1. Introduction

- Salience-hierarchical approaches (Givón, 1983; Ariel, 1990; see also Gundel et al., 1993): Highly salient antecedents are referred to with more reduced forms. Null pronouns > overt pronouns > NPs...

- Null vs. overt pronouns:
  - Pro-drop languages: Null pronouns refer to subjects which are syntactically prominent. Overt pronouns refer to non-subjects (Italian: Carminati, 2002; Spanish: Alonso-Ovalle et al., 2002).
  - Topic-drop languages: Null and overt pronouns both exhibit a subject preference (Japanese: Ueno & Kehler, 2016; Chinese: Simpson et al., 2015).
- Structural parallelism (English: Chambers & Smyth, 1998): Subject-position pronouns tend to refer to preceding subjects, object-position pronouns tend to refer to preceding objects.
- Consequences of null vs. overt pronoun distinction for parallelism are not yet fully investigated.

2. Research Questions

(i) In Vietnamese, what are the referential properties of null pronouns, overt pronouns and NPs when these forms occur in different grammatical positions?
(ii) Do null and overt pronouns in Vietnamese differ in their referential biases?

3. Discourse Coherence

- Centering Theory (e.g. Grosz et al., 1983, 1995) looks at discourse coherence using three main transitions among utterances, while taking into account (i) the form of the referring expression, and (ii) the grammatical role of both the referring expression and its antecedent (Gordon et al., 1993).
- Building on insights from Centering, we investigated these four transition types (These are not identical to ‘official’ Centering Theory transitions, as the backward-looking center of the preceding utterance is not considered):
  - Subject parallelism: Subj of current utterance refers to Subj of preceding utterance (Subject$_{preceding}$-Subject$_{current}$)
  - Subject demoted to Object: Current Obj refers to preceding Subj (Subject$_{preceding}$-Object$_{current}$)
  - Object promoted to Subject: Current Subj refers to preceding Obj (Object$_{preceding}$-Subject$_{current}$)
  - Object parallelism: Current Obj refers to preceding Obj (Object$_{preceding}$-Object$_{current}$)
- Null pronouns are used in subject position when referring back to previous (topical) subject
- Other forms (overt pronouns/Italian, NPs/Japanese) are used – roughly speaking – when ‘demoting’ a preceding subject/topic or ‘promoting’ a preceding non-topical object to a subject position.

4. Results

Overall, the distribution of forms in Subject$_{preceding}$-Subject$_{current}$ configuration (Subject parallelism) differs from the other configurations (p’s < 0.02).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical roles</th>
<th>% Nulls</th>
<th>% Overt</th>
<th>% NPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Subject$<em>{preceding}$-Subject$</em>{current}$</td>
<td>Subject parallelism</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Subject$<em>{preceding}$-Object$</em>{current}$</td>
<td>Subject demoted to object</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Object$<em>{preceding}$-Subject$</em>{current}$</td>
<td>Object promoted to subject</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Object$<em>{preceding}$-Object$</em>{current}$</td>
<td>Object parallelism</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subject parallelism: Overall preference for pronouns (p<.01), no difference between null vs. overt pronouns (p=.09).

Subject demotion & Object promotion: Mostly NPs, but also some overt pronouns. No null pronouns.

Object parallelism: Mostly NPs, but also some null pronouns. Differs from subject parallelism (p<.005).

5. Conclusions

- Parallel configurations:
  - When subject role is maintained: Pronouns (null+overt combined) are the most frequent forms.
  - When object role is maintained: NPs are the most frequent, but also >25% null pronouns.
- Non-parallel configurations: NPs are by far the most frequent form. No null pronouns at all.

Parallelism effect: Null pronoun use facilitated by grammatical-role parallelism

- Grammatical role/subjecthood effect: Subject parallelism triggers more null pronouns than object parallelism (p < 0.005).
- But division of labor between null and overt pronouns is less clear than standardly assumed (see also Kaiser & Trueswell, 2008; Fedele & Kaiser, 2015; Filicci et al., 2014). When pronouns are produced:
  - Subj parallelism: Null pronouns ~ Overt pronouns
  - Obj parallelism: numerically more null than overt
  - Shifting grammatical roles: no null pronouns, only overt, regardless of configuration subtype

Speakers’ choices between null/overt pronouns and NPs in Vietnamese depend on the referent’s grammatical role in the current and preceding utterance: Evidence of both subjecthood and parallelism effects. Importance of looking beyond subject pronouns when investigating referential forms.

SELECTED REFERENCES
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