On Semi-Fake Indexicals

Daniel Tiskin · ✉ · HSE St Petersburg / ILS RAS

This paper reports on the existence, in focus contexts, of pronouns with a **strict** reading w.r.t. the commanding focus-sensitive operator but at the same time with a **bound** (or sloppy, or "fake indexical," FI) reading w.r.t. an even higher such operator; hence the term *semi-fake indexicals*. I present an example from Russian (2) in detail, and discuss how semi-fakeness disfavours the theories of FIs where two classes of pronouns, minimal and full-fledged, are assumed. Finally, I suggest an analysis which is akin to focus binding but does not require focus on the bindee.

Background. By *fake indexicals* are understood bound (i.e. co-varying) uses of pronouns and agreement whose ϕ-features—person, number, gender—do not restrict the pronoun's range. Notably, this can happen when a pronoun is bound by a FOCUSED antecedent and its features do not contribute to the computation of focus alternatives. E.g. (1) has *her* as Mary is female but asserts (on the pertinent reading) that other people, whether male or female, did not do their homework.

(1) ^{F7}Only [MARY$_{F7}$ λ_1[t_1 did her$_1$ homework]].   parsed according to Bassi (2021)

The main lines of analysis are (i) assuming that a pronoun can be born featureless, or *minimal*, and then receive its features via binding so that it becomes a (locally bound) FI (Kratzer 2009; Wurmbrand 2017); (ii) conceding that ϕ-features, while inherent in the pronoun and semantic (presuppositional), may fail to project to focus alternatives (Sauerland 2013), or are cancelled in the context where the antecedent has the same presupposition (Charnavel & Sportiche 2023); and (iii) treating ϕ-features as related to denotation but imposed post-syntactically (Bassi 2021).

A Semi-Fake Indexical. The literature on FIs assumes that a given pronominal token is either referential or bound. Yet, some Russian speakers (not all; the reasons for that are left for future research) find (2) to have a true reading (albeit not outright accessible) in the scenario below.

(2) Tol'ko Katja ODNA znajet, čto jej   govorit'.
     only   Katya alone knows what she:DAT say:INF   (= ...what she has to say)
     Scenario: The class has been rehearsing the same play for months, so that almost each character's lines are by now known to someone else apart from the kid playing that character. Except for Katya, whose lines are too long to be memorised by anyone but herself.

Semi-fake indexicality seems likewise to obtain with other focus particles, here omitted.
One consultant has trouble with the relevant interpretation of (2) but judges (3) true if Katya thinks other kids do not know **her** lines but all other kids think someone else knows **their** lines.

(3) Tol'ko KATJA$_1$ dumajet, čto $\emptyset_1$ ODNA znajet, čto jej   govorit'.
     only   Katya thinks   that   alone knows what she:DAT say:INF

I opt for the dative subject *jej* in the subordinate clause as the nominative *ona* would compete with a zero subject believed to force the bound reading (Shushurin 2017; Парамонова 2023), with the effects of the competition not yet fully known. I assume *odna* to be a floating focus-sensitive element associating with the trace (lower copy) of the subject, cf. Erlewine (2014), Hirsch & Wagner (2019) for some discussion as to when *only*-type focus particles can do so.
In the scenario in (2), all kids are classified into those whose lines are known by someone else and those whose are not (who satisfy $P = [\lambda x : x$ knows x's lines.no $(y \neq x)$ knows x's lines]); and moreover, Katya is the only member of the latter class, i.e.

(4) $[\lambda z : P(z).$for no $(v \neq z), P(v)]($Katya$) = \mathbf{1}$, $P(z) = only$'s definedness condition

In other words, in (2) *jej* 'she:DAT,' morphologically [FEM], has a reading that is simultaneously
- **strict** w.r.t. *odna* $\sim$ *odin* 'alone' as other kids do not know the lines that **Katya** has to say;
- **bound**/FI w.r.t. *tol'ko* 'only' as other kids do not **themselves** have unmemorisable lines; here [FEM] has no interpretive role in the focus alternatives: other kids can be either male or female.

Theoretical Significance. Data like (2)–(3) challenge the assumption behind some work on FIs like Kratzer (2009), Wurmbrand (2017), and Ivan & Mirrazi (2019), that a pronoun is **either** born featureless, or *minimal*, to be a (locally bound) FI, **or** specified for ϕ-features and incapable of being bound. The challenge is that [FEM] on *jej* in (2) is both interpreted (relative to *odna*) and ignored (relative to *tol'ko*), so that (given bottom-up composition) a fully specified pronoun would have to become featureless to get bound. (Kratzer also allows for context-shifting binding, but it is intended for long-distance binding and for person rather than gender.) Sauerland's approach, where ϕ-features project optionally to alternatives, may be able to handle (2) while having problems elsewhere (see a summary in Charnavel & Sportiche 2023). On Bassi's approach, where "*all* variables—referential and bound alike—are generated without ϕ-features," [FEM] on *jej* is explained by its referring to the particular female (Katya) on any assignment due to coindexation. This approach, which is assumed below, treats ϕ-features of pronouns as uninterpretable within semantics proper and thereby renders feature mismatches harmless.

Analysis. There is no semi-fakeness with sequential particles, as in *tol'ko odna / odna tol'ko Katja*, where no nested foci arise. So I assume that the floating position of *odin* is essential and the exclusion of alternatives is built into the denotation of (adverbial) *odin* without recourse to focus assignments (the accent on *odin* is independent of the presence of *tol'ko*, Пекелис 2021):

(5) $[\![\lambda_1[\,\text{ODIN}\ t_1\ \text{V}'\,]\!]\!] = \lambda x : [\![\text{V}']\!](x).\forall y \neq x(\neg[\![\text{V}']\!](y))$

With (5) and Bassi's analysis of FIs as in (1), the LF of (2) can be represented as (6), with the truth conditions in (7). *Jej$_2$*, referential w.r.t. *odna*, is not bound by λ_1 but corefers with *Katja*.

(6) ^{F7}Tol'ko [Katja$_{F7}$ λ_1[ODNA t_1 znajet, čto [jej$_2$]$_{F7}$ govorit']].

(7) $[\![(6)]\!]^{g,h}$ is defined iff Katya knows what Katya (= $g(2) = h(F7)$) has to say   [from *odna*]
            but no one else knows what Katya has to say   [from *odna*]
            and $\forall h' \sim_{F7} h$, $h'(F7)$ knows what $h'(F7)$ has to say [from *tol'ko*]
      if defined, $[\![(6)]\!]^{g,h} = \mathbf{1}$ iff $\forall h' \sim_{F7} h$, someone $\neq h'(F7)$ knows what $h'(F7)$ has to say

However, this analysis assumes invisible focus marking on *jej*—lest the pronoun, in order to covary w.r.t. *tol'ko*, have to be bound by λ_1 like in (1), and thus not strict w.r.t. *odna*. This focus is coindexed with that on *Katja* to ensure covariate interpretation (Büring 2016). To avoid stipulating invisible foci, I suggest that the role of focus could be—perhaps exceptionally—played by an operator inspired by work on *de re* readings of attitude reports (Percus & Sauerland 2003; Charlow & Sharvit 2014), where counterparts of a *res* in other possible worlds are delivered by *concept generators* (CGs). Instead of worlds and counterparts, we have focus assignments and individuals mapped to the same focus index. The unpronounced **modulator** μ (licensed by a c-commanding focus or focus-sensitive operator) takes two arguments, (i) a referring expression with a (plain) index i and (ii) a focus assignment index Fj, to yield, for a given focus assignment h, the value of $h(Fj)$—thus reproducing the effect of indexed focus without the focal accent:

(8) $[\![[\mu_{Fj}\ \text{ona}_i]]\!] = [\![\text{ONA}_{i,Fj}]\!]$

The LF for (2) is then as in (6) modulo μ (9), and the interpretation remains as in (7). Conceptually though, the analysis raises the question why Russian disfavours the focus feature itself, with its signature accent on the pronoun (JEJ), to be used to convey the intended meaning of (2).

(9) ^{F7}Tol'ko [Katja$_{F7}$ λ_1[ODNA t_1 znajet, čto [μ_{F7} jej$_2$] govorit']].

Further research will address a parallel problem concerning **reflexives**, which have been classified into coreferential/strict and bound/sloppy (Sag 1976; McKillen 2016, i.a.). E.g. (10), with the reflexive possessive *svoj*, has a reading equivalent to the pertinent reading of (3).

(10) Tol'ko KATJA$_1$ dumajet, čto $\emptyset_1$ ODNA pomnit   svoju   rol'.
     only   Katya thinks   that   alone remembers REFL:POSS part (= ...her part)

References

Bassi, I. (2021). Fake Feature and Valuation From Context. PhD thesis. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. URL: https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/140990.

Büring, D. (2016). Intonation and Meaning. Oxford University Press.

Charlow, S. & Y. Sharvit (2014). Bound 'de re' pronouns and the LFs of attitude reports. *Semantics & Pragmatics* 7.1, 1–43. DOI: 10.3765/sp.7.3.

Charnavel, I. & D. Sportiche (2023). Indexical binding, presuppositions and agreement. *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung*. Vol. 28. URL: https://lingbuzz.net/lingbuzz/007872.

Erlewine, M. Y. (2014). Movement Out of Focus. PhD thesis. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. URL: https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/93027.

Hirsch, A. & M. Wagner (2019). *Only* reconstruction and backwards association. *Proceedings of the Amsterdam Colloquium*. Ed. by J. J. Schlöder, D. McHugh, & F. Roelofsen. Vol. 22, 161–170.

Ivan, R. & Z. Mirrazi (2019). Minimal Pronouns & T-Agreement Effects: The Case of Farsi Fake Indexicals. Presented at GLOW 42. URL: https://glowlinguistics.org/42/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/05/main.pdf.

Kratzer, A. (2009). Making a pronoun: Fake indexicals as windows into the properties of pronouns. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40.2, 187–237. DOI: 10.1162/ling.2009.40.2.187.

McKillen, A. (2016). On the Interpretation of Reflexive Pronouns. PhD thesis. McGill University. URL: https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/vt150m77n.

Percus, O. & U. Sauerland (2003). On the LFs of attitude reports. *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung*. Vol. 7, 228–242.

Sag, I. A. (1976). Deletion and Logical Form. PhD thesis. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. URL: https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/16401.

Sauerland, U. (2013). Presuppositions and the alternative tier. *Proceedings of SALT*. Vol. 23, 156–173.

Shushurin, P. (2017). Null Pronouns in Russian Embedded Clauses. *Pronouns in Embedded Contexts at the Syntax-Semantics Interface*. Ed. by P. Patel-Grosz, P. G. Grosz, & S. Zobel. Springer, 145–169.

Wurmbrand, S. (2017). Feature sharing or how I value my son. *The Pesky Set: Papers for David Pesetsky*. Ed. by C. Halpert, H. Kotek, & C. van Urk. MIT Working Papers in Linguistics, 173–182. URL: https://ucloud.univie.ac.at/public.php/dav/files/dhZtAocQg3qTHvi/FI.pdf.

Парамонова, Д. А. (2023). Контексты связывания личных местоимений в русском языке. Курсовая работа, МГУ им. М. В. Ломоносова.

Пекелис, О. Е. (2021). *Один* в значении 'только': синтаксис и семантика в синхронии и диахронии. *Jezikoslovni Zapiski* 27.2, 143—155.