

# Homework # 1

Klaus Abels, Introduction to Syntax

Summerschool Wrocław 05

## 1 Are the binding principles vacuous?

It is sometimes claimed that the Binding Principles we came up with are vacuous. I repeat the principles here:

- (1) **Principle A** Anaphors in English must have a co-referring antecedent which c-commands them and which is within the same clause.
- (2) **Principle B** Standard pronouns in English must not have a co-referring antecedent which c-commands them and which is within the same clause.

The author of the webpage <http://human-brain.org/nonsense.html> reacts to this and the claim that the Binding Principles must be innate in some form like this:

This is blatant nonsense, because these 'innate rules' are not rules, they are tautologies. For example, we call 'anaphors' those words that must be bound<sup>1</sup> in the local domain [we have identified the local domain with the clause in class] (approximately), so obviously they are almost always bound in the local domain. The same applies to pronouns and being free in the local domain.

This case relies on the fact that the definitions of anaphor and pronoun are not given in the same terms that are used to express the rules. Instead, they are given in intuitional way, which camouflages the identity between the definitions and the rules.

These rules are reproduced many times with different terms [...] and appear in introductory textbooks (e.g. akmajian et al (1995), P. 491).

What's wrong with this argument? Why are the binding principles not vacuous, contrary to the suggestion of the author of this web-page?

---

<sup>1</sup>An element  $\alpha$  is *bound* by an element  $\beta$  iff  $\alpha$  c-commands  $\beta$  and  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are co-indexed. An element is free if it is not bound. With these definitions we can paraphrase our principles as follows.

- (i) **Principle A** Anaphors in English must be bound within their clause.
- (ii) **Principle B** Pronouns in English must be free within their clause.

## 2 Optional: More on Binding Principles

We will not have time to discuss the optional homework assignments in class. But feel free to show me your solution after class, during my office hours, at lunch, or at 2 o'clock at night in the bar.<sup>2</sup>

Look over the data on reflexive and ordinary pronouns from the first day. Based on that data, take a few minutes to come up with five wrong generalization concerning the distribution of reflexives and pronouns that meets covers some large subpart of the data or, in fact, all of it.

Identify data that tell you that these generalizations are wrong.

Can you also come up with alternatives to our binding principles that you cannot falsify?

## 3 Optional: How does binding work in your native language?

We will not have time to discuss the optional homework assignments in class. But feel free to show me your solution after class, during my office hours, at lunch, or at any other time you manage to hunt me down.

Translate the examples discussed in English today in class into your native language? Is there a set of anaphoric pronouns different from the standard pronouns? Are they made up of two separate pieces like the English reflexive pronouns (him+self, her+self, them+selves) or are they one piece (like the German 'sich')? Do the reflexives in your language behave like or unlike their English counterparts? What are the differences? Are there other (non-pronominal) ways of expressing reflexivity in your language?

---

<sup>2</sup>I can't guarantee I can react coherently to solutions at 2 o'clock in the bar.