

Demystifying Picture Noun Anaphors

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1. Introduction

Anaphors within NPs headed by representational nouns like *picture* and *story* have long been treated as belonging to an exceptional class due to their seeming exemption from the structural conditions imposed on anaphoric binding (Warshawsky 1965, Ross 1970, Postal 1971, Bouchard 1984, Pollard & Sag 1992, Reinhart & Reuland 1993, Drummond et al. 2011, i.a.). In particular, anaphoric arguments of picture nouns appear to admit antecedents outside of the minimal clause containing them, as in (1).

- (1) Tom_i believes that there is a picture of himself_i hanging in the post office.
(Jackendoff 1972:133)

Our goal is to show that reflexive anaphors in picture nouns phrases (henceforth, Picture Noun Anaphors or PNAs) are in fact not exceptional—that they, too, standardly obey Condition A of Binding Theory. As we will explain, this result relies on the following combination of independently-motivated hypotheses:

- Condition A is defined on domains delimited by subjects (see Charnavel & Sportiche 2016).
- Anaphors can be bound by implicit logophoric binders located within their binding domain (see Charnavel 2020a, 2020b).
- Implicit logophoric binding is never available for anaphors with a syntactic coargumental subject due to a weak/strong competition principle that is fully independent of Condition A (cf. Charnavel 2020a).
- Picture noun phrases (PNPs) can, and sometimes must, contain potentially implicit nominal subjects (see Bryant & Charnavel 2020).

Based on new and existing data, we argue that this novel set of hypotheses corrects the wrong predictions that both Chomskian and predicate-based theories of binding make for PNAs.

In the next section, we provide a brief introduction to the puzzle PNAs have posed for binding theories. We then lay out our proposal in further detail in Section 3, and we demonstrate that this proposal correctly predicts the distribution of PNAs in Section 4. We conclude in Section 5.

2. The Problem with Picture Noun Anaphors

According to Condition A of the Chomskian Binding Theory (CBT), anaphors must be bound within the minimal XP containing both the anaphor and a subject distinct from it (Chomsky 1986). Under the assumption that a picture noun may optionally project a covert agentive subject (PRO) identified with the creator of the representation (Chomsky 1986, Roeper 1987, Giorgi & Longobardi 1991, Davies & Dubinsky 2003, i.a.), this hypothesis can account for some apparently exceptional behavior of PNAs: as argued by Chomsky (1986), it can explain their non-complementarity with pronouns, as shown in (2); it can arguably also account for some instances in which a PNA lacks an overt local binder, as in (3).

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- (2) a. They_i heard stories about themselves.
 b. They_i heard [PRO_k stories about them_i].
 (Chomsky 1986:166-167)
- (3) [The photographer]_i said that the gallery opening would include [a PRO_i photo of herself].

However, this hypothesis incorrectly predicts that all PNAs that lack an overt binder must refer to the agent associated with the noun, contrary to fact: under the most natural reading of (1) above, Tom is not identified with the taker of the picture.

Inspired in part by the distributional and interpretive properties of PNAs, predicate-based theories of binding (PBTs; e.g., Pollard & Sag 1992, Reinhart & Reuland 1993, Safir 2004, Reuland 2011) redefine Condition A to require that anaphoric arguments of a predicate with a subject be bound by a coargument.¹ PBTs maintain that anaphors lacking a coargument are exempt from Condition A and are only constrained by discourse factors like point of view. Though proposals diverge on the status of PNAs in DPs with possessors—some treat possessors as subjects of the noun (e.g., Pollard & Sag 1992), some do not (e.g., Runner & Kaiser 2005)—PNAs in DPs without possessors are always considered exempt. This correctly predicts the sensitivity to perspective exhibited by PNAs in pairs like (4).

- (4) a. John_i knew that there was a picture of himself_i in the post office.
 b. *Mary said about John_i that there was a picture of himself_i in the post office.
 (Kuno 1987:126)

However, as shown by Charnavel & Sportiche (2016) for French, PBTs wrongly predict that PNAs in DPs without possessors can appear only when anteceded by a perspectival center. (5a) demonstrates that inanimate PNAs in fact do not require a coargument binder even though inanimates, lacking a mental state, cannot serve as perspectival centers. On the other hand, inanimate PNAs must be bound within the minimal domain containing a subject (5b), consistent with CBT Condition A.²

- (5) a. [The witty play]_i inspired a parody of itself_i.
 b. *[The witty play]_i inspired Anne to see a parody of itself_i.

Following Charnavel & Sportiche (2016), we conclude from examples like (5) that Condition A should not be defined over predicates but over domains delimited by the presence of a subject (or tense³), in line with Chomsky (1986). At the same time, examples like (1) reveal that positing DP-internal PRO subjects is not sufficient to account for all cases in which Condition A is not overtly obeyed. Rather than reject both CBT and PBT solutions to the PNA puzzle and resort to the assumption that PNAs are simply exceptional, we argue that both covert agentive subjects (cf. CBT) and perspectival centers (cf. PBT) play a role in licensing PNAs. In the following section, we lay out an analysis that integrates both of these key aspects while maintaining the view that PNAs, like all anaphors, must obey Condition A.

3. General proposal: Condition A + Weak/Strong Competition

We propose that the distribution of PNAs can be accounted for by appealing to two factors: (i) Condition A, and (ii) competition between strong and weak forms, which applies independent of binding.

We define Condition A as in (6) in light of arguments presented in Charnavel & Sportiche (2016). Descriptively, it entails that an anaphor must be bound within its tensed TP without any subject intervening between it and its binder.

¹ This paraphrase of PBT Condition A glosses over some differences (here irrelevant) between particular proposals. See Charnavel & Bryant (2020) for further discussion.

² As is standard, we use ‘ok/*’ to indicate contrasts in acceptability rather than absolute grammaticality judgements.

³ Unlike Chomsky (1986), Charnavel & Sportiche (2016) conclude that tensed TPs form a binding domain even in the absence of an intervening subject, i.e., even if the anaphor is (within) the subject. We avoid such cases here.

- (6) Condition A: An anaphor must be bound within the minimal Spell-out domain.

Crucially, we take Condition A to hold without exception, even for anaphors that lack an overt local antecedent. Building on the observation that seemingly exceptional anaphors are subject to perspectival conditions similar to those affecting logophoric pronouns (Clements 1975, Kuno 1987, Sells 1987, Pollard & Sag 1992, i.a.), Charnavel (2020a, 2020b) argues that such anaphors are in fact locally bound by implicit logophoric pronouns, pro_{log} , which are identified with the attitude holder or empathy locus associated with the domain within which they occur.⁴ Charnavel proposes that pro_{log} is introduced as the specifier of a logophoric operator⁵ that can appear in any Spell-out domain, as shown in (7).

- (7) (DP_i) ... [SPELL-OUT DOMAIN ... [_{LogP} pro_{log-i} OP_{log} [_α ... picture of herself_i ...]]]

Focused mainly on French data, Charnavel motivates the presence of pro_{log} in the syntax on the basis of exhaustive coreference constraints on apparently exempt anaphors as well as the interpretive properties of their domain, namely the requirement that the domain containing the anaphor express the first-personal perspective (e.g., *de se* attitude) of its antecedent. After checking that the same facts hold in English, we conclude that local logophoric binding can likewise license English anaphora (see Charnavel & Bryant 2020 for details). For example, we see in (8a–b) that apparently exempt English anaphors can be anteceded by attitude holders (e.g., Mary), if read *de se*, empathy loci (e.g., John), or a mix (e.g., Mary and John). But crucially, logophorically-bound anaphors occurring in the same Spell-out domain must exhaustively corefer, as shown in (8c); given that Condition A requires exhaustive binding (see Charnavel & Sportiche 2016), this supports Charnavel’s hypothesis that pro_{log} serves as a local A-binder for apparently exempt anaphors under the assumption that any given Spell-out domain can contain only one pro_{log} .

- (8) Mary_i told John_k...
 a. [that pro_{log-i} her son looks up to her husband and herself_i].
 b. [that $pro_{log-i+k}$ her son looks up to people like themselves_{i+k}].
 c. *[that { pro_{log-i} / $pro_{log-i+k}$ } her son looks up to herself_i and people like themselves_{i+k}].

From this we predict that English PNAs must always be locally bound but can lack an overt local binder when interpreted logophorically.

Though logophoric binding can covertly satisfy Condition A under appropriate perspectival conditions, we find that logophoricity is not a sufficient condition for apparent exemption from Condition A in English. Consider the minimal pair in (9).

- (9) a. *It angered him_i that she tried to attract himself_i.
 b. It angered him_i that she tried to attract a man like himself_i.
 (Reinhart & Reuland 1993:670)

Discourse conditions are held constant across (9a) and (9b), and yet inclusion of the reflexive is unacceptable in the former but acceptable in the latter. PBTs appeal to such contrasts in support of a predicate-based formulation of Condition A; however, we have seen in the previous section that PBTs come up short in predicting the distribution of non-perspectival (e.g. inanimate) anaphors. We propose that the unavailability of logophoric binding in (9a) instead follows from a general, binding-independent

⁴ See Charnavel (2020a, 2020b) for further details regarding the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic factors that determine the availability of logophoric binding, as well as the interpretive constraints associated with attitude holders and empathy loci.

⁵ Inclusion of logophoric operators and/or perspectival projections in the syntax has elsewhere been proposed to account for the distribution of logophoric pronouns (Koopman & Sportiche 1989, Anand 2006, i.a.) and syntactic effects of point of view (Jayaseelan 1998, Speas & Tenny 2003, i.a.). See Charnavel (2020a, 2020b) for discussion of how the treatment adopted here differs from previous hypotheses.

competition constraint according to which, all else being equal, the availability of a weaker form precludes occurrence of a stronger form (Cardinaletti & Starke 1999).

This competition is morphologically apparent in French, where the strong reflexive *elle-même* (as well as the strong pronoun *elle*) is blocked from environments that license use of a reflexive or pronominal clitic under the same interpretation (Charnavel & Sportiche 2016, Charnavel 2020a). This is true both when *elle-même* has an overt local antecedent ((10) vs. (11)) and when it is logophorically bound ((12) vs. (13)). Given that the specific syntactic restrictions on *se* forbid logophoric binding,⁶ this competition gives rise to the descriptive generalization that logophoric reflexive licensing (i.e. apparent exemption of *elle-même*, as in (13a)) is precluded in positions that can host clitics (as in (12a)).

- (10) a. *Rémy_i a brûlé lui_i(-même).
 b. Rémy_i s'est brûlé.
 'Rémy_i burned himself.'
 (11) a. Louise_i incarne souvent des personnages comme elle_i(-même).
 b. *Louise_i s_i'incarne souvent des personnages comme.
 'Louise_i often plays characters like herself.'
 (12) a. *Rémy_i croit que Marie a brûlé lui_i(-même).
 b. Rémy_i croit que Marie l_i'a brûlé.
 'Rémy_i believes that Mary burned him.'
 (13) a. Louise_i s'étonne que ses filles aiment incarner des personnages comme elle_i(-même).
 b. *Louise_i s'étonne que ses filles aiment l_i'incarner des personnages comme.
 'Louise_i is surprised that her daughters enjoy playing characters like her.'

We propose that a similar competition applies in English. In support of this hypothesis, we appeal to Ahn's (2015) discovery that English reflexives exhibit a dual prosodic behavior: reflexives that are bound by a syntactic coargumental subject are *phonologically weak*—they do not bear phrasal stress in maximally broad focus contexts (14)—while all other reflexives are *phonologically strong*, patterning with fully referential DPs including proper names (15).⁷

- (14) A: What happened in the kitchen?
 B: a. Remy_i accidentally burned {**Marie** / #**himself**}.
 b. Remy_i accidentally **burned** {#Marie / 'imself}.
 (Ahn 2015:42)
 (15) A: What is the setup for the show?
 B: a. Louis_i plays a character like {his **brother/himself**}.
 b. Louis_i plays a character **like** {#his brother/'imself}.
 (Ahn 2015:50)

Interestingly, those environments that can host weak reflexives in English are also those that can host weak personal pronouns (Zwicky 1986, Wallenberg 2007, i.a.). And just as in French, it is in exactly the environments that license weak elements that logophoric binding is unavailable (see (9a) vs. (9b)). Following Charnavel (2020a), we assume that only strong *herself* can be logophoric due to the

⁶ Descriptively, the reflexive clitic *se* can only be anteceded by local subjects, i.e., by some syntactic coargumental subjects as in (10). But as argued in, e.g., Labelle (2008) and Sportiche (2014), *se* is arguably not a reflexive itself, but is related to Voice.

⁷ It should be noted that the phonological contrast between strong and weak English reflexives is not always observed outside of broad-focus contexts. For instance, weak reflexives may bear phrasal stress in response to a narrow-focus question while strong reflexives may not bear phrasal stress when contextually given (Ahn 2015). See Charnavel & Bryant (2020) for details. All our examples here should be read in broad-focus contexts.

dependence of weak *herself* on a local reflexive head (see Ahn 2015, cf. French *se*), and we conclude contra PBTs that the restriction on logophoric binding in English follows not from Condition A, but from the preclusion of strong reflexives in configurations that allow weak elements under the same interpretation. As shown in (16), the contrast in (9) thus follows from the fact that the intended interpretation can obtain with a weak form in (a), but not in (b).

- (16) a. It angered him_i that she tried to **attract** 'im_i.
 b. #It angered him_i that she tried to attract a man **like** {'im_i/'imself_i}.

While additional work is required to refine the view of the English strong/weak competition posited here (see Charnavel & Bryant 2020), the key resulting descriptive generalization is that English anaphors can be logophorically bound only in the absence of a coargumental subject (as in (9b)). Crucially, Ahn (2015) observes that PNAs, too, can be phonologically weak, consistent with the presence of a subject within NP (henceforth, nominal subject⁸): he remarks of example (17) that the weak PNA strongly favors an interpretation under which the reflexive argument is identified with the author of the letter.

- (17) Jack found a **letter** to 'imself. [⇒ Jack wrote the letter]
 (Ahn 2015:131)

We therefore predict that logophoric binding will be unavailable for PNAs in the presence of a (potentially implicit) nominal subject.

In short, we propose that English PNAs do not comprise an exceptional class of anaphors but, rather, are consistently subject to Condition A, just like any other anaphor. While we predict that Condition A can in some cases be covertly satisfied by logophoric binding, we also predict this mechanism to be unavailable whenever the picture noun projects a subject, due to competition. Because subject projection renders the NP a Spell-out domain, we thus predict that a PNA co-occurring with a nominal subject must be bound by that subject (in the absence of another potential antecedent within the NP⁹).

4. Applying the proposal to PNAs

In this section we show how the two factors put forth above—Condition A and weak/strong competition—interact to give rise to the specific distribution of PNAs. We first observe that a PNA can lack an overt local antecedent when it is logophorically interpreted, that is, when it is anteceded by either an attitude holder (18a) or empathy locus (18b) and when it falls within a domain expressing its antecedent's first-personal perspective (for instance, a *de se* attitude in (18a)).

- (18) a. John_i knew [that pro_{log-i} there was a picture of himself_i in the post office]. [= (4a)]
 b. [The pro_{log-i} picture of himself_i in Newsweek] dominated John_i's thoughts.
 (Pollard & Sag 1992:278)

As only animate referents may serve as logophoric centers, logophoric binding is unavailable for inanimate PNAs, as shown in (19a) vs. (19b). Rather, an inanimate PNA must be bound by an overt local antecedent within its Spell-out domain, as in (5a) (except under a creator interpretation, see (27)).

- (19) a. [The motivational speaker]_i inspired Anne [pro_{log-i} to buy a picture of himself_i].
 b. *[The witty play]_i inspired Anne [to see a parody of itself_i]. [= (5b)]

⁸ We assume here that nominal subjects are merged within the thematic core of the nominal (which we notate as NP) before moving to the genitive position. Genitives can also originate, we assume, as the subject of a higher functional projection, for instance DP. See, e.g., Stowell (1989), Giorgi & Longobardi (1991), Longobardi (2001).

⁹ In this paper, we ignore cases in which the picture noun takes another argument besides a subject and a PNA (e.g., *Susan's letter to Mary about herself*). In such cases, the third argument (e.g., *Mary*) can also bind the PNA.

Furthermore, logophoric PNAs occurring in the same Spell-out domain must exhaustively corefer, as exemplified in (20) under readings where neither John nor Mary are the creators of the story and pictures.

- (20) John_i told Mary_k ...
 a. [that pro_{log-i} there was a story about himself_i in the paper].
 b. [that pro_{log-i+k} there were some pictures of themselves_{i+k} in the paper].
 c. *[that {pro_{log-i} / pro_{log-i+k}} there were a story about himself_i and some pictures of themselves_k in the paper].

We conclude from these examples that, for some PNAs, apparent exemption from Condition A is due to the implicitness of local binding by pro_{log}.

Not all PNAs can be logophorically bound, however. As explained in the previous section, logophoric binding is blocked in English for anaphors with coargumental subjects as a result of a general competition between weaker and stronger forms. With respect to PNAs, this amounts to the requirement that a PNA co-occurring with a nominal subject must be bound by that subject. And crucially, the nominal subject can be covert (pro_{subj}¹⁰) as represented schematically in (21).

- (21) (DP_i) ... [SPELL-OUT ... [LogP pro_{log-i} OP_{log} [NP pro_{subj-k} picture of herself *_{i/k} ...]]]

Adhering to the assumption that subjects of picture nouns must be creators (Chomsky 1986, Roeper 1987, i.a.), we thus predict there to be contexts in which a PNA obligatorily refers to the creator. In an online survey of 108 native English speakers, Bryant & Charnavel (2020) turned up two such contexts.¹¹ First, PNAs that express the goal argument of a noun like *letter* are acceptable only when they refer to the author of the letter. This is true even when Condition A appears to be satisfied by the surface syntax, as illustrated by (22).

- (22) a. Ellis_i enjoyed the [NP pro_{subj-i} letter to himself_i]. [context: letter written by Ellis]
 b. *Ellis_i enjoyed the [NP pro_{subj-k} letter to himself_i]. [context: letter written by Ellis's sister]

Second, PNAs within the direct object of a creation verb must corefer with the creator (cf. Asudeh & Keller 2001). This is shown in (23), where antecedence by a non-creator is significantly worse when the selecting verb is a creation verb than when the selecting verb is not a creation verb.

- (23) a. *[Jackie_i's brother]_k painted the [NP pro_{subj-k} picture of herself_i].
 b. [The fire Hannah_i started]_k pro_{log-i} destroyed the portrait of herself_i.

We take these data to reveal that nominal subject projection is obligatory within a PNP that is the object of a creation verb (cf. Davies & Dubinsky 2003) or contains a goal argument. This conclusion gains further support from the observation that such PNPs are incompatible with overt possessors that are not construed as creators, as shown in (24) and (25): English DPs may only project one external argument (Giorgi & Longobardi 1991, Longobardi 2001, i.a.), which can but need not originate as nominal subject.

- (24) a. Wyatt_i tore up [DP Vanessa_k's [NP ~~Vanessa~~ letter to herself_k]].
 [context: letter written by Vanessa]
 b. *Wyatt_i tore up [DP Vanessa_k's [NP pro_{subj-j} letter to herself_k]].
 [context: letter written by Vanessa's partner]
 c. *Roger_i tore up [DP Cora_k's [NP pro_{subj-i} note to himself_i]].
 [context: note written by Roger]

¹⁰ We adopt this notation as a matter of convenience. We remain agnostic as to whether this covert subject is PRO, pro, or some other null syntactic element (see, e.g., Landau 2013 for some relevant discussion).

¹¹ Examples (22) – (26) are taken from Bryant & Charnavel (2020).

- (25) a. *David_i wrote [DP Ericak's [NP pro_{subj-i} book about himself_i]].
 b. *Gordon_i wrote [DP Fayettek's [NP pro_{subj-i} book about herself_k]].

Hence, just as in the verbal domain, we find that the distribution of anaphors within PNAs is constrained by the presence of a coargumental subject: by virtue of licensing phonologically weak arguments, nominal subject projection within a PNP blocks logophoric binding of anaphoric arguments, rendering the subject the only potential binder.

In all other conditions considered by Bryant & Charnavel (2020), PNAs were equally compatible with both creator and non-creator binders, whether overt as in (26a) or logophoric as in (23b) and (26b).

- (26) a. Erica_i hated the photo of herself.
 b. Ben_i loved [DP Amanda_k's pro_{log-i} portrait of himself_i].

We conclude from these examples that nominal subject projection is not obligatory in the absence of creation verbs and goal arguments.¹² We propose that subject projection is however possible in these contexts on the basis of examples like (27) (cf. Chomsky's 1986 analysis of (2)).

- (27) The [NP pro_{subj-i} picture of itself_i] shows [the Mars rover]_i at the base of a steep hill.

The PNA here cannot be licensed by logophoric binding since its antecedent, being inanimate, cannot serve as a perspectival center in the required sense. Nevertheless, (27) is acceptable under the interpretation that the Mars rover snapped the picture in question. We therefore hypothesize that the PNA is instead covertly bound by an implicit agentive subject.

In sum, apparent Condition A exemption of PNAs results either from covert logophoric binding or from covert subject binding. The blocking of logophoric binding by the presence of a nominal subject is responsible for further obscuring the superficial distribution of PNAs. Nominal subjects therefore require further investigation, as understanding their role (as both potential binders and potential blockers of logophoric binding due to weak/strong competition) is the key to debunking PNA exceptionalism. We leave it to future work to provide further, independent support for covert nominal subject projection (see also literature on control within nominals mentioned in, e.g., Landau 2013).

5. Conclusion

We have argued that, far from being exceptional, English PNAs exhibit the same distributional constraints that are observed of all other anaphors in the language. Specifically, we have shown that PNAs must obey Condition A, which requires that they be bound within the minimal Spell-out domain, but that Condition A may be covertly satisfied, in particular by an implicit logophoric binder, thereby extending Charnavel's (2020a) hypothesis of logophoric licensing to English nominals. We have further demonstrated that PNAs are subject to a general competition between phonologically strong and weak forms that is likewise observed in the verbal domain, resulting in the unavailability of logophoric binding for PNAs co-occurring with a nominal subject. With this new combination of ingredients, we are able to account for the distribution of PNAs without stipulating an idiosyncratic licensing mechanism (cf. Postal 1971, Pollard & Sag 1992, Reinhart & Reuland 1993, i.a.) or homophony between anaphors and logophoric pronouns (cf. Safir 2004, Drummond et al. 2011, Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011, i.a.).

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¹² This implies that *Amanda* in (26) does not originate as subject of NP. Note that this does not preclude interpreting *Amanda* as the creator of the portrait: while a genitive originating as NP subject must be the creator, a genitive that does not originate as NP subject has a broader range of interpretations, creator included (cf. Grimshaw 1990, i.a.).

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