

Whether or not multiple occurrences of *ziji* can take distinct antecedents: A deictic perspective



Xiaolong Yang^{a,b}, Yicheng Wu^{b,c,*}

^a International College, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, PR China

^b Centre for the Study of Language and Cognition, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310028, PR China

^c School of Linguistic Sciences, Jiangsu Normal University, Xuzhou 221009, PR China

Received 19 December 2014; received in revised form 6 August 2015; accepted 6 August 2015

Abstract

It has been claimed in the theoretical linguistic literature (Pan, 1997; Huang et al., 2009) that (i) the Chinese reflexive *ziji* 'self', if occurring more than once in a single clause, can take separate antecedents, and (ii) a third-person NP can block the long-distance binding of *ziji*. On the basis of corpus data, this paper investigates the claim, demonstrating that it is neither empirically possible nor cognitively plausible for multiple *ziji*s in a single clause to have distinct referents, and the so-called blocking effect induced by a third-person NP is unlikely to exist. It is shown that the perspective center is determined relative to the communicative context, which in turn determines the linear order of sentence structure containing multiple *ziji*s. Precisely, the first *ziji*'s reference determines the rest of *ziji*s' reference(s).

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Keywords: Chinese reflexive; Perspective center; Communicative context; Relevance; Linear order

1. Introduction

The Chinese reflexive *ziji* is not well-behaved due to its violation of the Standard Binding Principle A (Chomsky, 1981), since it can take an antecedent across the clausal boundary and become a long-distance reflexive (LDR) as illustrated by (1):

- (1) *Wangwu_i renwei Lisi_j lao piping ziji_{i/j}.*
 Wangwu think Lisi often criticize self
 'Wangwu_i thinks that Lisi_j often criticizes him_i/himself_j.'

ziji in (1) can be bound either by the local subject *Lisi* or by the matrix subject *Wangwu*. Since Huang (1982), *ziji* has been much studied with respect to its binding conditions. As far as the anaphoric relation between *ziji* and its antecedent is concerned, it has been generally agreed among linguists of all persuasions that non-syntactic factors, such as discursal, semantic and pragmatic ones, also play an important role in determining the referent of *ziji*, as can be summarized below (Reinhart and Reuland, 1993; Pollard and Sag, 1994; Xue et al., 1994; Baker, 1995; Pollard and Xue, 1998; Pan, 2001):

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 15168239518.

E-mail addresses: yreno@sina.com (X. Yang), wuyicheng@zju.edu.cn (Y. Wu).

- (a) *Ziji* is subject to syntactic binding, although, notoriously, the conditions under which it is subject to such binding have not been fully characterized.
- (b) Its behavior is not purely syntactic, because semantic and pragmatic factors also play a significant role. In other words, *ziji* has an ambiguous status in that it allows interpretation via either syntactic binding or discourse coreference.

In the theoretical linguistic literature, the most interesting claims are perhaps that multiple occurrences of *ziji* in a clause can take separate antecedents, and a third-person NP can block the long-distance binding of *ziji*¹ (Pan, 1997; Huang et al., 2009). On the basis of authentic data, we show in this paper that it is neither empirically possible nor cognitively plausible for multiple *ziji*s in a single clause to have distinct referents, and the so-called blocking effect induced by a third-person NP is unlikely to exist. We then argue that the Chinese reflexive, no matter how many times it appears in a single clause, can only take one and the same antecedent. Precisely, the perspective center is determined relative to the communicative context, which in turn determines the linear order of sentence structure containing multiple occurrences of *ziji*.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a critical review of the existing analyses of *ziji*. Section 3 attempts to address three questions: (1) Does the blocking effect induced by a third-person NP really exist? (2) What is the motivation behind the binding relation? (3) What is the nature of the coreference relation between *ziji* and its antecedent? Conclusions are drawn in section 4.

2. Existing analyses

The syntactic relation between anaphor and antecedent is prominently represented by the Standard Binding Theory (Chomsky, 1981):

- (a) An anaphor (reflexive or reciprocal) is bound in its local domain.
- (b) A pronoun is free in its local domain.
- (c) An R-expression is free.

The Chinese reflexive can take a referent across the clausal boundary, as already shown in (1). Meanwhile, it is sometimes construed as a logophor from the pragmatic perspective. Recently, experimental studies have been conducted to investigate the interpretive process of *ziji*. In this section, we will present a critical review of the existing analyses of *ziji*.

2.1. Syntactic analysis

Some syntactic analyses have been proposed to address issues regarding long-distance reflexive *ziji* in an attempt to revise the Standard Binding Theory. One important attempt is to treat long-distance binding as local binding via head movement (see Tang, 1989; Cole et al., 1990; Cole and Sung, 1994; Cole and Wang, 1996). And the blocking effect is considered to be what motivates the head movement analysis. Under the syntactic analysis, the long-distance binding of *ziji* can be licensed only if all intervening subjects agree in person features. Otherwise, long-distance binding is blocked, as (2) shows:

- (2) a. *Wangwu_i renwei ni_j lao piping ziji_{i/j}.*
Wangwu think you often criticize self
'Wangwu_i thinks that you_j often criticize him_i/yourself_j.'
- b. *Wo_i renwei ni_j dui ziji_{i/j} mei zixin.*
I think you to self not confidence
'I think you have no confidence in me_i/yourself_j.'
- c. *Ni_i renwei wo_j dui ziji_{i/j} mei zixin.*
You think I to self not confidence
'you think I have no confidence in yourself_i/me_j.'

The matrix subjects in (2a), (2b) and (2c) cannot be the antecedents of *ziji*, since they do not agree in person feature. In sentences containing a single *ziji*, intervening first/second person pronouns induce the blocking effect on remote

¹ Normally, an intermediate third-person NP does not block the long distance binding of *ziji*, as will be discussed in sections 2.1 and 3.1.

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