The Uniqueness Restriction on E-type Pronouns

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Donkey Sentences & E-type Pronouns

(1a) Every man [who owns a donkey] loves it.
    = [Every man [who owns a donkey]] loves his donkey.
(1b) If a man owns a donkey, he loves it.
    = [If a man owns a donkey], he loves his donkey.

Intended Reading:
John loves John’s donkey
George loves George’s donkey

Syntactic & Pragmatic Restrictions on E-type Pronouns

(1a) Every man [who owns a donkey] loves it.
    = [Every man [who owns a donkey]] loves his donkey.
(1b) If a man owns a donkey, he loves it.
    = [If a man owns a donkey], he loves his donkey.

Syntactic: The Formal Link Condition

Pragmatic Conditions

(i) Sentences involving e-type pronouns also have to satisfy certain pragmatic conditions (e.g. presuppositions)
(ii) ‘The overt antecedent must not be a part of a word’
(iii) Sentences involving e-type pronouns also have to satisfy certain pragmatic conditions (e.g. presuppositions)

E-type Pronouns Cross-linguistically

Kutchi Gujarati (native speaker intuitions)
(Sa) batha pathi pro bak bharavyu every husband hugged his wife
(Urd) har sakshe ne pro chusmaa every husband-erg kissed his wife

Uniqueness

The Indo-Aryan examples show that ‘husband’ makes salient a relation to interpret a null E-type pronoun pro. In contrast, ‘brother’ does not seem to achieve this. Possible solution: Uniqueness

¢ husband-of is (usually) a one-to-one relation: Every husband has exactly one (i.e. a unique) wife.
¢ brother-of can be a one-to-many relation: A brother can have many siblings.

The experiment: Investigate whether this observation carries over to English

EXPERIMENT

Design & Materials

• Off-line rating study 1-7 naturalness scale
• Design - 2 x 2 (Overt referent / No overt referent and Unique / Nonunique)
• 32 participants for the rating study
• 24 items (12 items contained N-less constructions, e.g. who was carless;
12 items contained N-owner constructions, e.g. who was a credit-card-owner)
• 72 fillers
• Statistical analysis used: Logistic regression with random intercepts for participants and items

Hypotheses

Prediction: Main effect of overt referent only.
(ii) The Pragmatic Hypothesis: E-type pronouns are licensed if and only if certain pragmatic conditions are met (e.g. uniqueness, as in husband vs. brother).
Prediction: Main effect of uniqueness only.
(iii) The Compromise Hypothesis: E-type pronouns are licensed by an overt NP antecedent; if there is none, pragmatic conditions (e.g. uniqueness) can license them.
Prediction: An interaction between overt referent and uniqueness condition.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall Results
Two main effects:
• Uniqueness (p < 0.05)
• Overt referent (p < 0.001)
• A non-significant trend for an interaction.

Uniqueness (p < 0.05)
Results

N-less items only

N-owner items only

Two main effects:
• Uniqueness (p < 0.05)
• Overt referent (p < 0.001)

Summary & Conclusions

The results of this study support the Compromise Hypothesis (although we cannot definitely decide between Version 2 and Version 3). We find a main effect of the presence of an overt antecedent (confirming the existence of a formal link, as proposed e.g. by Heim 1990 and Chierchia 1992); however, there is also a main effect of uniqueness, which plays a role especially in the absence of an overt antecedent.

FUTURE WORK

• Set up an analogous experiment, investigating differences between pre-nominal vs. post-nominal modification (e.g. A fatherless child vs. A child who was fatherless).
• Investigate cases where the referent is not a part of the word (e.g. Every woman who was a widow had lost him in the war).
• Investigate the factor of lexial integrity: particularly differences in data patterns between the N-less items and the N-owner items. Given the discussion on lexical integrity in the literature, we might expect the N-owner items to act more like the “overt NP referent” cases when compared to the N-less items.
• Carry out cross-linguistic testing on Kutchi Gujarati and Urdu. These languages will require a slightly different design, as they are pro-drop languages; e.g. an additional condition, null vs. overt pronoun will be required.

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