

On the Interpretation of Certain Arbitrary Pronouns

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Keywords: arbitrary pronouns, impersonals, argument structure

It is well-known that some arbitrary elements (henceforth “arbs”) are restricted to the external argument. This is true of English *they*, Spanish 3pl null subjects (Jaeggli 1986) and argumental *si* in Italian (Cinque 1988) (see also Hebrew 3pl null subjects, Borer 2005):

- (1) a. They sell cigarettes at gas stations.
b. They don’t allow dogs on the beach.
c. They are arrested all the time by the police.
d. They exist without any water on this planet.
- (2) a. Lllaman a la puerta. “They’re calling at the door”
b. Fueron asesinados por criminales. “They were assassinated by criminals.”
c. Llegan cansados despues de un viaje tan largo.
“They arrive tired after a long trip.”
- (3) a. Sembra non essersi ancora scoperto il vero colpevole.
“It seems that the true culprit has not yet been discovered.”
b. Sembra non essersi lavorato a sufficienza.
“It seems that one has not worked enough.”
c. *Sembra essersi arrivati troppo tardi.

(A non-agreeing nominative-assigning context is needed to isolate argumental *si*; see Cinque 1988: 524). In all these cases, the interpretation is roughly:

- (5) $\exists x, x$ a conscious being, $V(x, ..)$.

Here we address two questions:

- (6) a. Why the restriction to the external argument?
b. How is this arb-element distinguished from others which do not show the restriction (in particular PROarb and one, see below)?

Cinque (1988:548) answers (6a) by stating that this kind of *arb* must be in a CHAIN with [NP, IP] at D-structure. This may well be empirically adequate but unstateable on current assumptions, given that neither D-Structure nor CHAINS are available as analytic devices.

Instead I propose an account based on two ideas: (i) featural relativized minimality (FRM; Starke 2001, Rizzi 2001, 2013), (ii) this kind of arb is licensed by unselective binding by T -- T has generic/existential temporal properties, which can license a generic/existential arb. The latter idea is supported by the interpretations of passive implicit arguments in (7), where the existential or generic interpretation of the external argument tracks the specific/generic tense:

- (7) a. John was arrested yesterday at 6.
b. It is widely believed that the world is round. FRM can be stated as in (8):

- (8) In the configuration
X ... Y ... Z...

where each element asymmetrically c-commands the next, going from left to right, Y prevents X from interacting with Z for property P just where X and Y both have property P.

Following Starke (2001), P can refer to some (possibly composite) featural property.

In these terms, we arrive at the following account of the restriction to external arguments:

- (9) a. T_i [vP arb_i [VP .. - arbitrary external argument: nothing intervenes between T and arb, so licensing is possible
- b. Internal arb argument of a passive:
* T_i [vP EA [VP .. arb_i ... - implicit EA intervenes and is licensed, blocking licensing of IA arb by T
- c. Internal arb argument of a (non-stative) unaccusative:
* T_i ... Ev ... [VP .. arb_i ... - low Event argument intervenes, blocking licensing of IA arb by T.

This account clearly represents an improvement over Cinque's. But two questions arise: (i) what of arbs which do not show the external-argument restriction? (ii) what is the exact nature of the unselective-binding relation here?

Concerning (i), consider PRO_{arb} and (British) English *one*, both of which can clearly be internal arguments:

- (10) a. It is annoying [PRO_{arb} to be beaten].
 [PRO_{arb} to arrive late] is embarrassing.
 b. One is always beaten in these tournaments.
 One always arrives late to these dinners.

These are instances of what Cinque called "quasi-universal" (Qu- \forall) arbitrary pronouns, with the following properties:

- (11) a. incompatibility with specific time reference, e.g. present perfect;
 b. incompatibility with a single individual satisfying the description;

The arb-elements in (1-3) do not show these properties:

- (12) a. Ayer a las cinco, llamaban a la puerta.
 Yesterday at the five, call.3pl.Impf at the door
 "Yesterday at five, they were calling at the door."
 b. Lllaman a la puerta; pienso que sera Juan.
 Call.3pl at the door; think.1sg that be.Fut John
 "They're calling at the door; I think it'll be John."
 (13) a. They're knocking at the door; I think it's John.
 b. Yesterday at 5 they were knocking at the door.

This leads us to the prediction that any arbitrary element that is not restricted to the external θ -role will display the other Qu- \forall properties. Cinque (1988:546-554) demonstrates that this is true for Italian *si*, Italian arbitrary null 2sg, Italian null objects, French *on*, and PRO_{arb} (it also holds for the Finnish "G-pronoun" (Holmberg 2010) and Welsh impersonals).

Qu- \forall readings have two further properties (illustrated here with *one*), indicating an A'-relation (14)

- Bound-variable reading:
 a. One often worries that one shouldn't eat meat.
 b. One is always pursued by one's admirers.
 (15) Weak crossover (see Moltmann 2006):
 a. *His_i mother should always say that one_i is good.
 b. One_i should always say that his_i mother is good.

So we conclude, following Chierchia (1995), Moltmann (2006), that Qu-" arbs involve a GEN operator in the local C which A'-binds the arb (construed as a variable). The conclusion is thus: (16) Arbs subject to the external-argument constraint are licensed by T and therefore:

- a. allow the Qu- \exists interpretation;
 b. must be highly local to T (hence the constraint);
 c. do not show bound-variable interpretations.
 (17) Arbs not subject to the external-argument constraint are licensed by GEN in C and:
 a. show the Qu- \forall interpretation;
 b. have bound-variable interpretations;
 c. show weak-crossover effects;
 d. in some cases, show island-sensitivity;
 e. may default to 1PI interpretation in specific-time contexts.

(16) and (17) represent the basic two modes of licensing available: Agree ("A'-licensing") and variable-binding ("A'-licensing"), the former sensitive to argument structure, the latter not.