

1. Introduction

Biclausal sentences can be ambiguous with respect to pronoun interpretation.

Null subject languages:

- Null pronouns preferred when the antecedent is the subject of a higher clause;
- Overt pronouns preferred when the antecedent is not the subject:

(1) Lorenzo_i ha scritto a Roberto_j quando Ø_i/lui_j si è trasferito a Torino.
'Lorenzo wrote to Roberto when (he) moved to Turin.'

Previous accounts: syntax-discourse interface

Topic shift (e.g. Belletti, Bennati & Sorace 2007; Tsimpli et al. 2004):

- Null subjects strongly preferred when referring to a topic which is the subject of another clause; overt subjects imply a change of topic and prefer non-subject antecedents.

Position of Antecedent Strategy (PAS) (Carminati 2002; Sorace & Filiaci 2006):

- Null pronouns prefer antecedents in Spec IP; overt pronouns prefer their antecedents to be elsewhere.

Previous Findings on L2

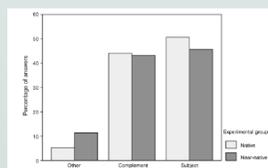


Figure 1: Forwards anaphora with null pronouns (Sorace & Filiaci 2006)

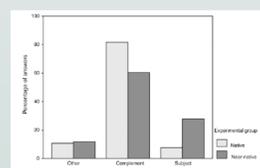


Figure 2: Forwards anaphora with overt pronouns (Sorace & Filiaci 2006)

Discrepant results:

Null pronouns (Figure 1):

- Both native speakers and L2ers allow a null pronoun to take a non-subject antecedent about 50% of the time.

Overt pronouns (Figure 2):

- L2 speakers of Italian occasionally permit overt pronouns to take subject antecedents, in contrast to native speakers.
- Explanation provided: L2ers do not fully master the discourse requirements on overt pronouns.

2. Our Paper

- Focus: Puzzling results observed for both native speakers and L2ers.
- **Proposal:** Prosodic effects on pronoun interpretation, which lead to interpretations other than those expected if only syntax-discourse interface is involved.
- Problem with earlier tasks: Impossible to determine what prosody has been assumed by participants because previous studies used Picture Verification Tasks, with orthographically-presented sentences they read to themselves.

3. Hypotheses

The source of the discrepant results relates to prosody, specifically effects of a PAUSE between the clauses containing the pronoun and its antecedent and effects of STRESS on overt pronouns.

Hypothesis 1 – Effects of Pause:

- A pause between clauses containing the pronoun and its antecedent will permit an analysis whereby the subordinate clause has been extraposed, making Spec IP no longer 'close' enough.

Hypothesis 2 – Effects of Contrastive Stress:

- Overt pronouns can be unstressed or can bear contrastive stress.
- When a pronoun is unstressed, the preference is for an object antecedent.
- When the pronoun bears contrastive stress, this signals a contrast with the object, thus favouring an antecedent other than the object (either the subject or an external referent).

4. Methods

Participants:

- 10 Italian native speakers
- 8 high intermediate to high advanced learners (L1 Dutch or English)

Items:

- Total: 80 (70 biclausal sentences + 10 fillers)
- Focus: 30 main-subordinate forwards anaphora sentences

Factors Manipulated:

- (1) *pronoun* (null/overt)
- (2) *pause* (pause/no pause)
- (3) *stress* (contrastive/unstressed)

Task:

- Auditorily-presented stimuli
- Target sentence (spoken by female Italian speaker) followed by comment (spoken by male Italian speaker)
- Participants indicated whether or not they agreed with the comment (scale from 1-6 + don't know option; 1 = completely agree; 6 = completely disagree)
- Three types of comments: **Subject**; **Object**; **External**

Sample Stimuli:

Target sentence:

Lorenzo ha scritto a Roberto quando Ø/lui si è trasferito a Torino.
'Lorenzo wrote to Roberto when (he) moved to Turin.'

Comment – Subject:

È Lorenzo che si è trasferito a Torino.
'It is Lorenzo who moved to Turin.'

Comment – Object:

È Roberto che si è trasferito a Torino.
'It is Roberto who moved to Turin.'

Comment – External:

È una persona diversa da Lorenzo e Roberto che si è trasferito a Torino.
'It is a person other than Lorenzo or Roberto who moved to Turin.'

5. Predictions

Null Pronoun Conditions:

- When no pause interrupts the clauses, the preferred antecedent will be the **SUBJECT**, as expected under previous approaches.
- When a pause interrupts the clauses, there will be an increase in choices of **OBJECT** or **EXTERNAL** referents (consistent with Hypothesis 1).

Overt Pronoun Conditions:

Pronoun as Unstressed:

- Whether or not a pause interrupts the clauses, the preferred antecedent for an unstressed pronoun will be the **OBJECT**, as expected under previous approaches.

Pronoun as Contrastively Stressed:

- Contrastive stress signals a contrast with the normally preferred antecedent object. There will be an increase in choice of **SUBJECT** or **EXTERNAL** referents (consistent with Hypothesis 2).
- When a pause interrupts the clauses, there will be an increase in choice of **EXTERNAL** referents as antecedent. Contrastive stress signals a contrast with the object (consistent with Hypothesis 2) and the subject is 'too far away' (consistent with Hypothesis 1).

Pronoun Condition	No Pause	Pause
Null	SUBJECT	increase in OBJECT or EXTERNAL
Overt Unstressed	OBJECT	OBJECT
Overt Contrastive	increase in SUBJECT or EXTERNAL	increase in EXTERNAL

6. Results

Figure 3: **Subject/Object/External** responses by pronoun.

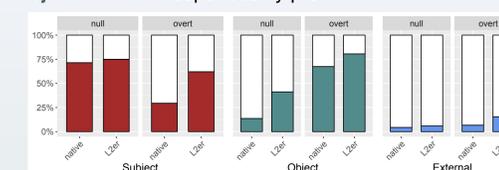
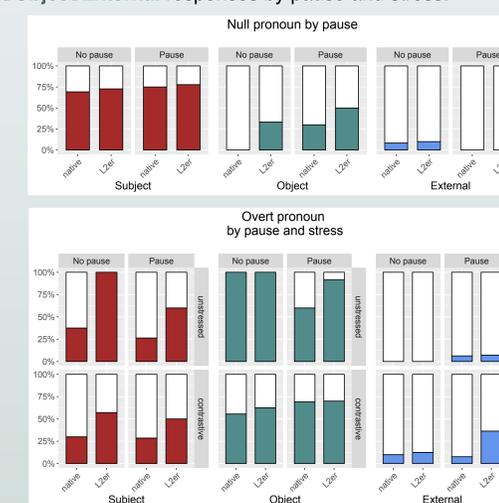


Figure 4: **Subject/Object/External** responses by pause and stress.



The coloured portions in the bars indicate the rate of agreement with each comment. The white portions indicate the rate of disagreement with each comment.

7. Conclusion

- Overall results are consistent with earlier studies investigating the Syntax-Discourse Interface, showing strong preferences for subjects as antecedents for null pronouns (more definitively than earlier studies) and objects for overt.
- The following results support our hypotheses that prosody can lead to responses that depart from these preferences:
 - Both groups show increased agreement with object comments for null pronouns when the clauses are separated by a pause, possibly accounting for the object results in Fig. 1 (Hypothesis 1).
 - L2ers show reduced agreement with subject responses to unstressed overt pronouns when there is a pause, possibly explaining the overuse of overt pronouns with subjects in Fig. 2 (Hypothesis 1).
 - Contrastive stress on the overt pronoun reduces L2ers' acceptance of object responses and increases their acceptance of external referents (Hypothesis 2).
- In conclusion, prosodic factors affect the ways in which pronouns are interpreted with respect to participants in the discourse.

References

- Belletti, A., E. Bennati & A. Sorace. 2007. Theoretical and developmental issues in the syntax of subjects: Evidence from near-native Italian. *NLLT* 25: 657-689.
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Acknowledgements and Contact

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