

An experimental approach to principle C in German

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Standard binding theory (Chomsky 1981) proposes that coreference and binding are regulated by binding principles A, B, and C. Additionally, it was generally accepted until a few years ago that coreference and binding are regulated by *c-command* (Reinhart 1976, 1983), a syntactic principle.

Definition 1: Principle C: All R-expressions must be free.

Definition 2: C-command: Node A c(onstituent)-commands node B iff the branching node α_1 most immediately dominating A either dominates B or is immediately dominated by a node α_2 which dominates B, and α_2 is of the same category type as α_1 .

Principle C and c-command taken together predict why coreference between the pronoun preceding the R-expression *Lucy* is possible in (1a), but not in (1b).

(1) a. Her₁ sister found Lucy₁.

b. *She₁ found Lucy₁.

However, there are many counterexamples showing that non-syntactic factors can influence coreference judgments (Bolinger 1977) or even obviate principle C, such as etiquette requirements in (2).

(2) (Schlenker 2005: 399, ex. 37)

[The King of Transsylvania]₁ requests that [his Majesty's]₁ ministers join [his Majesty]₁ in Room Rosa Luxemburg.

These counterexamples lead modern approaches to principle C (e.g. Bruening 2014, 2021; Schlenker 2005) to adopt pragmatic principles allowing for principle C violations. One of these principles is *Minimize Restrictors!* (Schlenker 2005), which states that a definite description should be reduced (to a pronoun, for example) if this

does not affect its denotation and if there is no pragmatic reason to not reduce it. In (2), politeness requires the usage of the full R-expression *his Majesty* instead of a pronoun.

In this talk, I present the results of a judgment task experiment focusing on semantic and pragmatic effects causing principle C violations in German. While testing the data of Frey (1993), one of the most influential works on coreference and binding in German, I discuss whether the principle C obviations found in my study can be accounted for through the incorporation of *Minimize Restrictors!* and similar principles into principle C. The results show that a purely syntactic theory of principle C, even if it is granting exceptions for ‘pragmatic effects’, cannot account for the German coreference patterns, suggesting that other, non-syntactic effects regulating coreference could be uncovered in future research.

References

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