

Building a Pronoun

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Referential and bound variable pronouns tend to look the same. The English pronouns *he*, *she*, and *they* can all be referential or bound, for example. Referential pronouns refer to salient individuals in the utterance situation. Bound variable pronouns are interpreted by assignment functions. This looks like ambiguity. The apparent ambiguity is systematic, though, and this is why semanticists have been looking for a unified analysis for both types of pronouns. Following up on Kratzer (1998), I want to suggest a different explanation for the puzzle of pronominal ambiguity: referential and bound variable pronouns might look the same because bound variable pronouns inherit their shapes from their referential cousins. Bound variable pronouns are what I will call “Minimal Pronouns”. Minimal Pronouns are born without a full set of agreement features. They acquire the missing features, and hence the essence of their visible or audible shapes, via chains of local agreement relations established in the syntax. The looks of bound variable pronouns are gradually constructed, then.

If bound variable pronouns are born without a full set of features, what is it that determines which features a pronoun can have from the very start, and which features are inherited via agreement? I will argue that the meanings of pronominal features provide the necessary guidelines. More generally, it seems that the behavior of various kinds of pronouns can be derived from the meanings of their initial features in interaction with general syntactic and semantic principles.