

Icelandic *sig*: a standard anaphor, after all

Isabelle Charneval (Harvard) and Dominique Sportiche (UCLA)

Goal - Should there be different binding domains for anaphors (Wexler & Manzini 1987, a.o.)? and is the domain size correlated with the morphological complexity of anaphors (Pica 1987, a.o.)? One of the best known cases motivating positive answers to both of these questions is based on the contrast between the morphologically simple Icelandic anaphor *sig* and the morphologically complex English anaphor *x-self*. The research reported here shows that, under closer scrutiny, it is warranted to treat the English and the Icelandic anaphors alike, removing a major obstacle on the way to a universally valid Condition A, imposing a unique binding domain for all anaphors.

Background - It has been observed that in various languages, some instances of anaphors seem not to satisfy locality conditions imposed by the “standard” Condition A (very roughly – but enough for here: an anaphor must be bound within its clause, Chomsky 1986, a.o.). To account for this, two main approaches have been adopted: (i) Postulate different binding domains (ii) Exempt anaphors from binding requirements when used logophorically: anaphors anteceded by perspective centers – call them logophors - can escape locality conditions (Sells 1987, Pollard & Sag 1992, a.o.). Thus, either cross-linguistic or cross-anaphoric uniformity is lost; or logophoric exemption (and its theory) is needed. Strikingly, the facts reported for Icelandic, which clearly distinguishes infinitive from finite clauses, have been generally argued to require both approaches simultaneously (Thráinsson 1976, Maling 1984, Sells 1987, Reuland & Sigurjónsdóttir 1997, Thráinsson 2007). These authors conclude that on the one hand, the anaphor *sig* in infinitive clauses (need not be logophoric and) must be anteceded by a binder outside of the standard domain, so that the binding domain for *sig* in Icelandic is the *finite* clause; on the other hand, *sig* in subjunctive clauses is a logophor exempt from binding or locality conditions anteceded by a perspective center.

One hypothesis which does not lead to such an uneconomical conclusion, namely Anderson (1986), only adopts approach (i), by taking both infinitives and subjunctives as extending the domain within which *sig* must be anteceded by a binder. But this has been convincingly refuted based on the crucial role logophoricity plays for *sig* in subjunctive clauses (see references above).

We will defend the reverse hypothesis, so far never seriously entertained, which takes *sig* anteceded from outside its clause in *both* infinitive and subjunctive clauses to be in fact logophoric.

Arguments for logophoric *sig* in infinitives – This hypothesis predicts that: (a) *sig* in infinitives, just like in subjunctives, cannot be long distance bound when it is not logophoric; (b) conversely, *sig* in infinitives, just like in subjunctives, need not be c-commanded by its antecedent when it is logophoric.

Following Charneval & Sportiche (2016), we test point (a) with inanimate *sig*, which cannot be logophoric, as perspective centers require a mental state which inanimates lack. The distribution of inanimate *sig* thus reveals the binding locality constraints *sig* is subject to without the potential confound due to logophoric readings. Accordingly, (2) shows that inanimate *sig* (vs. the pronoun) is disallowed when long distance bound in infinitives, just like in subjunctives (3) (*pace* Reuland & Sigurjónsdóttir 1997, cf. Reuland 2006: fn 13, Reuland 2011: 318), while it is acceptable if locally bound as in (1). In other words, *sig* in an infinitive cannot be long distance bound when it is not logophoric.

(1) [**Petta vandamál**]_i minnir okkur stöðugt á **sig**_i. [local]

“[**This problem**]_i constantly reminds us of **itself**_i.” (Thráinsson 2007: 471)

(2) a. [**Petta alvarlega vandamál**]_i fékk Jón til [_{INF} að leita lengi lausnar á {***sér**_i / því_i}]. [infinitive]

“[**This serious problem**]_i made John look for **its**_i solution for a long time.”

b. **Síminn**_i neyðir mig til [_{INF} að hlaða { ***sig**_i / hann_i} á tveggja tíma fresti].

“[**The telephone**]_i forces me to charge **it**_i every two hours.”

(3) [**Petta vandamál**]_i krafðist þess [_{SUBJ} að við hugsuðum stöðugt um {***sig**_i / það_i}]. [subjunctive]

“[**This problem**]_i demanded that we constantly thought about **it**_i.” (Sigurðsson 1990: 335)

This is corroborated by examples such as (4) where *sig* in an infinitive cannot refer to a non-logophoric animate (object) antecedent, just like in (5) involving a subjunctive.

(4) *Eg hótaði **Jóni**_i [_{INF} að lemja **sig**_i]. [infinitive]

“I threatened **Jon**_i to hit **him**_i.”

(Reuland 2011: 319)

(5) **Jón**_i sannfærði **Mariu**_k um [_{SUBJ} að ég hefði gleymt **sér**_{i/*k}]. [subjunctive]

“**John**_i convinced **Mary**_k that I had forgotten **him**_i/**her**_{*k}.”

(Sigurðsson 1990: 334)

All examples in the literature that are claimed to involve long distance *sig* in infinitives disallow

inanimate *sig*, hence involve logophoricity. The most straightforward cases use as antecedents subjects of verbs like *ask*, *order*, *believe...etc*, which all are or can be perspective centers.

Point (b) has been claimed not to hold by Reuland & Sigurjónsdóttir 1997 (who argue for consistent differences between the antecedent possibilities of *sig* in subjunctives vs. infinitives, see also Reuland 2006, 2011: 8.5) based on contrasts such as that between (6) and (7).

(6) *Skoðun Jóns_i virðist [_{INF} vera hættuleg fyrir sig_i]. [infinitive]

“John_i’s opinion seems to be dangerous for him_i.” (Reuland & Sigurjónsdóttir 1997: 330)

(7) Skoðun Jóns_i er [_{SUBJ} að sig_i vanti hæfileika]. [subjunctive]

“John_i’s opinion is that he_i lacks talent.” (Maling 1984: 222)

This contrast is however not conclusive. While a perspective center as antecedent is necessary to license a logophor, it is not sufficient: the logophor must also occur in a constituent expressing the content of this perspective center’s thoughts. And although the subjunctive clause containing *sig* in (7) indeed describes the content of John’s opinion, the infinitive clause containing *sig* in (6) does not express the content of this opinion (cf. Reuland’s 2011 remark: 320, Gärtner 2015): the infinitive clause expresses the perspective of the evidential source of *seem*, not John’s. The exact infinitival counterpart of (7) does not exist in Icelandic, but (8)-(9) show that *sig* need not be anteceded by a c-commander if it is contained in an infinitive clause expressing the perspective of this antecedent.

(8) Samkvæmt Harald_i, þá fékk lagið hans Maríu til [_{INF} að hugsa til sín_i]. [infinitive]

“According to Harold_i, his song got Mary to think about him_i.”

(9) Ráð(legging) Jóns_i (til okkar) var [_{INF} að vitna í sig_i á hverri blaðsíðu]. [infinitive]

“John_i’s advice (to us) was to cite him_i on every page.” (Gärtner 2015)

Space prevents us from discussing here other published putative counterexamples but they similarly suffer from confounding factors, either failing to control for the behavior of inanimates or tied to the various logophoricity dimensions available (see Sells 1987, Charnavel & Zlogar 2016, a.o.).

Finally, it is sometimes argued, based on the near complementarity between anaphors and pronouns in their binding domain, that finite clauses form *sig*’s binding domain because *sig* and *hann* (the pronoun) are - it is claimed - in complementarity distribution as exemplified in (10).

(10) Jón_i skipaði mér [_{INF} að raka { sig_i / *hann_i }]. [infinitive]

“John_i ordered me to shave him_i.” (Anderson 1986)

This overlooks the *de se* and non *de se* distinction. As shown in (11), *sig* needs to be read *de se* in infinitives while *hann* cannot and there is in fact no positional complementarity.

(11) [*Context*: Maria and others have taken part in a recorded song competition. Ultimately, Jon will decide who is the winner. Jon listens to the recordings and states that Maria is the best singer.

a. (*de se* context) Maria hears Jon say “this is the best singer” and realizes he is talking about her.

b. (*non de se* context) Maria hears Jon say “this is the best singer” but does not realize he is talking about her (she does not recognize her voice in the recording).

María_k taldi [_{INF} Jón hafa kosið {a. *hana_k/sig_k; b. hana_k/*sig_k }]. [infinitive]

“Maria_k believed John to have elected her_k.”

Thus, the apparent complementarity between *sig* and *hann* is not due to Condition B (as also shown by 2), but is interpretively driven and follows, we argue, from a general preference for more specified forms (see e.g. Schlenker 2005): *sig* is preferred over *hann* under *de se* readings as in (10)-(11a). If time permits, we will discuss why complementarity is not as readily observed when *sig* is used logophorically in subjunctives, tying this behavior to whether an embedded clause under an attitude must (infinitives) or only may (subjunctives) express the content of the attitude holder’s perspective, and relating this to the complex dialectal situation in subjunctives/indicatives (Sigurðsson 1990: 332).

Conclusion – The only condition exempting *sig* from Condition A is logophoricity. Pending extensions to others cases (e.g. Scandinavian/Germanic), a crosslinguistically uniform binding domain regardless of morphological complexity (as suggested for Mandarin *ziji* in Huang & Liu 2001) is a parsimonious and viable option.

Selected references: Anderson 1986: The Typology of Anaphoric Dependencies. *Topics in Scandinavian Syntax*; Gärtner 2015: On Infinitives Hosting Logophors: The Case of Icelandic. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 38; Maling 1984: Non-Clause-Bounded Reflexives in Modern Icelandic. *L&P* 7; Reuland & Sigurjónsdóttir 1997: Long Distance ‘Binding’ in Icelandic: Syntax or Discourse?. *Atomism and Binding*; Schlenker 2005: The lazy Frenchman’s approach to the subjunctive. *RLLT* 17; Sells 1987. Aspects of Logophoricity. *LI* 18; Sigurðsson 1990. Long distance reflexives and moods in Icelandic. *Modern Icelandic Syntax*; Thráinsson 2007. *The syntax of Icelandic*. Cambridge University Press.