Long-distance binding of French reflexive *soi* (\textasciitilde{}`one(self)`): first-person oriented empathy

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, Cole et al. 2005, a.o.)? The behavior of French reflexive *soi* is sometimes cited as evidence for positive answers to both of these questions: just like Icelandic *sig*, the morphologically simple anaphor *soi* can be bound, it is claimed, in a larger domain than the morphologically complex English reflexive *x-self* (Pica 1991, a.o.). The research reported here shows that the anaphoric properties of *soi* are in fact unexceptional, once they have been disentangled from its generic and perspectival properties.

Background – Based on sentences in (1), Ronat (1982) claims that *soi*, which requires an indefinite antecedent, is an anaphor strictly obeying Condition A of Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981).

(1) a. Personne, ne vote pour soi,
   b. *Personne, ne sait que tu votes pour soi,
   c. *Personne, n’a laissé ces gens voter pour soi.

Pica (1984) however observes that *soi* can be long distance bound under the same conditions as Icelandic *sig*, i.e. in infinitive and subjunctive clauses, vs. indicative clauses, as illustrated in (2).

(2) a. On, ne devrait jamais laisser [soi les gens dire du mal de soi],
   b. Personne, ne souhaite jamais que [soi les gens disent du mal de soi],
   c. *Personne, ne dit que [soi les gens ont pensé à soi].

Drawing on this, Pica hypothesizes that the binding domain of non-compound reflexives is the tensed clause, because they can undergo covert successive cyclic head movement from INFL to INFL through C, which is empty at LF only in infinitives and subjunctives; this movement allows long distance reflexives to be locally bound at LF. As observed by Zribi-Hertz (1990), the contrast between (2c) and (2a-b) is however due to a confound: *soi* does not only require the antecedent to be non-specific, but also universally quantified (and human), as shown in (3) vs. (4) (in standard dialects - variations cannot be reported here). When this factor is controlled for, *soi* can be bound across a tensed clause as in (5).

(3) a. {N’importe qui/tout le monde/chaque} doit penser à soi.
   b. {Personne/nul/oni} ne pense plus jamais à soi.
   c. *Quelqu’un, aura sûrement pensé à soi.
   d. *{Certains/pluriel}; pensent d’abord à soi.
   d. *{Pas grand chose/rien}; ne peut se recroqueviller sur soi.

(4) a. *Quelqu’un, aura sûrement pensé à soi.
   b. *Pierre et moi, on a travaillé pour soi.
   c. *{Certains/pluriel}; pensent d’abord à soi.
   d. *{Pas grand chose/rien}; ne peut se recroqueviller sur soi.

(5) On, espère toujours que [soi les autres ont dit du bien de soi].

Furthermore, Zribi-Hertz (1990, 2007) assumes that *soi* has two variants, one of which is the non-nominate version of *on* (= ‘one’) which does not require an antecedent at all, as in (6).

(6) La confiance en soi n’est pas toujours innée. *Confidence in soi [i.e. self-confidence] is not always innate.*

Instead of assuming such ambiguity, I propose that *soi* is an anaphor that can be exempt from Condition A under conditions related to perspective, as observed for many reflexives from various languages (cf. Mandarin *ziji*: Huang & Liu 2001, a.o.; Icelandic *sig*: Maling 1984, a.o.; English *himself*: Pollard & Sag 1992, a.o.): specifically, *soi* does not have to be locally bound when the empathy locus of the proposition containing *soi* includes the speaker, as will be explained below.

New generalization – Although *soi* is in most cases locally bound (1a; 3a-b), *soi* can also have a long distance antecedent (2a-b, 5), no antecedent (6), or a non-c-commanding antecedent as in (7):

(7) Le mal qu’on inflige à autrui peut se retourner contre soi. *The harm one does to others can turn against soi.*

Unlike anaphors like *ziji* or *sig*, the condition for exempting *soi* from Condition A is not simply to be antecedent by a perspective center: even if *on* is the attitude holder (subject of ‘thinks’) in (8b), it cannot antecede *soi* when it occurs in a different clause, vs. (8a) (unlike German *man*, Kratzer 1997).

(8) a. Là-bas en Grèce, on garde confiance en soi. *Over there in Greece, one remains confident in soi.*
   b. *Là-bas en Grèce, on, pense que l’Europe a peur de soi. *Over there in Greece, one, thinks Europe fears soi.*
But this is possible in 9b where soi includes the speaker vs. 8b: exempt soi must be speaker-inclusive.

(9) a. Ici en France, on a confiance en soi. Here in France, one has confidence in SOI.
   b. Ici en France, on pense que l’Europe a besoin de soi. Here in France one thinks Europe needs SOI.

This means, I argue, that the conditions for exemption of soi are also related to perspective (just like for other reflexives), but in a different way due to its specific generic properties: exempt soi must express a generalization based on first-person identification (cf. English one: Moltmann 2006, Malamud 2012).

**Analysis** – Specifically, I hypothesize that soi encodes three properties: (i) genericity: its antecedent must be a non-specific universal quantifier; (ii) anaphoricity: it must be locally bound; (iii) empathy (Kuno 1987; cf. Moltmann’s 2006 ‘simulation’): the speaker empathizes, i.e. identifies, with its referent; this explains the human requirement, and the difference of meaning that arises in sentences like (8a) (cases of speaker-exclusion) when on/soi (‘one’) is replaced by third person ils/eux (‘they’).

Importantly, the empathy locus (entity identified with) must be distinguished from the experiencer of empathy (entity identifying with). In the case of soi, the experiencer of empathy has to be the speaker (unlike cases of taste predicates, Pearson 2012: the subject of the identify with relation can shift): in (10) Janis cannot identify with on anteceding soi; only the speaker could (in right contexts, i.e. if Greek).

(10)*Janis dit qu’en Grèce, on pense que l’Europe a peur de soi. *Janis says that in Greece, one thinks Europe fears SOI.

In that sense, soi is first-personal. In fact, just like first-person me, soi does not have to be read de se, while soi-même (lit. soi-same, =’oneself’) has to, like moi-même (=’myself’); consider dream contexts:

(11) On, rêve parfois qu’on est [un monstre], et qu’on, lance une attaque contre {soi} (i.e. moi_mème).

One, sometimes dreams that one is [a monster] and one, launches an attack against {SOI}

(12) Je, rêve parfois que je suis [un monstre], et que je, lance une attaque contre {moi} (i.e. moi-elle-même).

I, sometimes dream that I am [a monster] and I, launch an attack against {me} (i.e. moi-elle-même).

However, the empathy locus for soi does not have to include the speaker, unless – crucially – soi is not locally bound (cf. 9b vs. 8b). This is explained if we suppose that the anaphoric properties of soi are in this case fulfilled by a silent empathy operator (cf. logophoric operator, Koopman & Sportiche 1999, Sundaresan 2014, a.o.) including the speaker (cf. Kuno 1987: the speaker is highest on the empathy hierarchy), which corefers with the antecedent and locally binds soi. When soi is locally bound by the generic antecedent, the empathy locus can include the speaker as in (3) where the speaker empathizes with the generic antecedent in including himself in the generalization, but it does not have to as in (8a) where the speaker empathizes with the generic antecedent by simply taking his perspective. So the (non) obligatory inclusion of the speaker in the empathy locus, and thus in the antecedent, crucially distinguishes between locally bound soi and exempt soi; this relates its anaphoric behavior to other anaphors that are exempt from Condition A when encoding specific perspectival properties.

Finally, this perspective-based explanation of exemption of soi is corroborated by the strong intervention effects exhibited by exempt soi as in (13) (Sportiche et al. 2014: cf. 1b), akin to blocking effects shown by Mandarin ziji because of perspective conflicts (Huang & Liu 2001).

(13) Aujourd’hui, on, pense que la nation/*tous a(s) besoin de soi. Today, one, thinks that the nation/*everyone need SOI.

This explanation cannot hold for (14b) as the speaker has to be included in the empathy locus (cf. 9b vs. 8b). The deviance of (14b) (M. Hollande speaking) vs. (14a) is due, I argue, to a Condition B-like effect between je and speaker-inclusive soi (cf. ban on partial overlap: *J’ai besoin de nous ‘I need us’).

(14) a. Partout où je vais, on, aime me parler de soi. Wherever I go, one, likes telling me about SOI.
   b. *En France, on, aime sentir que je ai confiance en soi. *In France, one, likes feeling that I need SOI.

**Conclusion** – As commonly observed with anaphors, French reflexive soi must be either clause-bound or antececeded by a perspective center; but the specific generic and first-person oriented properties of soi impose specific properties on that perspective center: it should be an empathy locus including the speaker. A crosslinguistically uniform binding domain regardless of morphological complexity, as required by parsimony, is thus still a viable option: conditions for exemption only rely on perspective.