

The blocking of anaphoric bare nouns

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In this paper I discuss the anaphoric uses of bare nouns in bare argument languages such as American Sign Language (ASL), Thai, Hindi, Japanese and Korean, that freely allow bare nouns as arguments to predicates. I propose a competition-based analysis of anaphoric expressions motivated by two observations: a) that these languages differ on whether bare nouns can appear in intersentential anaphora; and b) that this difference corresponds to the presence of morphologically simplex pronouns in the language.

Observation: While some bare argument languages such as Korean and Japanese allow bare nouns in contexts like (1) (cf. Furuya 2008, Nemoto 2005), others like Thai and Hindi do not. For example, in the Thai example (2a) from Jenks 2015, the only possible interpretation of the bare noun is that students in general are clever.

- (1) a. *watashi-wa hon-o kat-ta. hon-wa takaka-ta.*
I-TOP book-ACC buy-PAST book-TOP expensive-PAST
'I bought a book. The book was expensive.' [Japanese]
- b. *ecey haksayng-ul manna-ss-ta. haksayng-un pappu poy-ess-ta.*
yesterday student-ACC meet-PAST-DECL student-TOP busy seem-PAST-DECL
'I met a student yesterday. The student looked busy.' [Korean]
- (2) a. *miawaan phom cee kap nakrian khon nin. #nakrian chalaat maak.*
yesterday I meet with student CLF INDEF student clever very
(Intended) 'Yesterday I met a student. The student is very clever.' [Thai]
- b. *maine ek kitab kharid-i. #kitab mehngi thi.*
1SG.ERG one book.SGF buy-PAST.SGF book.SGF expensive be.PAST.SGF
(Intended) 'I bought a book. The book was expensive.' [Hindi]

ASL behaves like Japanese in certain contexts and Thai in others. In ASL, the pointing handshape (IX) signed to a location in the signing space (a locus) can be used to refer to familiar entities associated with that locus. Loci do not have to be set up for all entities, especially when there is only one salient entity being discussed (cf. Czubek 2017). Without associating a locus, the bare noun is possible as in (3a), but if a locus has been established for the book as in (3b), the anaphoric use of the bare noun is not felicitous.

- (3) a. YESTERDAY I BUY BOOK. BOOK EXPENSIVE.
'Yesterday I bought a book. The book was expensive.'
- b. YESTERDAY I BUY BOOK_a. #BOOK EXPENSIVE.
(Intended) 'Yesterday I bought a book. The book was expensive.' [ASL]

In Hindi and Thai, the anaphoric bare noun becomes felicitous if there is more than one salient entity. To account for (1), (2), and (3), I propose the following novel generalization:

- (4) Bare noun blocking: If a bare argument language has morphologically simplex pronouns, bare nouns are blocked from intersentential anaphora with one salient entity.

In Korean and Japanese, all anaphoric expressions involve a full demonstrative description, or a reduced form that is morphologically complex with the demonstrative and an NP as in (5) (cf. Seah 2013). In Korean, the demonstrative *ku* ('he') can stand alone in Korean, but it is rarely used in speech (Kim & Han 2016), and there is no simplex form for inanimates.

- (5) a. *kyay: ku-ay* ('that kid') [Korean]
 b. *ano hito* ('that person'), *ko/so/a-itsu* ('this/that guy') [Japanese]

In contrast, Thai has pronouns *kháw* (3s) and *man* (3s inanimate) that are distinct from the demonstrative, while Hindi demonstrative *vo* is used freely as pronouns.

Analysis: What we see is that the availability of anaphoric bare nouns in these languages depends on the presence of a pronoun that is more minimal (e.g., not containing the noun). This motivates a competition-based story. I propose one possible analysis by a) analyzing them as elements on a scale derived from meaning, and b) proposing a principle that chooses the lowest one in the scale.

I assume that the syntactic structure contains an empty DP place-holder with an index. The index identifies the target referent, the antecedent. The competition takes place between possible expressions to determine which expression can felicitously refer to the target referent.

The denotations I propose are shown in (6). The pronoun and the anaphoric bare noun differ in the restriction that is used to evaluate uniqueness, and are ordered in terms of semantic content in (7). While the pronoun returns the unique entity in the context, the definite bare noun NP_{def} returns the unique entity x such that $\llbracket \text{NP} \rrbracket(x)$ is true. Then, the economy principle in (8) requires that the lowest element be chosen. This principle can be derived from more general principles such as Grice's Brevity, similar to *Minimize Restrictors!* (Schlenker 2005) and Efficiency (Meyer 2014), which are applied to other domains.

- (6) a. $\llbracket \text{pronoun} \rrbracket = \iota x: \text{entity}(x)$ (7) Scale: $\langle \text{pronoun}, \text{NP}_{\text{DEF}} \rangle$
 b. $\llbracket \text{NP}_{\text{def}} \rrbracket = \iota x: \text{entity}(x) \wedge \llbracket \text{NP} \rrbracket(x)$

- (8) Among the anaphoric expressions whose existential and uniqueness presuppositions are satisfied, **choose the lowest item on the scale.**

In an intersentential anaphoric context with one salient entity, the uniqueness presupposition is satisfied for both the pronoun and NP_{DEF} . In languages like Thai and Hindi, the availability of the pronoun blocks the use of bare nouns. In languages like Korean and Japanese, however, the lowest element in the scale is the bare noun, so no blocking occurs. In ASL, the bare noun is the lowest element in the scale like Korean and Japanese when there is no locus created for the referent. If there is a locus created, IX becomes a possible expression and enters the scale, and thus IX signed at the locus can block the bare noun.

I analyze the demonstrative description as taking an additional restrictor property R which can be filled by relative clauses or pointing. The (reduced) demonstrative description does not block the bare noun in Korean or Japanese because it is higher in the scale than the anaphoric bare noun. I show how this competition-based mechanism can be more generally applied to cross-linguistic anaphoric expressions.

- (9) $\llbracket \text{DEM}_R \text{ NP} \rrbracket = \iota x: \text{entity}(x) \wedge \llbracket \text{NP} \rrbracket(x) \wedge \llbracket R \rrbracket(x)$ (10) $\langle \text{pronoun}, \text{NP}_{\text{DEF}}, \text{DEM NP} \rangle$

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