

Cross-Germanic Variation in Binding Condition B

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From a cross-linguistic perspective, the classical binding conditions “are too good to be false, and too bad to be true” (Reuland 2005, 579). Variation in Condition B effects is less striking than Condition A, but no less problematic. This paper addresses this variation across English, Dutch, Frisian, Norwegian, and Icelandic, concluding that the locus of variation is not how a binding condition *per se* applies, but is the interaction between language-specific syntactic properties and the syntactic features of its pronouns.

Significant steps have recently been made to reduce binding domains to phases (e.g. Canac-Marquis 2005, Quicoli 2008), and further, to derive this by reducing the binding conditions to narrow syntactic operations (Heinat 2006, Hicks 2006). Hicks builds on Marušič (2005), distinguishing between LF-phases and PF-phases (identified by semantic and phonological properties of the constituent in question), to derive the following empirical generalisations from a binding theory essentially reduced to Agree and Merge:

- (1) **Condition A:** An anaphor must be bound within its minimal **LF-phase** (CP, ν P)
- (2) **Condition B:** A pronoun must not be bound within its minimal **PF-phase** (CP, ν P, DP, PP)

This paper first shows that (2) correctly predicts general patterns in Condition B effects, before focusing on three types of apparent counter-example, also unexplained by the classical binding theory.

i) Certain pronouns apparently circumvent Condition B altogether. Frisian has a 3rd person singular feminine and a 3rd person plural pronoun (*har* and *har(ren)*) which may be locally bound, and an alternative 3rd person pronoun (*se*) which cannot. Following Hoekstra (1994), *se* bears structural Case, and *har(ren)* inherent Case. If Condition B reduces to syntactic operations, in the sense of Chomsky (2001), the absence of a structural Case feature makes *har(ren)* syntactically ‘inactive’, apparently entailing insensitivity to Condition B. A related Condition B circumvention is also found in Icelandic. In quirky-Case ECM constructions, a locally bound nominative ECM subject pronoun may be permitted (Taraldsen 1995):

- (3) a. *Konunum_i fannst þær_i vera gáfafar*
women-the_i-DAT seemed-3SG they_i-NOM be gifted-FEM.PL-NOM
‘The women thought they were smart.’
- b. *Konunum_i fundust þær_{*i} vera gáfafar*
women-the_i-DAT seemed-3PL they_{*i}-NOM be gifted-FEM.PL-NOM
‘The women thought they were smart.’ (Icelandic: Taraldsen 1995)

Following Sigurðsson (1996), the non-agreeing ECM subject’s nominative Case may be assigned within the infinitival clause, rendering the pronoun inactive (and insensitive to Condition B) when the antecedent enters the derivation in (3a). In (3b), the agreeing ECM subject’s Case is assigned in the matrix clause, remaining active for both φ -agreement and Condition B when the antecedent enters the derivation.

ii) Phonological factors affect Condition B domains. Fiengo and Higginbotham (1981) observe that in certain contexts in English, when a pronoun is unstressed and phonetically reduced, it is less grammatical than when stressed. Koster (1985, 147) notes that in Dutch, the PPs that constitute Condition B domains typically bear stress; PPs that do not create local binding domains do not. For Norwegian, Hellan (1988) notes that Condition B violations can be circumvented by embedding a pronoun in a constituent with a ‘heavier’ phonological content:

- (4) a. *?* Vi fortalte Jon_i om ham_i*
We told John_i about him_i
- b. *Vi fortalte Jon_i om ham_i og hans_i kusine*
We told John_i about him_i and his_i cousin
‘We told John about himself and his cousin.’ (Norwegian: Hellan 1988)

A binding theory that derives (2) permits the explanation that the phonologically heavier the constituent containing the pronoun, the more likely it is treated as a PF-phase (and hence as a Condition B domain).

iii) Icelandic and Norwegian contradict (2) in that the local domain extends beyond the PF-phase:

- (5) a. **John_i kikket* [_{VP} *rundt ham_i*]
John_i looked [_{PP} around him_i]
b. *John_i fortalte Per_j om* [_{DP} *hans_{*i/j} kone*]
John_i told Peter_j about [_{DP} his_{*i/j} wife]
'John told Peter about his wife.' (Norwegian: Hestvik 1990)

(5b) suggests that—in addition to a constraint like Condition B, which requires pronouns to be free from all c-commanding local DPs—an independent constraint on orientation of pronouns is at play: the pronoun cannot be bound by the subject, only by the object. Hence we propose for Norwegian and Icelandic:

- (6) **Orientation constraint:** Pronouns must be free from subjects in their minimal LF-phase.

In summary, this paper uses cross-Germanic variation in Condition B effects as evidence that:

- Syntactic 'activity' (Chomsky 2001) correlates with sensitivity to Condition B, supporting a narrow-syntactic reinterpretation of the condition (consistent with much recent work).
- Anti-subject orientation of pronouns is distinct from Condition B, targeting a different domain.
- PF-phases are not entirely predictable from syntactic category: what constitutes a PF-phase correlates with phonological properties of the syntactic constituent.
- The languages under discussion do not vary in *how* Condition B applies. Variation in Condition B effects is derived via the interaction between syntactic features of different pronouns and independent syntactic properties of the language in question.

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