

Prosodic features in anaphora resolution: a comparative study on Italian and Swedish

Chiara Gargiulo, Mechtild Tronnier, & Petra Bernardini¹

Abstract

In the present study, we explore how prosody affects the resolution of an overt pronoun in a sentence like (2), to either the subject or object referent of a preceding sentence (e.g., (1)), in Italian (a null subject language) and Swedish (a non-null subject language). We tested 28 native Italian speakers and 28 native Swedish speakers in a production task and in a control interpretation task. Italian overt pronouns are usually assigned to objects and null pronouns to subjects (“PAS” - Carminati, 2002), while Swedish overt pronouns leave a measure of ambiguity in antecedent assignment. Consequently, we expect that the Italian speakers would use prosody in a different way from the Swedish speakers, to resolve an anaphor.

- (1) Riccardo/ Diego lavorava in una clinica privata.
'Riccardo/ Diego worked in a private clinic.'
- (2) «Riccardo ha conosciuto Diego quando lui lavorava in una clinica privata.»
'Riccardo met Diego when he was working in a private clinic.'

The results show that the Italian speakers produced a longer inter-clausal pause and a more prominent pronoun (in terms of relative length, average F0 range and relative intensity) with subject instead of object antecedents. In contrast, the Swedish speakers produced a longer inter-clausal pause and a more prominent pronoun (in terms of relative length and average F0 range) with object instead of subject antecedents. Furthermore, in the interpretation task, the Italian speakers followed the PAS, but the Swedish speakers unexpectedly assigned overt pronouns to subjects. These findings suggest that Italian and Swedish speakers use prosodic cues in an opposite way and that this reflects opposite underlying patterns in pronoun resolution, between the two languages.

Keywords: Monolingual Speech, Anaphora, Null Subject Parameter

References

Carminati, M. N. (2002). *The processing of Italian subject pronouns*. PhD dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Oral presentation

¹ Chiara Gargiulo, first author, no speaker

PhD candidate, Department of Italian Studies, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University (Sweden); email: chiara.gargiulo@rom.lu.se

Dr. Mechtild Tronnier, second author, no speaker

Department of Phonetics, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University (Sweden); email: mechtild.tronnier@ling.lu.se

Dr. Petra Bernardini, third author, speaker

Department of Italian Studies, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University (Sweden); email: petra.bernardini@rom.lu.se