THE NOMINATIVE ISLAND CONDITION IS A FALSE GENERALIZATION[*]

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1.   Introduction

Chomsky (1980) proposes a principle called the Nominative Island Condition (NIC), given in (1).

(1)   The Nominative Island Condition (NIC):
       A nominative anaphor in S cannot be free in S' containing S.
       (Chomsky 1980 (26) p.13)

This essentially excludes lexical anaphors and NP-trace in nominative positions as in (2).

(2)   a.   *John and Bill expect that themselves will be wrong.

       b.   *They expected that each other would win.
             (Chomsky 1986 (226iii) p.168)

       c.   *John$_i$ seems [that t$_i$ is intelligent].

        Although this condition is no longer taken as an independent principle of grammar in the recent framework, it is still considered to be a valid generalization. In this paper, however, I will argue that the NIC is not accurate even as a generalization and suggest that each case in (2) should be dealt with separately.
        The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In section 2 an empirical challenge to the NIC will be presented both from actual language samples and from grammaticality judgments. In section 3 an analysis for the ill-formedness of each type of nominative anaphor will be provided. In section 4 I will account for two asymmetries, which are cross-linguistically observed in the binding system, without invoking such a thing as the NIC. The concluding remarks will be contained in section 5.

2.   An Empirical Challenge to the NIC

It seems that the NIC is not empirically true. First, nominative reciprocals can occasionally be seen in actual language use.[1] For example, (3a) is taken from a genuine e-mail written by a native speaker of English. (3b) is extracted from the website provided by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). (3c) is excerpted from the women's magazine *Cosmopolitan*.

(3)   a.   Since the academic year has begun, and there are a lot of new
                faces, I'd like to suggest a brief meeting next week so that we
                can all be sure we know who each other is and what everyone
                does research-wise etc.
                (from Sadie Fowler's e-mail dated September 9, 2003)

        b.   When the second person enters the schedule both people get
                notified that each other is working there, giving them a chance
                either to use the system's Notes facility or communicate some
                other way about what they are doing.
                (from the BBC website:
                http://www.bbc.co.uk/rd/projects/eca/technology/t3.shtml)

        c.   Twenty-year-old identical twins Adriana Scott and Tamara
                Rabi were separated at birth and were unaware that each other
                existed. (from *Cosmopolitan* July 2003 l.2 p.187)

        What is remarkable about these examples is that their mode of use was not speech but writing. Generally speaking, people make fewer grammatical mistakes when they write than when they speak. And if they realize that they have made one, they usually correct it in writing, though they may not bother to do so in speech. So it is very difficult to put aside the sentences in (3) as being simple errors of sorts.
        Furthermore, this observation was also confirmed in my grammaticality judgment survey as shown in (4).

(4)   %John and Bill expect that each other will be wrong.

While there were a handful of speakers who rejected a sentence like (4) as being completely ungrammatical, well over half of my informants judged it to be in the acceptable range, and the remainder accepted it only marginally. Note that the second group gave a full check to the sentence, which is distinct from the third group who said that it was just marginal. Thus, although the fact that a class of English speakers allows nominative reciprocals has been ignored as a marginal phenomenon, it appears that this phenomenon is much more robust than generally believed.

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[1] Woolford (1999: fn.6) already reports that people sometimes exploit a reciprocal in the subject position of a tensed clause in English. However, she puts aside such examples as marginal.

In the standard approach to binding, the source of the awkwardness in nominative reciprocals that some English speakers feel is the same as that of the ungrammaticality of English nominative reflexives. However, this is not a logical inevitability. In fact, there are a few pieces of evidence that cast doubt on it.

For one thing, even people who fully accept reciprocals in nominative positions as in (4) usually judge their reflexive counterparts like (2a), reproduced below, to be quite deteriorated.

(2)   a.   *John and Bill expect that themselves will be wrong.

Moreover, for most of the speakers who feel nominative reciprocals to be awkward, the degree of ill-formedness in (2a) is significantly stronger than that in (4). In the standard approach these differences between nominative reciprocals and nominative reflexives are rather puzzling. Therefore, I suggest that the reason why nominative reflexives are ungrammatical is distinct from why for some speakers, nominative reciprocals are degraded in English.

This opens up a brand new view on nominative anaphors. It is well known that some languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean allow nominative anaphors. For instance, (5) is a nominative reflexive example from Japanese.

(5)   Itirou$_i$-wa zibun-zisin$_i$/kare-zisin$_i$-ga tensai-da-to
       Itirou$_i$-top self-self$_i$/him-self$_i$-nom   genius-be-comp
       omot-te-iru.
       think-prt-prog
       'Itirou$_i$ thinks that he$_i$ is a genius.'

Standardly, it is thought that English-type languages, where nominative anaphors are prohibited/restricted, have the default status and that for Japanese-type languages, there is some special mechanism by which such anaphors are made possible. But we can turn this way of thinking around. That is, the Japanese-type is the default, and in principle, there is nothing wrong with an anaphor in the subject position of a finite clause being bound from outside of that clause.

However, if binding theory does not prohibit nominative anaphors, why are English nominative reflexives ungrammatical, and for some speakers, nominative reciprocals so awkward? We will turn to this topic in the next section.

3.   The Analysis

In this section an analysis is provided for the ill-formedness of each type of anaphors in nominative positions. In section 3.1 a Case mismatch analysis is proposed for nominative reflexives. In section 3.2 we will consider why nominative reciprocals are so awkward for some speakers. In section 3.3 the ungrammaticality of NP-trace in nominative positions is accounted for, based on the principle of "movement as a last resort" (Chomsky 1991).

3.1   Nominative Reflexives

In the preceding section it was noted that reflexives and reciprocals somehow display an asymmetry when occupying nominative positions in English. Refer again to the above contrast between (2a) and (4).

(2)   a.   *John and Bill expect that themselves will be wrong.
(4)   %John and Bill expect that each other will be wrong.

However, such a reflexive-reciprocal contrast is not restricted to just nominative environments but can also be found elsewhere with a sharper distinction. Consider the pair of sentences in (6).

(6)   a.   *We understand ourselves' problems.
       b.   We understand each other's problems.

The above examples indicate that, while reciprocals can be marked as genitive, reflexives do not have this option available. Thus, it is safe to say that the latter are restricted to accusative positions. On the basis of this observation, I suspect that in English, reflexives are lexically prespecified as accusative (see also Brame (1977), who holds a similar idea about both reflexives and reciprocals).
    Then sentences like (2a) can be ruled out on the same grounds as (7).

(7)   *Them will be wrong.

Thus, in (2a) as well as in (7), the Infl requires a nominative DP, and yet the subject bears prespecified accusative Case. Such a Case mismatch leads to strong ungrammaticality.
    However, As Lisa Travis (pc) points out, it appears that many speakers also accept sentences with *oneself* in the subject position of a tensed clause as in (8).

(8)   %One often thinks that oneself is intelligent.

At first sight, this seems to be fatally contradictory to what has been argued for so far. But closer examination reveals that it is not necessarily the case. Namely, for those who accept (8), *oneself* can also be marked as genitive as shown in (9).

(9)   %One often hides oneself's weaknesses.

Hence, I believe that *oneself*, though reflexive, is exceptionally neutral in terms of Case, perhaps due to its generic nature.[2]

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[2] Martina Wiltschko (pc) suggests a morphological account for the acceptability of such examples as (8). Specifically, her proposal is that, while *himself*, *herself*, *themselves* and so on are clearly accusative as they contain morphologically accusative prefixes: *him-*, *her-*, *them-*, etc., for *oneself*, it is ambiguous between nominative and accusative just as the morphology of the prefix *one* suggests. Although this elegantly explains the contrast

Therefore, I can still retain the idea that English reflexives, except for *oneself*, are prespecified as accusative in the lexicon.

3.2   Nominative Reciprocals

Let us now turn to nominative reciprocals in English such as the one in (4), reintroduced below.

(4)   %John and Bill expect that each other will be wrong.

As discussed in section 2, the judgments split on this from perfectly acceptable to totally unacceptable. However, since the number of people who judge sentences like (4) to be completely ungrammatical is very small, I will put those speakers aside in the present discussion. The emerging picture then is that there are two classes of speakers: (i) those who fully accept (4), and (ii) those who accept it only marginally. Thus, our ultimate task is to explain why these two variations exist with respect to nominative reciprocals.

Following Chomsky (1995), I assume that the φ-features on verbs are uninterpretable and that uninterpretable features must be erased at the interface. The φ-features on V are checked and erased by the φ-features on N. My proposal is that, while class (i) speakers allow a singular number feature to be added to reciprocals, class (ii) speakers cannot exercise this option. Consequently, for the former, reciprocals in nominative positions can check and erase an uninterpretable number feature on the verb, whereas for the latter, they fail to do so and lead to awkwardness.

One piece of evidence to support this line of analysis is that, while class (i) speakers also accept a sentence like (10a), class (ii) speakers reject it strongly.

(10)   a.   John and Bill believe that each other is intelligent.
              (class (i) √/class (ii) *)

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between non-generic 3rd-person reflexives and generic *oneself*, the problem with such an analysis lies in 1st-person and 2nd-person reflexives like *myself*, *yourself* and *ourselves*. Namely, whereas 1st-person and 2nd-person reflexives contain morphologically genitive prefixes such as *my-*, *your-* and *our-*, they can occur in accusative positions as in (ia) but not in genitive positions as in (ib) (see also (6a)).

  (i)   a. I blamed myself.
            b. *I solved myself('s) problem.

Hence, I assume that it is the entire ... *-self* which bears Case and that the morphological case of an element within it does not necessarily reflect the Case of the whole thing. This is reminiscent of the fact that in many dialects of English, an accusative pronoun like *me* can appear in the subject position of a finite clause as long as it is coordinated with another DP. Refer to sentence (ii).

  (ii) Me and Mary saw a movie yesterday.

Thus, with respect to the well-formedness of (8), I will stick to the idea that *oneself* is Case-wise neutral as given in the text.

b. John and Bill believe that each other are intelligent.
(class (i) ??/class (ii) ??)

That is, if a speaker judges nominative reciprocals to be fully grammatical, then he/she likes the verb to be singular as in (10a). On the other hand, if a speaker judges such reciprocals to be only marginal, then he/she dislikes the singular verb and instead prefers it to be plural as in (10b). Since class (i) speakers fully accept nominative reciprocals paired with a singular verb, it is natural to suppose that their reciprocals are associated with a singular feature to check off the coinciding feature on the verb.

However, one question still remains. Namely, if for class (ii) speakers, checking of the uninterpretable number feature on the verb is impossible, then why are sentences like (4) and (10b) not totally ungrammatical? The key to solving this problem is that even for class (i) speakers, sentence (10b) is marginal, not to say perfect. Since we have determined that class (i) speakers have a singular feature associated with their reciprocal, it does not make sense that their *each other* checks a plural feature on the verb in (10b). Therefore, we should doubt that in (10b) and for class (ii) speakers, in (4) as well, the verb really agrees with the reciprocal.

Now, it is often assumed that with English present-tense verbs, the form without an *-s* (or in the case of copula, *are*) is the default (Jonathan D. Bobaljik: class lecture, McGill University, Winter 2000). The idea is that for the copula, for example, the paradigm in (11a) is not a theoretical primitive but is derived from a system as in (11b).[3]

(11) a. The Conjugational Paradigm for the English Present Tense Copula:

I am	we are
you are	you are
he/she/it is	they are

b. A System that Derives the Paradigm in (11a):

I am
he/she/it is

otherwise → are

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[3] Such an approach appears to be both conceptually and empirically superior to the one where the paradigm is taken to be primitive (Jonathan D. Bobaljik: class lecture, McGill University, Winter 2000). It is conceptually better, because in this way, the weird distribution of *are* can be more naturally explained. It is empirically better as well, since it can correctly predict the occurrence of *are* when the regular form is blocked for whatever reason. For instance, consider the 1st-person negative tag question as the following.
 (i)   a. *I am smart, amn't I?
          b. I am smart, aren't I?
In standard English, as can be seen in (ia), the form *amn't* is not available for some reason. In such a context, *are* indeed shows up as illustrated in (ib). The paradigmatic approach does not predict this.

Based on this assumption, I propose that in the cases at hand, no number feature is added to the reciprocal and that the verb is in default mode without an uninterpretable number feature.   This is not ungrammatical, because no uninterpretable number feature is present, which causes the derivation to crash at the interface.   Nevertheless, it is marginal, since the employed form is a default, replacing the authorized one.[4]

As a quick summary, let us go over the derivations of (10a) and (10b) for each type of speaker. They are briefly schematized in (12) and (13), where *isg* stands for interpretable singular feature and *uisg* for uninterpretable singular feature.

(12)   Class (i) Speakers:

        a. John and Bill believe that each other$_{[isg]}$ is$_{[uisg]}$ intelligent.

              The uninterpretable singular feature on the verb is checked.

        b. ??John and Bill believe that each other$_{[\ ]}$ are$_{[\ ]}$ intelligent.
          No uninterpretable number feature is present on the verb.

(13)   Class (ii) Speakers:

        a. *John and Bill believe that each other$_{[\ ]}$ is$_{[uisg]}$ intelligent.
        The uninterpretable singular feature on the verb is unchecked.

        b. ??John and Bill believe that each other$_{[\ ]}$ are$_{[\ ]}$ intelligent.
          No uninterpretable number feature is present on the verb.

For class (i) speakers, (10a) is fine, because the uninterpretable singular feature on the verb is erased by the interpretable singular feature on *each other*. For them, (10b) is not ill-formed, since the reciprocal is not associated with a number feature, and the verb does not contain any uninterpretable number feature. Still, it is not perfect either, because it uses the default form in place of the authorized one.   For class (ii) speakers, on the other hand, (10a) is ungrammatical, because *each other* lacks a singular feature, and the uninterpretable feature on the verb cannot be checked off. Sentence (10b), however, is marginal, since the verb is a default, which does not have an uninterpretable singular feature.

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[4] Lisa Travis (pc) wonders how a sentence like (i) can be completely ungrammatical in the system proposed here.
      (i) *The boy are intelligent.
I think that the difference between (10b) and (i) is clear enough. That is, while in the former, the subject DP lacks the number feature (for both types of speakers), in the latter, *the boy* has a singular feature. But I am still uncertain how to implement this into my theory, because φ-features on N are usually considered to be interpretable, which do not cause the derivation to crash.

3.3   NP-Trace in Nominative Positions

The remaining question is why (2c), repeated below, is ill-formed.

(2)   c.   *John$_i$ seems that t$_i$ is intelligent.

Consider first the licit case of (14), where the embedded clause is nonfinite.

(14)   John$_i$ seems t$_i$ to be intelligent.

In the example immediately above, the DP *John* is base-generated in the lower clause and then raises to the matrix clause to get Case. Otherwise, it remains Caseless, and the Case Filter (Chomsky 1981) will not be satisfied.

In (2c), on the other hand, *John* already has Case in its original position. This fact makes its movement to the higher clause superfluous. As a result, the sentence violates the principle of "movement as a last resort" (Chomsky 1991).[5] Therefore, it is deemed ungrammatical.

4.   The Two Asymmetries in the Binding System

Kyle Johnson (pc) points out that cross-linguistically, two asymmetries are observed in the binding system. That is, there are languages with both nominative anaphors and accusative anaphors and those with accusative anaphors but no nominative. And yet, as far as we know, there are no languages with nominative anaphors but no accusative. Furthermore, there are languages which have both nominative anaphors and nominative pronouns and those which have nominative pronouns but no nominative anaphors. But again, as far as we know, no languages are attested to have nominative anaphors but no nominative pronouns. So, until we can provide a reasonable account for these asymmetries without invoking such a thing as the NIC, the picture will remain incomplete.

I do not think that the existence of these asymmetries is merely accidental. But nor do I believe that it is a reflection of binding theory. Rather,

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[5] Some might argue that *John* in (2c) should be able to raise to Spec of matrix IP to meet the requirement of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP). They might continue that thus, why the sentence is bad should ultimately be attributed to the movement across a CP boundary. However, it appears that already Case-marked DPs cannot be moved to satisfy the EPP anyway as shown below. Note that in (i) the movement does not cross the CP boundary.

(i) *John$_i$ seems to t$_i$ [$_{CP}$ that he is intelligent].

This is presumably because the principle of "movement as a last resort" must be implemented in terms of Greed (Chomsky 1993) (but see Lasnik (1995a & 1995b) for a different interpretation of "Last Resort", which is called Enlightened Self-Interest). According to the principle of Greed, an element cannot enter a syntactic operation unless there is a need to do so on the part of that element itself. In both (2c) and (i), the demand from the EPP that the matrix subject position should be filled is external to *John* and thus cannot be a reason for this DP to move.

I would prefer to explain these asymmetries from the functionalistic point of view. To begin with, let us acknowledge two basic facts. First of all, in nominative-accusative languages the unmarked Case marking is as depicted in (15).

(15)   SUBJ.nom V (OBJ.acc).

Namely, it is either an intransitive verb with a nominative subject or a transitive verb with a nominative subject and an accusative object.

Secondly, while pronouns can be referentially independent, anaphors are referentially dependent upon some other element. In other words, anaphors must have an antecedent in the same sentence. Thus, accusative anaphors can typically appear in monoclausal sentences as in (16a),[6] whereas nominative anaphors appear in biclausal sentences as in (16b) or (16c).

(16)   a. $[_{CP}$ SUBJ.nom$_{ante}$ V OBJ.acc$_{ana}$].
       b. $[_{CP}$ SUBJ.nom$_{ante}$ V (OBJ.acc) $[_{CP}$ SUBJ.nom$_{ana}$ V (OBJ.acc)]].
       c. $[_{CP}$ SUBJ.nom V OBJ.acc$_{ante}$ $[_{CP}$ SUBJ.nom$_{ana}$ V (OBJ.acc)]].

That is, nominative anaphors occur in more complex environments than do accusative ones. If so, it is not surprising that the latter are always developed over the former in the evolution of language. Moreover, since pronouns can referentially stand on their own, they appear in nominative positions in monoclausal sentences as in (17).

(17) $[_{CP}$ SUBJ.nom$_{pron}$ V (OBJ.acc)].

Then again, it does not come as a surprise that nominative pronouns exist in all languages.

Therefore, the two asymmetries do not have to be directly linked to binding theory.

5.   Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that nominative reciprocals are possible in English at least for some speakers. This fact is incompatible with the NIC, which I have suggested should be abandoned even as a generalization. Instead, I have proposed that nominative reflexives, nominative reciprocals and NP-trace in nominative positions in English are each prohibited/restricted for different reasons. Finally, as for the two asymmetries, cross-linguistically observed in the binding system, I have argued that there is a functionalistic explanation.

<div align="center">References</div>

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[6] I put ECM constructions aside, because they are fairly marked and cannot be found in all languages.

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