

Interpretation of Hebrew Pronouns: Are Resumptives Preferred over Full Pronouns?

Lion Oks (lion.oks@etu.u-paris.fr)¹, Caterina Donati (caterina.donati@u-paris.fr)¹,

Francesca Foppolo (francesca.foppolo@unimib.it)²

¹Université Paris Cité, LLF/CNRS, ²Univeristy of Milano-Bicocca

A key question in sentence processing is how the parser resolves interpretive ambiguity when several readings are structurally available. Previous self-paced reading work on Hebrew [1] found that readers prefer to interpret a pronoun as a resumptive pronoun (RP) rather than a full pronoun in structures that are temporarily ambiguous between a relative clause (RC), in which the pronoun is an RP, or a complement clause (CC) with a full pronoun. However, those studies confounded structural ambiguity (RC/CC) with interpretive ambiguity (RP/full pronoun). Under Reinhart's interface hypothesis [2], grammatical dependencies should take precedence over discourse dependencies in anaphora resolution, predicting a general bias to interpret pronouns as RP whenever possible. The present study tests this prediction while isolating interpretive ambiguity from structural ambiguity. **Methods.** Thirty Hebrew speakers evaluated 36 sentences like (1)-(2), containing an RC embedded in the same matrix frame (plus fillers). Hebrew pro-drop licenses a null subject, yielding an ambiguity between a Subject-RC, with a full pronoun (+PRO) and an Object-RC with an RP (-PRO). Two conditions were compared. In the +PRO condition, verbs selecting an oblique complement (e.g. "talked about") created an SRC vs. ORC+RP ambiguity. In the -PRO condition, optionally transitive verbs (e.g. "left") created an SRC vs. ORC ambiguity without a pronoun. By using two-alternative forced-choice task, participants answered a question on a continuous slider anchored by the two possible referents (NP1 or NP2, position counterbalanced). If a general RP bias exists, +PRO condition should show a reduced or reversed SRC preference relative to -PRO. **Results.** Participants showed high accuracy in fillers ($M=98.51$) and an SRC preference in both experimental conditions (-PRO: $M=59.67$ ($SD=36.6$); +PRO: $M=68.50$ ($SD=29.7$), which was only tendentially higher in the -PRO condition (*lmer*: $\beta = -8.83$, $SE = 4.66$, $p = .065$). Following [3] we looked at the distribution of participants' responses (Fig. 1-2): +PRO elicited more intermediate ("ambiguous") responses and fewer ORC responses than -PRO, suggesting that the availability of a resumptive interpretation did not increase ORC preferences. **Conclusions** These findings provide no evidence for a general bias to interpret pronouns as resumptives in Hebrew relative clauses. The well-documented SRC preference [4] remains robust even when an ORC+RP interpretation is structurally available and pragmatically plausible. The results suggest that previously reported processing advantages for RP are structurally constrained and do not override the general preference for SRC interpretations in SRC/ORC ambiguities. A follow-up acceptability judgement task with contextual manipulation is currently ongoing.

References

- [1] Oks, L. (2025). *Avoiding gaps or nodes: The case of resumptive pronouns in Hebrew* (Master's thesis, Université Paris Cité).
- [2] Reinhart, T. (1983). Coreference and bound anaphora: A restatement of the anaphora questions. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 6(1), 47–88.
- [3] de Rocafiguera, N., & Bel, A. (2025). The interplay between syntax and pragmatics on pronoun resolution in Catalan. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics*, 10(1), 1–37.
- [4] Friedmann, N., Belletti, A., & Rizzi, L. (2009). Relativized relatives: Types of intervention in the acquisition of A-bar dependencies. *Lingua*, 119(1), 67–88.

Figures and Tables

Table 1: Mean results

Condition	+PRO	-PRO	Fillers
Mean value	68.50	59.67	98.51

We set the results so that the closer to 100, the higher preference for SRC reading. For the fillers, it is the correct answer → very high accuracy. A linear mixed-effects model was fitted with response value as the dependent variable, condition as a fixed effect, and by-participant and by-item random intercepts and slopes for condition.

Figure 1: Binary split results

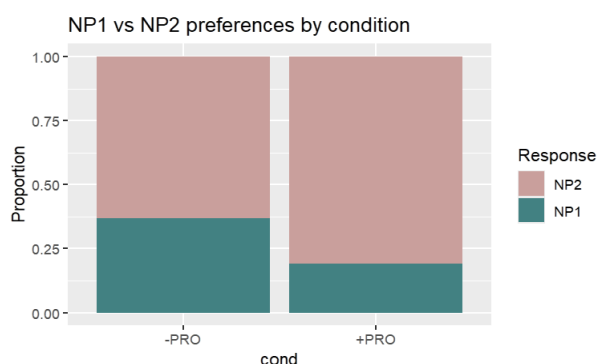


Figure 2: Trinary split results



Responses were coded and collected on a 0–100 scale, where higher values reflected stronger preference for SRC/NP2 interpretations and lower values reflected stronger preference for ORC/NP1 interpretations.

For the binary analysis, following [3], responses below 45 were classified as NP1 and responses above 55 as NP2, excluding intermediate responses.

For the trinary analysis, responses below 33 were coded as NP1, responses between 33 and 66 as ambiguous, and responses above 66 as NP2.

Optional Supplemental Information

+PRO condition:

(1)	etmol yesterday	pagašti met.I	et ACC	Maya Maya	ve-az and- then	gam also	Pagašti met.I	et ACC	ha-yalda the-girl
	še- that-	sipra talked	al-ea about-her						

'Yesterday I met Maya and I also met the girl that talked me about her' SRC (- RP)

A. The girl told me about Maya.

'Yesterday I met Maya and I also met the girl that she talked me about.' ORC (+ RP)

B. Maya told me about the girl.

Question: "Mi sipra?" 'who talked?'

Options: maya (reading B) ---- the girl (reading A)

-PRO condition:

(2)	etmol yesterday	pagašti met.I	et ACC	Maya Maya	ve-az and-then	gam also	pagašti met.I	Et ACC	ha-yalda the-girl	še-azva that-left
-----	--------------------	------------------	-----------	--------------	-------------------	-------------	------------------	-----------	----------------------	----------------------

'Yesterday I met Maya and I also met the girl who left.' SRC

A. The girl left.

'Yesterday I met Maya and I also met the girl she left.' ORC

B. Maya left the girl.

Question: "Mi Azva?" 'who left?'

Options: maya (reading B) ---- the girl (reading A)