially distinguish between a *reflexive semantic predicate* and a *reflexively-marked syntactic predicate*. A semantic predicate is reflexive if and only if two of its arguments are co-indexed; a syntactic predicate P is reflexive-marked if and only if either P is lexically reflexive or one of P's arguments is a SELF-anaphor. Let's see a few examples to make the terms more clear:

- (16) a. John<sub>i</sub> likes himself<sub>i</sub>  
 b. semantic predicate: likes(j, j) → reflexive  
 c. syntactic predicate: SELF-anaphor → reflexive-marked
- (17) a. \*Meredith<sub>i</sub> hugged her<sub>i</sub>  
 b. semantic predicate: hugged(m, m) → reflexive  
 c. syntactic predicate: no SELF-anaphor; verbal complex is not lexically reflexive → not reflexive-marked
- (18) a. Raffles<sub>i</sub> kidnapped him<sub>j</sub>  
 b. semantic predicate: kidnapped(r, j) → not reflexive  
 c. syntactic predicate: no SELF-anaphor; verbal complex is not lexically reflexive → not reflexive-marked
- (19) a. \*I<sub>i</sub> knew himself<sub>j</sub>  
 b. semantic predicate: knew(i, j) → not reflexive  
 c. syntactic predicate: SELF-anaphor → reflexive-marked

In English, reflexive-marking is typically accomplished via the presence of a SELF-anaphor, but this need not be the case. Romance languages, for instance, frequently express reflexive-marking via a lexically reflexive predicate (i.e. a verbal complex which is explicitly marked as reflexive).

R&R take advantage of the distinction between semantic and syntactic predicates in redefining Binding Conditions A and B:

- (20) a. *Condition A*: A reflexive-marked syntactic predicate has to be reflexive.  
 b. *Condition B*: A reflexive semantic predicate has to be reflexive-marked.

These are understood as conditional statements, abbreviated as above for reasons of perspicuity.

These conditions apply to the above examples as follows: (16) is both reflexive and reflexive-marked, so both conditions are satisfied. (17) is reflexive but not reflexive-marked; hence, Condition B is violated. (18) is neither reflexive nor reflexive-marked, so the binding conditions do not apply (the antecedents of the conditions are false). Finally, (19) is reflexive-marked but not reflexive; hence, Condition A is violated.

### 3 Problematic Data

The creole and Tahitian data presented in the first section of this paper is problematic for any account couched in overt syntactic distribution. And

the data presented is hardly anomalous; similar facts are seen in Spanish- and Portuguese-based creoles in addition to the French-based creoles shown above. Descriptively, the problem is clear: in Tahitian and the creole languages described, there is one morphologically neutral form which is ambiguous. One subset of these languages contains an additional form which is explicitly marked as reflexive (illustrated in (6-7) above). Another subset of these languages has, in addition to the morphologically neutral ambiguous form, a separate emphatic form which forces a non-reflexive interpretation (shown in (8) above).<sup>2</sup>

On the surface the morphologically neutral ambiguous data is problematic for both Chomsky (1981) and R&R (1993), and indeed, for any account couched in overt syntactic distribution. If there is no way to distinguish between reflexive and non-coreferential pronominal forms in the surface syntax – that is, if they share identical syntactic distributions and phonetic realizations – how do we instantiate Conditions A and B? Clearly some theory of use must account for speakers' ability to differentiate between the pronominal and the reflexive forms, but this theory of use has no place in the syntax *per se*. Further, how do we account for data from Saramaccan and similar creoles, in which it is not reflexivity which is marked at all but rather something like unreflexivity?

### 3.1 Reflexive-marking?

To sum, the creole data is at first blush highly problematic for Chomsky (1981) and Reinhart & Reuland (1993) in the following respect: it is difficult to see how one might give a syntactic account of the difference between reflexive anaphors and non-coreferential pronouns when there seems to be a difference in neither their syntactic distribution nor the phonetic realization of the predicates containing them. R&R's account depends crucially on the notion of reflexive-marking, but as we have seen, reflexives are not overtly marked in the creole data.

However, we would clearly like to maintain the distinction between reflexive anaphors and non-coreferential pronouns; despite the fact that they appear identical in the surface syntax (ignoring for the moment the non-ambiguous cases which are identifiably reflexive or non-reflexive, shown in (6-8)), reflexives and non-coreferential pronouns clearly mean different things. As far as

<sup>2</sup>The account presented here does not rule out the possible existence of a language containing both explicit forms in addition to the morphologically neutral ambiguous form, although at present the author does not know of a language exhibiting the relevant data.

I can tell, there are two major avenues one might pursue in accounting for this data. First, one might try to claim that the different ‘meanings’ in fact merely correspond to different pragmatic uses. If we follow this path, we are committed to the position that there is no *ambiguity* per se; that is, there is no ambiguity represented in the syntax or semantics at any level of abstraction. Intuitively, this option is unappealing, because we certainly don’t wish to advance the same claim about other languages which overtly differentiate between reflexives and non-reflexive pronominals, and we would like our account to be as cross-linguistically far-reaching as possible.

Alternatively, we might claim that the difference between the two, though *driven* by a theory of use, is not strictly due to it. That is, the theory of use allows for the choice between distinct syntactic options, and the difference in meaning is somehow represented in the syntactic representation. As it allows us to preserve what is good about R&R’s analysis, and as it allows for wider-reaching cross-linguistic claims than the first path sketched above, this is the avenue I will pursue here.

We know that reflexive-marking may be accomplished in two ways, via the presence of a SELF-anaphor or through lexical reflexivity, whereby a predicate is marked with the reflexive property. If we assume that reflexive-marking is present in the overt syntax (as either a SELF-anaphor or a verbal complex of the appropriate morphological type), the creole data appears troublesome as follows: Condition B is never met, and Condition A never applies. But let’s suppose instead that reflexive-marking does not have to be present in the overt syntax, but rather reflexive-marking may occur via some null operator. Creoles are on the whole morphologically simplified; when the operator applies, the syntactic predicate is reflexive-marked with no phonetic reflex. That is, the marking is not present in the overt syntax even where it has applied due to the morphological restrictions typically imposed by creole grammars.

#### 4 Not All Markers are Created Equal

The two instantiations of reflexive-marking are treated as semantic equivalents in the R&R framework; however reflexive-marking is achieved, it must correspond to semantic reflexivity. Because binding theory applies at LF, all reflexive predicates have the same LF interpretation. Lidz (1998) reports data from Kannada which cast considerable doubt on this supposed equivalence. Kannada represents lexical reflexivity morphologically, with an overt verbal affix. In Kannada, the anaphor *tannu* cannot be bound by a coargument in the absence of the verbal reflexive morpheme *-koL* (*-koND* in the past tense).

- (21) a. \*Hari tann-annu hoDe-d-a (Kannada)  
 Hari self-ACC hit-PST-3.sg.m  
 'Hari hit himself'  
 b. Hari tann-annu hoDe-du-koND-a  
 Hari self-ACC hit-PP-REFL.PST.3.sg.m  
 'Hari hit himself'

Kannada also has a morphologically complex anaphor which can occur in the absence of the verbal reflexive:

- (22) Hari tann-annu-taane hoDe-d-a  
 Hari self-ACC-self hit-PST-3.sg.m  
 'Hari hit himself.'

Thus, lexical reflexivity is morphologically represented by an affix on the verb, while syntactic reflexivity is marked with a morphologically complex SELF-anaphor. Kannada not only provides evidence of distinct morphological realizations of the two types of marking; there is also evidence of differences in their meaning:

- (23) a. Hari tann-annu nod-i-koND-a  
 Hari self-ACC see-PP-REFL-PST-3.sg.m  
 'Hari saw himself (=own self)'  
 b. Hari tann-annu-tanne nod-id-a  
 Hari self-ACC-self see-PST-3.sg.m  
 'Hari saw himself (=statue or own self)'

The first example above licenses only the interpretation where Hari is seeing his literal self (say, in a mirror), while the second is felicitously uttered when Hari walks past Madame Tussaud's and catches sight of a statue of himself in the window. Using this data, Lidz suggests the following distinction:

- (24) a. (*Semantic/Pure-reflexive*):  $\lambda x [P(x,x)]$   
 b. (*Near-reflexive*):  $\lambda x [P(x, f(x))]$

The Pure-reflexive is represented by a function which maps an object to the object itself; the Near-reflexive maps an object to some appropriate representation of that object. Clearly, then, all interpretations permitted by a felicitous use of the Pure-reflexive are also licensed by a felicitous use of the Near-reflexive (but not vice versa). In Kannada, the use of the morphologically complex SELF-anaphor permits both Near-reflexive interpretations, while lexical reflexivity denotes Pure-reflexivity.

But Tahitian has neither the morphological affix of Kannada to designate lexical reflexivity, nor the simplex-complex anaphor distinction; there is only one explicit anaphor, *iho*. But if we assume, as suggested above, that lexical reflexivity may apply via some null operator, the picture clarifies. In Tahitian, like Kannada, the two kinds of reflexive-marking also differ with respect to the availability of Near- and Pure-reflexive readings. However, unlike Kannada, lexical reflexives allow both readings, while syntactic reflexivity permits only the Pure-reflexive interpretation:

- (25) a. 'Ua 'ite 'oia 'iāna  
 PST see he PREP-him  
 'He saw himself (=statue or self)'  
 b. 'Ua 'ite 'oia iho 'iāna  
 PST see he self PREP-him  
 'He himself saw himself (=statue or self)'  
 c. 'Ua 'ite 'oia 'iāna iho  
 PST see he PREP-him self  
 'He saw HIMSELF (=self)'

The pairing of morphological type of reflexive-marker with semantic type of reflexivity does not appear to be cross-linguistically straightforward. What is crucial here, however, is that in light of this data, R&R cannot assume that all types of reflexive-marking are created semantically equal.

## 5 Borrowing of Discourse Function across Linguistic Boundaries

Recall the following data:

- (26) a. 'Ua aroha 'oia 'iāna  
 PST love he PREP-him  
 'He<sub>i</sub> loved him<sub>i/j</sub>'  
 b. 'Ua aroha 'oia 'iāna iho  
 PST love he PREP-him self  
 'He<sub>i</sub> loved himself<sub>i/\*j</sub>'  
 (27) a. 'Ua hahu vau iho 'iāna  
 PST shave I self him  
 'I myself shaved him'

- b. 'Ua hahu vau 'iāna iho  
 PST shave I him self  
 'I shaved HIM'
- c. 'Ua hahu vau iho  
 PST shave I self  
 'I MYSELF shaved (myself) (i.e. No one else was responsible)' or  
 'I shaved MYSELF (i.e. No one else was shaved)'

Note that *iho* serves an emphatic pronoun function in non-reflexive contexts:

- (28) a. Te ha'api'i nei Si'one i c ta'ata mana  
 PRES teach here-now John to a man powerful  
 'John teaches a powerful man'
- b. Te ha'api'i nei Si'one iho i c ta'ata mana  
 PRES teach here-now John self to a man powerful  
 'John himself teaches a powerful man'
- (29) a. 'Ua ite au 'iāna  
 PST know I PREP-him  
 'I knew him'
- b. 'Ua ite au iho 'iāna  
 PST know I self PREP-him  
 'I myself knew him'
- c. 'Ua ite au 'iāna iho  
 PST know I PREP-him self  
 'I knew him himself,' i.e. 'I knew HIM'

These apparently mystifying facts are in fact quite easily explained in light of the standard emphatic use of *iho*. Since *iho* may be added to either subject or object in the non-reflexive case, I assume that the ambiguity illustrated in (numberc) is related to the fact that the object may be suppressed on the inherent reflexive interpretation. That is, *iho* is where it always is. Given that it follows the subject, the agent-emphasis reading is available as usual. However, if the object were present, it would intervene between the subject and *iho*. And in fact the object may be present, even on a reflexive reading:

- (30) 'Ua hahu 'oia 'iāna iho  
 PST shave he PREP-him self  
 'He shaved HIMSELF'

Standard French allows both reflexive-marking 'slots' to be filled overtly, but to only one semantic effect:

- (31) Nous nous sommes mariés nous-mêmes  
 We us are married ourselves  
 a. 'We married each other ourselves (we performed our own marriage ceremony).'  
 b. \*'We married EACH OTHER (emphatic).'

Tahitian French permits both interpretations of (31), but its surface syntax is identical to that of Standard French. That is, the two reflexive-marking operators can potentially apply overtly (i.e. they are morphologically realized) in both Standard French and Tahitian French. Tahitian French then retains the syntax of Standard French – in which both types of reflexive-marking may appear in the overt syntax – but takes (a crucial aspect of) the information structure of Tahitian: where Tahitian displays ambiguity in the use of the SELF-anaphor, so does Tahitian French.

This is consistent with the claims put forth by Prince (1992) with respect to constructions and the borrowing of discourse function in language contact situations. The speaker of Tahitian learning French has at her disposal an overtly reflexive SELF-anaphor which can be used for two informational purposes: agentivity or emphasis, as discussed above. She hears an overt SELF-anaphor in French, which she takes to be the same (or highly similar). In all cases where she hears this SELF-anaphor, it is being used agentively. That is, the evidence she hears is entirely consistent with her own pattern of use in Tahitian, as she too can use SELF-anaphors agentively. The Tahitian learner of French then extends the perceived parallelism and uses the French SELF-anaphor as she would use the apparently comparable element in Tahitian – that is, she will use the French SELF-anaphor not only to convey its canonical agentive function, but also to express the emphatic function common to the similar SELF-anaphor in Tahitian.

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Department of Linguistics  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305  
[kmsnyder@babel.ling.upenn.edu](mailto:kmsnyder@babel.ling.upenn.edu)