

Refining salience and the Position of Antecedent Hypothesis: a study of Catalan pronouns

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Object of study

- Investigate what governs the referring preferences of **null subject pronouns (NSP)** and **overt subject pronouns (OSP)** in Catalan, a null subject language.
- Are they governed by syntactic factors, by information structure factors or both?

Why is this interesting?

- It contributes to the debate about referring preferences of pronouns in null-subject languages.
- Since there is a correlation between reduced anaphoric forms and **salient antecedents** (Ariel 1990), we can gain insight into which factors compose salience.

Claims

- Salience is influenced by both syntactic and information structure factors.
- Different anaphoric forms are sensitive to different factors:
 - NSP have a preference for **subjects**.
 - OSP have a preference for **low-salience antecedents**.

Outline

1. Background
2. Experiment
3. Related experiments
4. Conclusions

The Position of Antecedent Hypothesis

- Carminati (2002) proposed that pronouns in Italian are governed by the Position of Antecedent Hypothesis: **NSP have a subject preference and OSP a non-subject preference.**
- PAH was tested with different methods and in several **intrasentential** contexts.

The PAH and information structure

- Subjects are usually links (file where new information is updated (Vallduví 1992)).
- Frana (2007):
 - When subject = link: the PAH holds
 - When object = link: both pronouns have an object (=link) preference

Extending and refining the PAH?

- Does the PAH hold **across sentences**?
- Is the PAH a by-product of **information structure**?

Catalan information structure

- Information structure is encoded through word order (Vallduví 1992).
- Links appear preverbally: preverbal subjects and left-dislocated constituents.
- Postverbal subjects are focal information.

Experiment: Material

- Questionnaire study.
- Word-order (SVO vs OVS) and type of pronoun (NSP and OSP) were crossed, creating four conditions.
 - Cond 1: SVO + Null
 - Cond 2: SVO + Overt
 - Cond 3: OVS + Null
 - Cond 4: OVS + Overt

Material

- (1)
 - a. What happened to Marta?
 - b. La Marta escrivia sovint a la Raquel. \emptyset / Ella vivia als Estats Units.
“Marta wrote frequently to Raquel. \emptyset / She lived in the States.”
- (2)
 - a. What happened to Raquel?
 - b. A la Raquel, l'escrivia sovint la Marta. \emptyset / Ella vivia als Estats Units.
“To Raquel, Marta wrote (to her) frequently. \emptyset / She in the United States.”

Participants and procedure

- Questionnaire:
 - 16 3-sentence discourses counterbalanced across lists
 - 16 fillers + 5 practice items
- Participants (n=32) had to choose their preferred paraphrase:
 - (3) a. Marta lived in the United States
 - b. Raquel lived in the United States

Results

	subject antecedent	object antecedent
Cond 1: SVO + Null	59.1	40.9
Cond 2: SVO + Overt	35.2	64.8
Cond 3: OVS + Null	58.0	42.0
Cond 4: OVS + Overt	51.1	48.9

- Type of pronoun is significant (both by subjects and items, $p < 0.05$).
- The interaction between type of pronoun and word order is also significant, only marginally by subjects ($F_1(1,31) = 2.32, p = 0.07$; $F_2(1,15) = 3.06, p < 0.05$).

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Discussion

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- NSP has a subject preference, regardless of whether it is a link or not.
- OSP has an object preference, only when it is not the link.

What does this tell us about salience?

- Both syntactic and information structure factors contribute to salience, ...
 - ... but syntax has a greater weight.
- Different anaphoric forms have different constraints:
 - NSP prefer the most salient antecedent (i.e. subjects) across the board.
 - OSP are constrained to refer to low-salience antecedents.

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OSP and non-salient antecedents

- When both information structure and syntax agree:
 - OSP picks up the non-salient antecedent: non-subject + non-link.
- When both information structure and syntax do not agree:
 - Both potential antecedents have an intermediate degree of salience.
 - There is no non-salient antecedent.
 - OSP shows no clear preference.

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Finnish: Kaiser and Trueswell (2008)

- Similar results in a sentence-completion study in Finnish: pronoun *hän* and the demonstrative *tämä*.
- *Hän* displayed a subject preference regardless of word order.
- *Tämä* showed an object preference in SVO and a weak subject preference for OVS along with many demonstrative uses.

Italian: Frana (2007)

- Participants (n=32) answered a questionnaire.
- Results:
 - When subject = link → the PAH holds
 - When object = link → both pronouns have an object (=link) preference
- Four conditions
 - Full DP (subject = link) + null
 - Full DP (subject = link) + overt
 - Clitic (object = link) + null
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Italian: Frana (2007)

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- Results:
 - When subject = link → the PAH holds
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Frana (2007): Material

- (4)
- a. La signora Rossi è una persona molto maleducata che non merita alcun riguardo.
“Mrs Rossi is a very rude person that does not deserve any regard.”
 - b. Quando Maria incontra **la signora Rossi** per strada, \emptyset / lei fa sempre finta di non vederla
“When Maria sees Mrs Rossi in the street, \emptyset / she always pretends not to see her.”
 - c. Quando Maria **la** incontra per strada, \emptyset / lei fa sempre finta di non vederla
“When Maria her-sees in the street, \emptyset / she always pretends not to see her”

Frana (2007): Discussion

- Frana (2007) is not really manipulating information structure.
- In the conditions with a clitic, why can't we refer to the subject?

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Frana (2007): Discussion

- Clitics as a signal that resolutions needs to be intersentential, while proper names signal a new discourse segment.
- (5)
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“Mrs Rossi is a very rude person that does not deserve any regard.”
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“When Maria her-sees in the street, \emptyset / she always pretends not to see her”

Frana (2007): Discussion

- Clitics as a cataphoric marker, which triggers the expectation that something else will be said about its referent.
- How can the pronoun refer to the subject in the subordinate clause? A stronger linguistic cue, such as a proper name, is needed.

Frana (2007): Discussion

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Frana (2007): Discussion

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“Mrs Rossi is a very rude person that does not deserve any regard.”
- b. Quando \emptyset la incontra per strada, **Maria** fa sempre finta di non vederla
“When \emptyset her-sees in the street, **Maria** pretends always no to see her”

Conclusions

- Experiment to test referring preferences of NSP and OSP in Catalan.
- Salience is influenced by both syntax and information structure, but the former has greater weight.
- Different anaphoric forms are sensitive to different factors
 - NSP have a preference for salient, subject referents.
 - OSP have a preference for low-salience (non-subject, non-link) antecedents.

Thank you!

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