

# Verbs and Governing Category Determination

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## Abstract

In this paper we will observe some binding phenomena concerning the pronoun *ta* 'he' in embedded subject position. We will see that some verbs in matrix position can affect the reference determination of the embedded subject pronoun. Verbs that can change the coreferential relation between the matrix subject quantifier and the pronoun pose problems for the binding theory. The main question to be raised in this investigation is why and how certain elements can work on the binding relation between NPs in a sentence. This paper will present a syntactic explanation of the changing binding effect associated with the relation between the quantificational subject and the embedded subject pronoun *ta* 'he'.

Key words: Governing Category, Pronoun, Binding

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will examine certain exceptional binding phenomena that pose interesting questions for binding theory. The main question to be raised in this investigation is whether verbs can affect the binding relation between NPs in a sentence by changing the governing category of the binding domain. If so, one might ask what mechanism allows this and under what circumstances. It is my intention in this paper to try to answer these questions.

### 1. AN OBSERVATION ON THE RELATION BETWEEN VERBS AND BINDING

A binding problem concerning the Specified Subject Condition (SSC) was pointed out in Chomsky (1986a), as shown in (1):

(1)

a. They<sub>i</sub> told [my stories about them<sub>i</sub>]

b. They<sub>i</sub> heard [my stories about them<sub>i</sub>]

c. \* They<sub>i</sub> told [stories about them<sub>i</sub>]

d. They<sub>i</sub> heard [stories about them<sub>i</sub>]

Since SSC requires that pronouns not be bound and anaphors not be free in the domain of the most local subject, the local domain for sentences (1a-b) is the embedded NP because it contains the nearest subject *my*. The pronouns are free in this domain. SSC applies correctly. However the embedded NP in sentences (1c-d) has no subject, the nearest subject for the pronoun in (1c) is the

matrix subject *They*. The local domain is the entire sentence in which the pronoun is not free; (1c), therefore, violates Binding Condition B and is correctly predicted ungrammatical. Nevertheless, sentence (1d), having the same structure except for having a different verb, is not as expected. Though the pronoun is not free in its local domain, the sentence is grammatical. To explain this problem, Chomsky suggests the following structures for (1c-d):

(2)

- a. \* $They_i$  hold [  $PRO_i$  stories about  $them_i$  ]
- b.  $They_i$  heard [  $PRO_i$  stories about  $them_i$  ]

The indexing tells us that in (2a) the stories are by the subject *they*; in (2b) the stories are by someone outside the sentence. Under this explanation, SSC is then applicable as the embedded NP now has a subject PRO. Binding principle B is therefore consistent. Although Chomsky paid no attention to the role of the verb in binding (as the only difference between the two sentences is the matrix verb), sentences in (1c-d) raise the interesting question whether verbs play some sort of syntactic role in determining the binding relation; more precisely, whether the choice of the verb affects the pronoun's antecedent. In theory, such a possibility seems quite reasonable. As is well known, in certain cases the choice of one constituent may have some sort of effect on the choice of another. In theta theory, for example, the thematic role of the subject in a sentence is determined by the choice of the object. Compare, for instance:

(3)

- a. Bill broke a hand yesterday.
- b. Bill broke a window yesterday.

We note that sentences (3a) and (3b) share the same structure, except that the verb in (3b) takes the NP *window* as its object; the subject *Bill* is then assigned the role AGENT, since *Bill* is the one who initiates the action<sup>3/4</sup> breaking a window. However, *Bill* in (3a) cannot be considered AGENT because the verb takes the NP *hand* as its complement. *Bill* in this case turns out to be the one who undergoes the action pointed out by the predicate. The subject is therefore assigned the role THEME (or PATIENT). The theta role of a subject may sometimes depend on the semantics of verb and its complement compositionally. This fact in turn suggests that it is not implausible to expect a close correlation between verbs and binding. More straightforwardly, the idea that verbs may affect the binding relation may be another possible account in addition to Chomsky's 'PRO as subject in NP<sub>S</sub>' for the problem shown in (1c-d).

There are two reasons for preferring the verb-based alternative. First, the following sentences in (4) suggest that the verb *hear* in English may play a part in binding:

(4)

- a. \*They<sub>i</sub> discussed stories about them<sub>i</sub>
- b. \*They<sub>i</sub> knew stories about them<sub>i</sub>
- c. \*They<sub>i</sub> wanted stories about them<sub>i</sub>
- d. \*They<sub>i</sub> liked stories about them<sub>i</sub>
- e. \*They<sub>i</sub> read stories about them<sub>i</sub>
- f. \*They<sub>i</sub> wrote stories about them<sub>i</sub>
- g. \*They<sub>i</sub> published stories about them<sub>i</sub>
- h. \*They<sub>i</sub> told stories about them<sub>i</sub>
- i. They<sub>i</sub> heard stories about them<sub>i</sub>

Second, the idea that PRO in [Spec NP] position may serve as subject creates problems. For example, by adopting this proposal, (5a) below would have an incorrect syntactic representation something like (5b):

- (5)
- a. They<sub>i</sub> heard [NP stories about each other<sub>i</sub>]
- b. \*They<sub>i</sub> heard [NP PRO<sub>j</sub> stories about each other<sub>i</sub>]

Clearly, (5b) is not consistent with Condition A. The reciprocal anaphor is not bound in the embedded NP (= its governing category), so the sentence is starred. Chomsky realizes this problem, and so suggests that the presence of PRO as subject inside NP<sub>S</sub> is optional. When PRO is not present, the governing category for the reciprocal anaphor in (5a) is the entire sentence because it contains the most local subject *they*, and this is the domain where the anaphor is bound. The sentence is thus correctly predicted, as (6) shown:

- (6)
- [GC They<sub>i</sub> heard stories about each other<sub>i</sub>]

Superficially, the problem seems to be plausibly resolved. However, Kuno (1987) points out certain problems concerning Chomsky's PRO suggestion and argues that the problem should be dealt with semantically rather than syntactically. For instance, Kuno (1987, pp. 171-172) indicates that Chomsky's 'PRO as subject in NP<sub>S</sub>' assumption fails to explain why the sentences such as (7a) is unacceptable, whereas (7b) is nearly acceptable or acceptable:

- (7)
- a. \*John<sub>i</sub> wrote for Mary a profile of him<sub>i</sub>,  
which was ten pages long.

- b.  $\checkmark$ /?John<sub>i</sub> wrote for Mary<sub>i</sub> a profile of herself<sub>i</sub>  
for the application.

According to Chomsky, (7) would have the following syntactic representation in (8):

(8)

- a. \*John<sub>i</sub> wrote for Mary [PRO<sub>i</sub>'s profile of him<sub>i</sub>],  
which was ten pages long.
- b.  $\checkmark$ /?John<sub>i</sub> wrote for Mary [PRO<sub>i</sub>'s profile of herself<sub>i</sub>]  
for the application.

That is, just like the verb *tell*, *write* must also assign subject control to the PRO so that the unacceptability of (7a) can be correctly explained, as shown in (8a). Yet this is not the case in (7b), which is not an unacceptable sentence, even though the binding between *John*, PRO, and *herself* clearly shows that the sentence should not be acceptable. Kuno, therefore, concludes that this suggests that the phenomenon requires a semantic explanation rather than a syntax one.

Note now what would happen in (1c-d) if we do not adopt Chomsky's 'PRO as subject in NP<sub>S</sub>' explanation. Suppose we assume Chomsky's (1996) binding theory, repeated here:

(9)

- A. An anaphor must be bound in a local domain.
- B. A pronoun must be free in a local domain.
- C. An r-expression must be free.

Recall that governing category in this version is defined roughly as in (10) below.

(10)

The GC for a is the minimal CFC that contains a and a governor of a and in which a's binding condition could, in principle, be satisfied.

Following (10), sentences (1c-d) would have the following interpretation instead of (2).

(11)

- a. \*[They<sub>i</sub> told stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- b. [They<sub>i</sub> heard stories about them<sub>i</sub>]

That is, the governing category for the pronoun *them* is the entire sentence, since it contains the pronoun itself, its governor *about*, which is the head of the PP *about them*, and the most local

subject *they* serving as the binder. In (11a) the sentence's ungrammaticality is precisely predicted by Condition B because the pronoun is not free in this domain. But the grammaticality of (11b) cannot be explained. Note that, however, the sentences shown in (4) suggest that the verb *hear* may be important in deciding the binding relation. A natural question to ask here then is: how can the verb affect the binding? A possible explanation may be that the sentences in (4) may have the following syntactic representations.

(12)

- a. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> discussed stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- b. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> knew stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- c. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> wanted stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- d. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> liked stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- e. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> read stories about them]
- f. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> wrote stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- g. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> published stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- h. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> told stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- i. \*[They<sub>i</sub> heard [GC stories about them<sub>i</sub>]]

(12) suggests that sentences (a-h) involve unmarked structure, in which the governing category for each sentence is the root sentence; while sentence (i) has a marked structure in which the governing category for the pronoun *them* is the embedded NP. In other words, the determination of the governing category in these sentences is somehow determined by the verb. Based on this assumption, sentences (1c-d) may now be alternatively considered as having the following structures instead of the (2) or (11).

(13)

- a. \*[GC They<sub>i</sub> told stories about them<sub>i</sub>]
- b. They<sub>i</sub> heard [GC stories about them<sub>i</sub>]

Thus, while the pronoun in (13a) is bound, it is free in (13b). Their grammaticality is therefore accounted for by Condition B of the binding theory. However, there is one question that arises further in connection with this explanation. That is, how do verbs determine the governing category? We will return to this question in the later discussion.

In sum, the English data illustrated in this section proposes that verbs may be responsible for the determination of governing category. In that regard, I will present evidence found in Chinese in the following sections.

## 2. VERBS THAT AFFECT BINDING IN CHINESE

Aoun and Li (1988) claim that bound pronouns in Chinese can not appear in such a context as shown in (14).

(14)

Context                      Referential Pronoun

a.  $NP_i$  V [<sub>s</sub>'  $NP_i$  V NP]

b. Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> shuo ta<sub>i</sub> de le        jiang

say he get ASP prize

"Zhangsan said that he got the prize."

Context                      Bound Pronoun

c.  $NP_i$  V [<sub>s</sub>'  $NP_i$  V NP]                      \*

d. \*Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou shuo ta<sub>i</sub> de    le    jiang

everyone all say he get ASP prize

"Everyone said that he got the prize."

In (14b) ta 'him' is a referential pronoun since it is coindexed with a name called 'Zhangsan', while in (14d) ta is a bound pronoun for its referent is 'Meigeren', a quantifier. As they point out, only referential pronouns, but not bound pronouns, can appear in the subject position of an embedded clause. Nevertheless, let's consider the following sentences that have the similar structures (i.e. they all comply with the context (14c)) except for having different verbs in place of shuo 'say'.

(15)

a. Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou ziren        ta<sub>i</sub> hen you danliang

everyone all self-know he very have courage

"Everyone considered himself a courageous person."

b. Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou jiazhuang ta<sub>i</sub> bu zhidao zhejian shi

everyone all pretend he not know this matter

"Everyone pretended he didn't know the matter."

c. Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou fashi ta<sub>i</sub> zaiyebu zuo huai shi        le

everyone all swear he no more do bad thing ASP

"Everyone swore that he no more did the bad things."

d. Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou mengxiang ta<sub>i</sub> jiushi neige baiwanfuweng

everyone all dream he is exactly that millionaire

"Everyone dreamed of being that millionaire."

Contrary to the prediction, the sentences in (15) are all perfectly acceptable. The bound pronoun *ta* in each sentence is in the subject position of the embedded clause, and is naturally interpreted as referring to the quantifier *Meigeren* 'everyone'. To see if verbs do possibly play a crucial role in the interpretation of pronoun reading, let's now replace the matrix verb in each sentence to see the result.

(16)

a. \*Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou shuo ta<sub>i</sub> hen you danliang

everyone all say he very have courage

"Everyone said that he was a courageous person."

b. \*Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou zhidao ta<sub>i</sub> bu zhidao zhejian shi

everyone all know he not know this matter

"Everyone knew that he didn't know the matter."

c. \*Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou yiwei ta<sub>i</sub> zaiyebu zuo huaishi le

everyone all think he no more do bad thing ASP

"Everyone thought that he no more did the bad things."

d. \*Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou zhichu ta<sub>i</sub> jiushi neige baiwanfuweng

everyone all indicate he is exactly that millionaire

"Everyone pointed out that he definitely was the millionaire."

The resultant structures clearly suggest that the sentences' acceptability is dependent on the particular verbs. This observation can be further supported by comparing (17) with (18).

(17)

Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> chengren ziji<sub>i</sub> shuoguo ta<sub>i</sub>you nü pengyou

admit self have said he have girl friend

"Zhangsan admitted that he himself had said that he had a girl friend."

(18)

\*Zhangsan; shuo ziji; shuoguo ta; you nü pengyou

say self have said he have girl friend

"Zhangsan said that he himself had said that he had a girl friend."

Obviously some verbs in these instances do play a part in binding. How they are able to do so will be the focus of the next section.

### 3. SUBJECT ORIENTATION

#### 3.1 TWO TYPES OF SUBJECT ORIENTATION VERBS IN CHINESE

To explain why some verbs have an effect on changing the binding relation between NPs in certain structures, two types of verbs in Chinese must be first identified. Consider the following two non-exhaustive lists:

(19)

a. Strong Subject Orientation (SSO)

zi-ren 'self-know'

jiazhuang 'pretend'

fashi 'swear'

chengren 'admit'

xiang-zhdao 'want-know'

mengxiang 'dream'

zhaoren 'confess'

b. Weak Subject Orientation (WSO)

shuo 'say'

renwei 'think'

xihuan 'like'

xiangxin 'believe'

zhidao 'know'

juede 'feel'



How might we distinguish these two types of verbs semantically? One fundamental feature that SSO verbs have in common is that they seem to always report on the subject's actions with respect to a mental state, whereas WSO verbs seem to merely report on the mental state itself (however, the verb *shuo* 'say' is an exception to this generalization). In general, whether a verb has strong or weak subject orientation property is not evident if the embedded subject pronoun is referential. For instance:

(20)

a. Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> shuo ta<sub>i</sub> de le jiang (WSO)

say he get ASP prize

"Zhangsan said that he got the prize."

b. Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> jiazhuang ta<sub>i</sub> de le jiang (SSO)

Zhangsan pretend he get ASP prize

"Zhangsan pretended that he got the prize."

As we can see, both types of verbs in (20) are possible. Nevertheless, this is not the case when a bound pronoun appears in the embedded subject position. More clearly, we find only SSO verbs may occur. Compare:

(21)

a. \*Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou shuo ta<sub>i</sub> de le jiang

everyone all say he get ASP prize

"Everyone said that he got the prize."

b. Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou jiazhuang ta<sub>i</sub> de le jiang

everyone all pretend he get ASP prize

"Everyone pretended that he got the prize."

When a matrix verb is a WSO verb, it would behave like a barrier for coreference between the bound pronoun and the matrix subject, as (21a) shows. On the other hand, when the verb is SSO, this barrier disappears, as illustrated in (21b).

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Based on the above observation, we seem to be able to give a schema to conclude the finding:

(22)

a. NP + V + [R-pronoun + V + NP]

Subject Orientation of the R-pronoun

SSO verbs ((20a)) Yes

WSO verbs ((20b)) Yes

b. NP + V + [B-pronoun + V + NP]

Subject Orientation of the B-pronoun

SSO verbs ((21a)) Yes

WSO verbs ((21b)) No

(22) clearly illustrates why the two groups of subject orientation verbs listed in (19) can be defined in terms of the notion ‘strong’ and ‘weak’, as the former shows consistent subject orientation no matter which type of pronominal occupies the embedded subject position, whereas the latter does not.

There seems to exist another difference between SSO and WSO verbs. Topicalization of the embedded subject bound pronoun is allowed by weak subject orientation verbs, but not SSO verbs. Compare, for example:

(23)

a.  $ta_j$ , Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou shuo  $t_j$  de le jiang

he everyone all say get ASP prize

"He, everyone said that e got the prize."

b. \*  $ta_j$ , Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou jiazhuang  $t_j$  de le jiang

he everyone all pretend e get ASP prize

"He, everyone pretended that he got the prize."

In (23a), the pronoun in the structure can only refer to someone outside the sentence. Therefore, topicalization of the pronoun from the embedded subject position to the highest C-specifier position is fine, as this does not violate Koopman and Sportiche's (1983) Bijection Principle, which requires that every variable be bound by exactly one operator, and every operator bind exactly one variable. Thus, the trace left by the pronoun is a variable, because the pronoun was moved to an A'-position. The trace is bound by one operator only. Consider now the LF representation of (23b) in (24):

(24)

\*[ $ta_j$ , Meigeren<sub>i</sub> [ $t_j$  dou jiazhuang [ $t_j$  de le jiang ]]]

he everyone all pretend get ASP prize

As shown in (24), each variable is bound by two operators, i.e., the pronoun and the quantifier; and in a like manner, each operator binds two variables. As the pronoun has been moved to the highest C-specifier position, where the quantifier is unable to c-command it, according to the schema (22a), then, the binding between the pronoun and the quantifier can not be licensed, for the pronoun can only be bound by a c-commanding subject in a higher position with the presence of an SSO verb. This may explain why topicalization of the embedded subject pronoun is allowed with WSO verbs only: since when a WSO verb shows up, the bound pronoun in the embedded subject position always takes a different index from the matrix subject, which will ensure that the pronoun does not violate the Bijection Principle.

#### 4. A GOVERNING CATEGORY CHANGING EXPLANATION

Thus far we have observed that the non-matrix subject pronoun reading may be changed when an SSO verb is involved. We then must ask how a verb or verb class can affect a binding relation. This section aims to suggest an explanation to this question.

The suggestion presented in this paper involves the idea that governing category is sensitive to verb class.

(25)

If a verb is SSO, the governing category for the pronoun is the smallest S containing the pronoun.

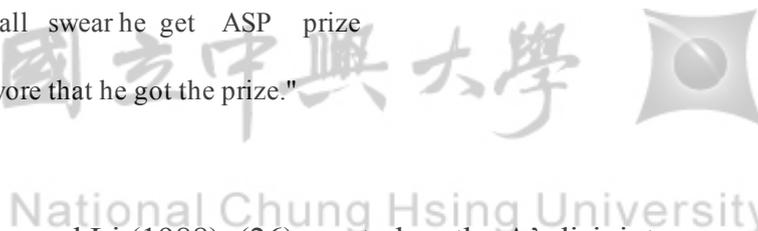
Now let's see how this assumption works on the problems. Consider first the following sentence:

(26)

[GC Meigeren; dou fashi ta; de le jiang]

everyone all swear he get ASP prize

"Everyone swore that he got the prize."



According to Aoun and Li (1988), (26) must obey the A'-disjointness requirement, which requires that the pronoun have the entire sentence as its governing category.

(27)

The A'-disjointness Requirement  
A pronoun must be A'-free in the least CFC

containing a SUBJECT and the pronoun

But since (26) involves an SSO verb, the pronoun *ta* ‘he’ must then be free in the smallest clause. This requirement entails that the governing category of the pronoun in (26) must be drawn back from the root sentence to the least clause domain, as illustrated in (28):

(28)

[Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou fashi [GC ta<sub>i</sub> de le jiang]

| GC -----**contract**-----à | GC

everyone all swear he get ASP prize

"Everyone swore that he got the prize."

Turn now to a sentence that involves no SSO, i.e. (29):

(29)

\*[GC Meigeren<sub>i</sub> dou yiwei ta<sub>i</sub> de le jiang]

everyone all think he get ASP prize

"Everyone thought that he got the prize."

Since sentence (29) has no an SSO verb in the matrix position, but rather a WSO, it obeys the A'-disjointness requirement, which will predict that the entire sentence is the governing category of the pronoun. The ungrammatical reading of the pronoun is thus correctly predicted. Now consider the following sentence.

(30)

Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> chengren ziji<sub>i</sub> shuoguo ta<sub>i</sub> you nü pengyou

admit self have said he have girl friend

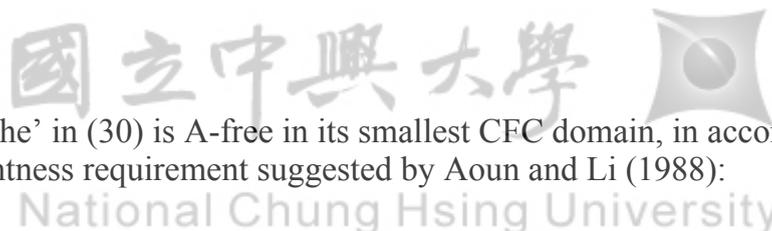
"Zhangsan admitted that he himself had said that he had a girl friend."

The pronoun *ta* ‘he’ in (30) is A-free in its smallest CFC domain, in accordance with the following A-disjointness requirement suggested by Aoun and Li (1988):

(31)

The A-disjointness Requirement

A pronoun must be A-free in the least Complete Functional Complex (CFC) in which it occurs



However, according to the A'-disjointness requirement, the pronoun should be A'-bound by *ziji* at LF in its binding domain, which, nevertheless, would bring an ungrammatical reading. To be in accord with (25), the governing category for the pronoun should be the smallest sentence as this sentence contains an SSO verb *chengren* 'admit'. We therefore obtain the following correct result by retracting the governing category from IP2 to the smallest IP.

(32)

[IP<sub>1</sub> Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> chengren [IP<sub>2</sub> ziji<sub>i</sub> shuoguo [IP<sub>3</sub> ta<sub>i</sub> you nü pengyou]]]

| GC --contract--à | GC

admit self have said he have girl friend

"Zhangsan admitted that he himself had said that he had a girl friend."

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this paper I focus on the relation between verbal class and binding, and discover that certain verbal classes play a role in determining the binding relation, particularly associated with pronoun, in some sentences. The determination of the binding relation can be theoretically achieved by assuming that the verbal classes, when involved, are able to contract the governing category to the smallest clause containing the pronoun, conforming the coreferential relation to the binding theory.

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# 動詞與管轄範疇

吳覺銘

## 摘要

本篇論文主要提出，中英文裡某些動詞在代名詞約束關係的詮釋上似乎扮演著重要的角色。我們發現，某些動詞可以改變子句裡主詞代名詞的約束關係，而此種約束現象的解釋似乎是Chomsky約束理論尚未著墨之處。本篇論文將要對此現象作一個觀察報告並提出管轄範疇改變的可能理論解釋：也就是說，某些動詞會影響代名詞的約束關係是因為這些動詞的出現，在句法結構上改變了它的管轄範疇所致。

關鍵詞：管轄範疇，代名詞，約束



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