
The Semantic Nature of the Intervention Constraint

Author(s): Bruce Hayes

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for the varying degrees of sensitivity displayed by different processes in the same language.

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THE SEMANTIC NATURE OF THE INTERVENTION CONSTRAINT

Bruce Hayes,
Harvard University

1. The rule of Super Equi NP Deletion was first proposed in Grinder (1970) as the rule relating pairs of sentences such as the following:

- (1) a. Albert thought it would be difficult for him to brush his own teeth.
- b. Albert thought it would be difficult ϕ to brush his own teeth.
- (2) a. Boris felt that it was certain that his washing himself in public would be embarrassing.
- b. Boris felt that it was certain that ϕ washing himself in public would be embarrassing.

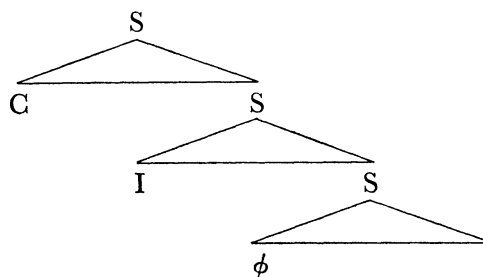
In other words, Super Equi deletes the subjects of embedded clauses under coreference with NPs found at least two clauses higher.

Grinder also found that there exist sentences for which the application of Super Equi is impossible:

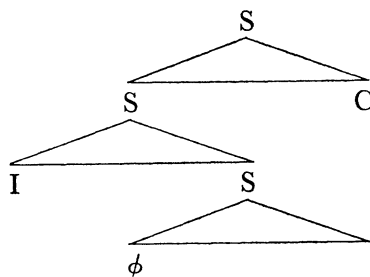
- (3) a. Horace felt that Alice didn't look forward to his getting himself arrested.
- b. *Horace felt that Alice didn't look forward to ϕ getting himself arrested.
- (4) a. The fact that Alice didn't look forward to his getting himself arrested bothers Horace.
- b. *The fact that Alice didn't look forward to ϕ getting himself arrested bothers Horace.
- (5) a. The fact that his_i getting himself arrested would be hard on Fred bothers Horace_i.
- b. *The fact that ϕ_i getting himself arrested would be hard on Fred bothers Horace_i.

Grinder proposed that the derivation of sentences such as (3b), (4b), and (5b) is blocked by what he called the Inter-

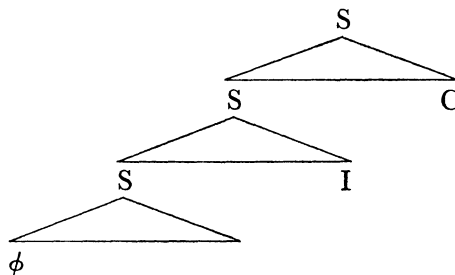
vention Constraint. Roughly speaking, the constraint is as follows: the application of Super Equi is blocked whenever a potential controller (or “intervener”) is located between the controller and the target in one of the following configurations:



which blocks the derivation of (3b);



which blocks (4b); and



which blocks (5b).¹

¹ One minor adjustment appears to be necessary to Grinder's constraint. For many speakers, sentences such as (5b) are grammatical provided that there is morphological evidence present that removes the ambiguity of which higher NP controls the deletion:

- (i) ?The fact that ϕ getting himself arrested would be hard on Alice bothers John.

In (i), for example, the morphological evidence consists in the fact that *Alice*, the intervener, cannot be coreferent with *himself*, which has been reflexivized under coreference with the target.

2. In the following sentences, however, there is no intervening potential controller; thus, the present Intervention Constraint seems to be inadequate to block the application of Super Equi upon them:

- (6) Martha told John that there had been deep regret over $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{his} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$ having gotten himself into trouble.
- (7) The world leaders admitted that there would be an outcry over $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{their} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$ making themselves emperors.²

Now, since sentences (6) and (7) contain so-called “derived” nominalizations, a solution might be proposed in which these nominalizations are derived from sentential forms, and in which the Intervention Constraint applies before these underlying sentences are nominalized. Thus the application of Super Equi in (6) could be blocked by the pro-form that appears in the underlying sentence:

- (8) Bob_i said that PRO deeply regretted his_i having gotten himself into trouble.

However, this approach would be poorly motivated, as the following sentences show:

- (9) Glenn announced that there had been a tremendous uproar about $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{his} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$ having destroyed his own piano.
- (10) Alice hinted to Harold that there would be a great brouhaha over $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{his} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$ washing himself for the first time.

This is because there exist no verbs that could serve as the sources of the proposed nominalizations, *uproar* and *brouhaha*.

² Kuno (1974) argues that Super Equi sentences should be derived from representations in which the embedded predicates appear as direct discourse. In this analysis, sentence (1b) would be derived from something like (i):

- (i) Albert thought, “It will be difficult ϕ to brush my own teeth.”

If we adopt Kuno’s proposal, the problem at hand still remains, but must be restated. Specifically, we must find some means of blocking (ii), which is the underlying discourse representation of the embedded predicates of (6):

- (ii) *“(There has been deep regret over ϕ having gotten yourself into trouble.”

3. The following sentences exhibit the peculiar property of allowing Super Equi to apply only when the controller is plural:

- (11) a. John revealed that there had been little talk of $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{his} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$ getting himself out of prison.
 b. The guerrillas revealed that there had been little talk of $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{their} \\ \phi \end{array} \right\}$ getting themselves out of prison.
- (12) a. Julie admitted that there had been heated debates over $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{her} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$ cutting her own toenails.
 b. The Nixons admitted that there had been heated debates over $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{their} \\ \phi \end{array} \right\}$ cutting their own toenails.

By contrast, the middle predicates of (6), (7), (9), and (10) prevent the operation of Super Equi with both singular and plural triggers.

As before, there exist sentences of this type whose middle predicates could not have been nominalized from sentential sources:

- (13) a. Elroy revealed that the general consensus was in favor of $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{his} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$ getting himself out of town.
 b. Elroy's friends revealed that the general consensus was in favor of $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{their} \\ \phi \end{array} \right\}$ getting themselves out of town.
- (14) a. Alex noted that a certain silly mood had prevailed in favor of $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{his} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$ getting himself high.
 b. The party-goers noted that a certain silly mood had prevailed in favor of $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{their} \\ \phi \end{array} \right\}$ getting themselves high.

4. It appears from these sentences that the present Intervention Constraint is inadequate to account for the facts about Super Equi. An alternative solution might be to mark the intervening predicates with features: for example, *there be deep regret* would be marked [$-$ Super Equi] to account for sentence (6), and *the general consensus be in favor of* would

be marked [+Super Equi/plural controller], to account for sentence (13). But aside from the arbitrary nature of this solution, it seems that the generalizations to be captured here are of a semantic nature.

Consider, for example, the predicates described in section 2: *there be deep regret*, *there be an outcry*, *there be a tremendous uproar*, and *there be a great brouhaha*. Each of these predicates describes an action that may be performed only by relatively large, unspecified groups of people.³ Such a group will naturally contain (or even consist entirely of) persons other than the referent of the controller, even if that referent is plural, as in (7). It thus seems plausible that what is blocking the application of Super Equi in sentences of this type is the presence of "semantic interveners"—that is to say, implicit nominal elements induced by the semantic structure of expressions like *there be deep regret*. A semantic intervener would work to block Super Equi in the same manner that an actually present intervening noun phrase does.

The sentences of section 3 support this view. The predicates involved in them—*there be little talk*, *there be heated debates*, *the general consensus was*, and *a certain silly mood prevailed*—are similar to the predicates of section 2 in that they are performed by groups of people. They differ, however, in that the people in the groups can be specified and that the action involved can be a private occurrence, rather than an action of the general public. Because of this, when such a predicate is found in a Super Equi sentence, the implicit subject of that predicate (the semantic intervener) can be perceived as being coreferent with the controller for Super Equi, if the controller is plural. In the sentences of section 3, this is exactly what happens: *the guerrillas* are perceived as being the ones who did little talking in (11b); *the Nixons* are perceived to have engaged in the heated debates in (12b); and so on. Because the semantic intervener in these sentences is coreferent with the controller, Super Equi is not blocked. When the controller is singular, as in (11)–(14)(a), the semantic intervener cannot be coreferent with it, and the application of Super Equi becomes impossible.

5. In conclusion, we have seen that there exist sentences in which Super Equi is blocked despite the lack of an overt

³ The first example, *there be deep regret*, may initially appear to be an exception. Consider, however, the normal means of announcing individual regret: one says *X regretted deeply*, or *there has been deep regret on X's part*, but never simply *there has been deep regret*. This is true even when X is plural.

intervening NP. We have seen that the embedded predicates of these sentences require in their semantic interpretation the existence of implicit nominal elements, which vary in the possibility of their coreference with the higher noun phrases of the sentence. The use of these “semantic interveners” enables us to predict the behavior of Super Equi in situations where the syntactic Intervention Constraint fails. This constitutes evidence that the Intervention Constraint is at least partly semantic in nature.

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SLOPPY IDENTITY AS A DIRECT DISCOURSE IDENTITY*

Etsuko Kaburaki,

Meiji Gakuin University

Ross (1969, 282) noted that his generalization on identity phenomena (written as (1) below), including sloppy identity phenomena, cannot account for the possible readings of (2).

- (1) Constituents are identical if they have the same constituent structure and are identical morpheme-for-morpheme, or if they differ only as to pronouns, where the pronouns in each of the identical constituents are commanded by antecedents in the non-identical portions of the phrase-marker. (Ross (1967))
- (2) I said to you that you would be famous, and Jack said it to Betty.¹

(1) predicts that (2) should have three readings, (3a), (3b), and (3c). However, contrary to this prediction, only (3a)

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¹ The original example found in Ross (1969) is as follows:

- (i) I told you that you would be famous, and Jack told it to Betty.

It has been pointed out to me that (i) sounds strange because of the absence of *to* in the first conjunct.