When can Resumptive Pronouns rescue islands?

This is an island that, although an RP seems to salvage [a/it], is violated.

Literature is split on the resourcing potential of Resumptive Pronouns (RPs):
- RPs are attested in English corpora (e.g., Prince 1990) and produced in the lab (Ferreira & Swets 2005) …
- … But are not rated higher than gaps in acceptability rating tasks (e.g., Omaki & Nakao 2004, Alexopoulos & Keller 2007, Heestrand et al. 2011, etc.)
- English RPs are intrusive (Seis 1984) and ungrammatical (Asudeh 2004) …
- … But are useful for processing complex structures, like islands and long-distance dependencies (e.g., Erteschik-Shir 1992, Alexopoulos & Keller 2007)

Much psycholinguistics literature suggest RPs should be less degraded than gaps, but fail to support the suggestion experimentally (e.g., Alexopoulos & Keller 2007, Heestrand et al. 2011, Han et al. 2012, Polinsky et al. 2013)

So if this difference has not been robustly observed in comprehension experiments, when can people use and make use of RPs?

We suggest the division in the literature is due to methodological differences, and find that a different paradigm demonstrates resourcing potential of RPs.

Predictions for the Island Condition

1a) If Gap is an appropriate baseline for direct comparison to RP
   - RP = Gap
   - No distinction is detectable
   - For instance, Heestand et al. 2011

1b) If Gap is not an appropriate baseline for direct comparison to RP
   - RP >= Gap
   - Experiment 1: RP >> Gap
   - Experiment 2: RP = Gap
   - For instance, Polinsky et al. 2013

2a) If RPs are only possible in production (for speaker, not listener)
   - Experiment 1: RP >> Gap
   - Experiment 2: RP >> Gap
   - Ferreira & Swets 2005

2b) If RPs are crucial in production and comprehension
   - Experiment 1: RP >> Gap
   - Experiment 2: RP >> Gap
   - Beltrami & Xiang 2013

Results

| RP preferred in Island Condition as compared to Non-Island Condition |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| RC: p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 |
| Adj: p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 |
| Wh: p < 0.001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 | p < 0.0001 |

Background

Literature that supports resourcing potential evaluates differences between gap and RP with direct comparison (McDaniel & Cowart 1999) or production (corpus: Prince 1990; experiment: Ferreira & Swets 2005)

Literature that does not support resourcing potential evaluates differences between gap and RP on a scale that includes grammatical sentences:
- Magnitude estimation (Alexopoulos & Keller 2007, Han et al. 2012)

☆ Cf. comprehensibility scale, not acceptability (Beltrami & Xiang CUNY 2013)

Questions:
1) Could studies that fail to show amelioration with RPs be using the wrong type of baseline?
   - If comparison set includes fully grammatical option, the RP and gap options may not be distinguishable
2) What kind of baseline is appropriate?
   - Studies that show amelioration may explicitly limit evaluations to RP versus gap situations
3) Is the production-comprehension distinction relevant, or an artifact of the methodologies?
   - Could production of RPs in islands have an implicit comparison set that only includes gap and RP options (not options without island violations)?

Methodology

Forced choice paradigm is similar to both comprehensibility and production:
- Sentence completion = production with a limited set of options
- Full sentence completion = comprehension on a binary acceptability scale
Stimuli: Relative Clause Islands (RC), Adjunct Islands (Adj), Wh-islands (Wh)
Participants:
- Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)
- 40 self-reported native English speakers from USA for each experiment (Total N = 240)

Forced-Choice Sentence Completion Tasks (SC):
- Island Condition (is): Which man did Jane say that the parent who __ forgave the babysitter’s mistake?
  - RC: scolded him
  - Adj: scolded him
  - Wh: scolded him

Non-island Condition (ni):
- Island Condition (is): Which man did Jane say that the parent who scolded the caregiver for __ forgave him?
  - RC: Which man did Jane say that the parent who scolded the caregiver forgave [a/it] him?
  - Adj: Which man did Jane say that, after the parent scolded [a/it] him, the caregiver forgave the babysitter’s mistake?
  - Wh: Which man did Jane question when the parent scolded [a/it] him?

Discussion

- Results are compatible with production and direct-comparison studies
- Forced-choice paradigm explicitly compares two structures known to be unacceptable in acceptability rating tasks
- Results are robust: RPs are preferred to gaps in islands
- Amelioration effect may only be detectable with comparison sets that do not include fully grammatical alternatives
- In conjunction with B&X13 and F&S05, this suggests speakers may use RPs to rescue islands in terms of comprehensibility, not acceptability
- Compatible with previous literature that doesn’t detect a difference between RP and gap

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References:

Additional References:
- In Japanese, the debate is ongoing. A recent review article by Masaya Yoshida (2013) highlights key arguments for and against resumption.

- For a broader perspective, see the comprehensive study by Alexopoulos & Keller (2007) on the role of resumption in English and its implications for sentence processing.