Logophoricity in French: how possessive anaphor *son propre* (his own) supports the theory that long distance anaphors are logophoric

The aim of this paper is to analyse the properties of the French expression *son propre* (« his own ») in order to support the theory that long distance anaphors are logophoric.

Long distance anaphors pose an interesting challenge to the standard theory of anaphor binding as proposed by Chomsky (1981, 1986) and subsequent revisions of it, since they do not obey condition A: as shown for example by Reinhart and Reuland (1993) or Huang and Liu (2001), long distance reflexives –also called exempt anaphors, free anaphors, indirect reflexives...etc– have their antecedent outside the local domain as defined by the standard binding theory. Since this syntactic licensing is only possible under a specific discourse interpretation, the puzzling category of long distance anaphors was characterized as logophoric: indeed, this term was originally introduced by Hagège (1974) to call a class of pronouns that refer in some languages to the source of the discourse. However, since anaphors—as opposed to these pronouns—have no specific lexical properties imposing a logophoric interpretation and since not every long distance anaphor seems to require a logophoric interpretation, the validity of this theory remains controversial.

The goal of this paper is to add another empirical argument in favor of this generalization about logophoricity and to strengthen it: based on the specific behavior of *son propre*, I would like to suggest that all long distance anaphors are actually logophoric, but other possibly interfering properties of some anaphors may sometimes conceal it.

Indeed, even though French *prima facie* appears to be a language which lacks both logophoricity and long distance anaphora, I propose that the complex possessive *son propre* (his own) actually supports the theory of long distance anaphors as logophors. Actually, *son propre* can be shown to constitute a short distance anaphor which obeys the standard condition A of binding theory: but *son propre* can also have its antecedent outside the local binding domain (example 1). Now, the point is that long distance antecedents are syntactically licensed only if *son propre* is logophoric, that is, if its antecedent denotes the perspective holder. Moreover, I propose that this is shown in French by the *de se* reading requirement. This means that *son propre* can only be long distance bound under a *de se* analysis, as suggested by three tests: in this case, the individual denoted by the antecedent has to be aware of the reflexive possession (example 2); therefore, he/she has *a fortiori* to be conscious (example 3) and animate (example 4). However, the reverse does not hold: certainly, locality and c-command are not required for the antecedent if *son propre* has a *de se* interpretation, but are not precluded either, which means that the anaphoric and the logophoric uses of *son propre* overlap.

Furthermore, I argue that if such logophoricity in French is not obvious, it is because of a third property of *son propre*: the possessive anaphor and logophor *son propre* behaves also like a focus particle which can express contrast or unexpectedness. Thus, I propose that this property can at first glance conceal the logophoric interpretation of some long distance anaphors *son propre* in that a *de se* reading with the possessor being conscious of the reflexive possession is apparently not required: nevertheless, I argue that actually, the logophoric interpretation still holds in these cases but in a specific way: the focus on *son propre* yields an interpretation where the speaker emphasizes that the individual denoted by the antecedent is not aware of the reflexivity of the possession (example 5). I propose to call this reading *anti de se*. Therefore, when *son propre* has a long distance antecedent, the awareness of the possessor always matters: he/she *should* or *should not* be conscious of the reflexivity of the possessive relation. In other words, since I argue that the criterion for logophoricity in French is the *de se* reading (or its focused counterpart the *anti de se* reading), it means that long distance *son propre* is always logophoric.

Thus, the French expression *son propre* adds another example to the long distance anaphors that have to get a logophoric interpretation, which empirically strengthens the crosslinguistic correlation between long distance anaphora and logophoricity. Furthermore, the *anti de se* reading suggests a way to make long distance anaphors uniform – as logophors –: I propose that if long distance anaphors in some languages do not seem to be logophoric at first glance, it may be due to another interfering property of these anaphors, just as the focus property of *son propre* may turn the required *de se* reading – criterion for logophoricity in French – into an *anti de se* reading.
Examples

(1) Romy Schneider, disait que tout le monde avait dû admirer sa propre robe.
« Romy Schneider said that everybody must have admired her own dress. » (Note : Romy Schneider has to be aware of the fact that the dress in question is her own = de se reading)

(2) Marceline, disait que Suzanne allait épouser son propre fils.
« Marceline said that Suzanne was going to marry her own son. » (Note : the sentence is well-formed only if Marceline is aware that Suzanne’s future husband is her own son = de se reading)

(3)* Le pharaon, a beaucoup aimé les embaumeurs qui à présent prennent soin de son propre corps.
« The pharaoh really liked the embalmers who are now taking care of his own body. » (Note : the sentence is not well-formed since the dead pharaoh is not conscious and cannot be aware that he has a body = de se reading impossible)

(4) *Les chambres du premier étage ont bénéficié du fait que leurs propres salles de bain plaisent aux touristes.
« The first floor bedrooms benefited from the fact that their own bathrooms are liked by the tourists. » (Note : The bedrooms are inanimate ; therefore, they cannot be aware that they possess a bathroom = de se reading impossible)

(5) Ironiquement, l’ogre, annonce à sa femme que ses propres enfants étaient délicieux.
« Ironically, the ogre tells his wife that his own children were delicious. » (Note : as stressed by the adverb ironically, the speaker emphasizes the fact that the ogre does not know that the children are his own = anti de se reading)

References

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