Filling in the Gaps: Animacy and Resumption in San Martín Peras Mixtec (Tù’un Ntá’abi)

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Andrew A. Hedding & Ben Eischens
ahedding@ucsc.edu & beischen@ucsc.edu

University of California, Santa Cruz

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In many languages, resumptive pronouns (RPs) appear in positions where we sometimes find a gap

(1) a. *an fear a bhuail tú* __
   the man C struck you
   ‘the man that you struck’

b. *an fear ar bhuail tú* [é]
   the man C struck you him
   ‘the man that you struck (him)’ (Irish; McCloskey, 2017)
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But, RPs are relatively rare, even in languages where they are fully grammatical (McCloskey, 2017).
Animacy may play a role in whether a gap or RP is used.
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- **Irish**: Optional RPs tend to correspond to an animate argument (McCloskey, 2017).

- **Hebrew**:
  1. Though usually optional, RPs are obligatory for the object of an experiencer verb (e.g., *annoy*) (Landau, 2009; Sichel, 2014).
  2. Significantly more resumption of objects when they are animate in production experiments (Meltzer-Asscher, 2018; Fadlon et al., 2019).

- **Asante Twi**: Extraction of animate DPs triggers obligatory resumption (Korsah & Murphy, 2019).
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- It is an inherent property of animates that they are more likely to be resumed (Direct effect).
- Animacy interacts with other factors, leading to increased resumption of animates (Indirect effect).
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These possibilities cannot be completely disentangled in Irish and Hebrew because of the **Highest Subject Restriction:**

- RPs are banned from being the highest subject of a RC.

(2) *an fear a raibh (*sé) breoite*

the man C be-PAST he ill

‘The man that (*he) was ill’ (Irish; McCloskey, 1990:210)
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\[
\begin{align*}
\text{the man} & \quad \text{be-PAST} \quad \text{he} \quad \text{ill} \\
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\]

Higher rates of animate object RPs in Irish and Hebrew could be:

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Higher rates of animate object RPs in Irish and Hebrew could be:

- **Direct:** Resumption of animates due to inherent properties.
- **Indirect:** Resumption is more likely because they are animates in **object position**.
  - Animate objects with inanimate subjects are marked (Aissen, 1999; McCloskey, 2017).
In this presentation, we investigate the interaction between resumption and animacy in San Martín Peras Mixtec (SMPM).
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Unlike Irish and Hebrew, **SMPM allows RPs in both subject and object position.**

\[(3)\]  
\(a. \ \text{Shini} \quad \text{rà tsyàha kàni rà Pêbro} \)  
\(\text{saw.1SG he man hit he P.} \)  
"I saw the man that (he) hit Pedro."

\(b. \ \text{Shini} \quad \text{rà tsyàha kàni Pêbro rà} \)  
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- Allows us to test whether animacy has a direct or indirect effect on resumption.
Additionally, the rich noun class system of SMPM gives a clear morphological indication of animacy.

**Table 1:** Noun classes in SMPM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Animates</th>
<th>Inanimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>ñá</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>rà</td>
<td>Liquid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>ñí</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Today, we report on an informal survey of judgments conducted with 4 speakers of SMPM.

Generalizations:
1. Resumption is very common in SMPM.
2. Resumption is not significantly more common for animate heads than inanimate heads.
3. There are significantly higher rates of resumption when arguments are matched in animacy than when they are not matched in animacy.
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**Generalizations:**
1. Resumption is very common in SMPM.
2. Resumption is not significantly more common for animate heads than inanimate heads.
3. There are significantly higher rates of resumption when arguments are matched in animacy than when they are not matched in animacy.
Main takeaways:

▶ The animacy of arguments seems to play an indirect role in the choice between a RP and a gap in SMPM.
▶ There is not a greater preference for resumptives if the head is animate.
▶ Resumption does not seem to repair a marked alignment (pace McCloskey 2017).
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- Resumption does not seem to repair a marked alignment (*pace* McCloskey 2017).
Roadmap

Today’s talk:
- Background on SMPM
- Resumptive Survey
- (In)direct effect?
- Conclusions and Future Directions
Background: San Martín Peras Mixtec

Oto-Manguean language (ISO: JMX), spoken principally in the municipality of San Martín Peras in Oaxaca, Mexico.

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- Spoken by roughly 10,000 people.
- The data here comes from residents of Ahuejutla, a town roughly 10 miles from the city of San Martín Peras.
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SMPM is a VSO language with no φ-agreement morphology and no overt case-marking.

Relative clause (RC) heads occur pre-verbally, resulting in ambiguity:

(4) Shini rà tsyàha kàni ____ Pebro ____
saw.1SG he man hit P.
"I saw the man that hit Pedro" or
"I saw the man that Pedro hit."
However, **RCs with resumptive pronouns are not ambiguous.**

(5) a. Shini rà tsyàha kàni rà Pebro saw.1SG he man hit he P.  
"I saw the man that hit Pebro."

b. Shini rà tsyàha kàni Pebro rà saw.1SG he man hit P. he  
"I saw the man that Pebro hit."
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a.  

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b.  

\[ \text{Shini} \quad \text{rà tsyàha kàni Pebro rà} \]

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Early elicitation with one speaker in California suggested that animacy may play a role in the choice of whether a RP or gap is used.
Resumptive Survey

Informal forced-choice task asking which of a pair of sentences sounded more natural.
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▶ Four participants
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- **Four** participants

- Each saw a picture and listened to two descriptions of the event, differing only in presence or absence of a RP.
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- Each saw a picture and listened to two descriptions of the event, differing only in presence or absence of a RP.

- Recordings of a native speaker of SMPM from the town of Ahuejutla who lives in Watsonville, California.
(6) Shìnì láńchi ntsísó (rí) rà lo’o
saw.I sheep carry it.AML he small
‘I saw the sheep that (it) is carrying the boy.’

(7) Shìnì rà lo’o ntsísó láńchi (rà)
saw.I he small carry sheep he
‘I saw the boy that the sheep is carrying (him).’
(8) Shìnì rà lo’o ntsíso (rà) lánchi
saw. I he small carry he sheep
‘I saw the boy that (he) is carrying the sheep.’

(9) Shìnì lánchi ntsíso rà lo’o (rí)
saw. I sheep carry he small it.AML
‘I saw the sheep that the boy is carrying (it).’
Resumptive Survey

- Participants judged 40 sentence pairs — 20 subject RCs and 20 object RCs.

The order of item and recording presentation was pseudo-randomized. There were no filler items, and every participant was aware of the difference between items. For three out of four participants, the task was interspersed with other elicitation activities.
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- For three out of four participants, the task was interspersed with other elicitation activities.
Generalization one: RPs were highly preferred over gaps across all noun classes tested (Human, Animal, Neutral).

**Table 2: Proportion of RPs by animacy**

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<tr>
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<th>Human (n=64)</th>
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<th>Inanimate (n=32)</th>
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<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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The high preference for RPs may be a task effect.

- There were no fillers, and every participant was aware of the difference between items by the end of the task.
- Some participants noted that RPs made the sentences ‘clearer’ (i.e., unambiguous).
- Predicates were reversible, and each version of each predicate was shown.
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- There were no fillers, and every participant was aware of the difference between items by the end of the task.
- Some participants noted that RPs made the sentences ‘clearer’ (i.e., unambiguous).
- Predicates were reversible, and each version of each predicate was shown.

However, RPs **are** found in spontaneous speech.

- A precursory overview of a spontaneous narrative shows four restrictive RCs, two of which contain an RP.
Generalization two: The difference between Animate (Human and Animal) and Inanimate noun classes is relatively small and statistically insignificant.

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Resumptive Survey: Results and Discussion

- This result might be affected by the smaller number of inanimate RC heads.

- If it is replicable, it provides evidence against the hypothesis that animacy directly triggers resumption.
  - If this were the case, we would expect animates to be resumed much more than inanimates.
Resumptive Survey: Results and Discussion

Generalization three: When the arguments within the RC matched in animacy, resumption was highly preferred. When they did not match in animacy, this preference was lessened.

- A chi-squared test found this result significant (p < 0.01)

**Table 3:** Proportion of RPs by matched and unmatched animacy

<table>
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<th>Mismatch (n=48)</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>31%</td>
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- Rates of resumption are just as high for RCs with two inanimate arguments.
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  - It is not whether an argument is animate or inanimate, but rather whether it has the **same animacy as another argument**.
  - Rates of resumption are just as high for RCs with two **inanimate** arguments.

- It appears that animacy does not **directly** affect rates of resumption, but rather it does so **indirectly** by interacting with some other factor.
Another possible indirect effect: McCloskey (2017) suggests that in Irish, resumption may be a strategy to avoid marked alignment (inanimate subject > animate object).

- Several studies (Prat-Sala and Branigan, 2000; Gennari et al., 2012) show that speakers use language specific mechanisms (e.g., passivization, topic fronting) to avoid it.
(In)direct Effect?

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There is no evidence from this survey to support resumption as a strategy to repair for marked alignment.
(In)direct Effect?

- We found many examples of subject resumption in cases with unmarked alignment:
  - 75% of the time in Human > Neutral clauses.
  - 87.5% of the time in Animal > Neutral clauses.

Instead of being affected by relative position in a clause, likelihood of resumption is affected by the RC head’s similarity to its co-argument.
Conclusions and Future Directions

What we hope you take away from today’s talk:

▶ Evidence from several unrelated languages suggests that argument animacy may influence whether resumption is used.
▶ Animacy does not directly trigger resumption in San Martín Peras Mixtec.
▶ Animates and inanimates are not resumed at significantly different rates.
▶ Animacy does have an indirect effect on resumption.
▶ Resumption rates are significantly higher when both arguments match in animacy.
▶ No evidence that resumption is used to repair marked alignment.
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Conclusions and Future Directions

Two possible explanations for matched animacy effect:

1. Ambiguity Avoidance
   
   Though all our test sentences were ambiguous, it is possible that in cases of unmatched animacy one argument alignment is more plausible, so resumption is less "necessary."
   
   It is more plausible that the man cut the paper than that the paper cut the man.

   Rejected by McCloskey (2017) as primary motivation for resumption in Irish

   Resumption often used in unambiguous sentences.
Conclusions and Future Directions

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Conclusions and Future Directions

Two possible explanations for matched animacy effect:

2. Similarity-based competition effect (cf. Gennari et al., 2012)
   - Activation of an argument that is ‘too similar’ to another in the clause causes processing difficulty.
   - Speakers use language-specific mechanisms to ameliorate processing difficulty (Prat-Sala and Branigan, 2000; Gennari et al., 2012; Fadlon et al., 2019), in this case RPs.
Conclusions and Future Directions

We plan to investigate these possibilities in future work.
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Next step: Carefully controlled experiment with a sufficiently large number of speakers in Ahuejutla.

If replicable, the results discussed here might provide insight into the nature the relationship between animacy and resumption.
Thanks! / Tashà’à bìndò!

We are very grateful to Agustina Caballero, Margarita Cruz Salazar, Eraclio Gracida Cruz, Juan Gracida Ortiz, Irma López Basurto, one anonymous consultant, and most especially Natalia Gracida Cruz for teaching us about their language.

Thanks as well to Maziar Toosarvandani, Matt Wagers and the Workshop on the Languages of Mesoamerica at UCSC for helpful suggestions.

This research was partially supported by a Jacob’s Foundation Research Fellowship Grant
Selected References


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## Complete Results

### Table 4: Summary of data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>OBJECT</th>
<th>Human</th>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subj RP</td>
<td>Obj RP</td>
<td>Subj RP</td>
<td>Obj RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>14/16 (87.5%)</td>
<td>13/16 (81.25%)</td>
<td>7/8 (87.5%)</td>
<td>7/8 (87.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>8/8 (100%)</td>
<td>8/8 (100%)</td>
<td>14/16 (87.5%)</td>
<td>16/16 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3/8 (37.5%)</td>
<td>8/8 (100%)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whence Resumption?

Resumption is obligatory to ameliorate WCO.

(10) a. \( Rà yó’o mí \quad rà \ lo’o \ quad \ kônî \ nána \quad rà \ *(rà) \)
he here SPEC he small love mother his he
‘This is the boy that his mother loves *(him).’

b. \( Rí \quad yó’o \ mì \quad tsìnà \ shìnì \ mì \quad rà \ shí’i \quad sànà \)
it.AML here SPEC dog saw SPEC he owner POSS.AML
\( rí \quad *(rì) \)
it.AML it.AML
‘This is the dog that its owner saw *(it).’
Resumption is obligatory when extracting out of islands.

(11)  a.  Rí  yó’o mí  chútu kusihi ini  Pedro  ⟨chi
it.AML here SPEC cat  happy inside P.  because
shìshi *(rí)⟩
ate  it.AML

‘This is the cat that Pedro is happy because it ate.’

b.  Rí  yó’o mí  tsìnà shˇini  ⟨yó  kàni *(rí)⟩
it.AML here SPEC dog  NEG.know who hit  it.AML

‘This is the dog that I don’t know who hit it.’
Initial Experiment Thoughts

- Collaborate with psycholinguist(s) in the department.
- Production experiment based loosely off Gennari et al. (2012).

Figure 1: Model photo from Gennari et al. (2012)
### Initial Experiment Thoughts

**Table 5: Experimental conditions**

#### Subject RC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Animate co-argument</th>
<th>Inanimate co-argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animate head</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>AI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inanimate head</td>
<td>IA</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Object RC

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