Accented Pronouns and Violated Expectations

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1 Introduction

Two Observations:

• Pronouns must have a contextually GIVEN antecedent to be felicitous:
  (1) *(John likes Mary.) He bought her a present.

• GIVEN items are often deaccented:
  (2) John wanted to buy some MILK, but the store was out of COW’s milk, so he bought some SOY milk.
  (3) # John wanted to buy some MILK but the store was out of cow’s MILK, so he bought some soy MILK.

Naive Prediction: Pronouns should not bear accent.

However: Since at least Akmajian and Jackendoff (1970) we’ve known both that pronouns do occasionally bear accent, and that this sometimes has an effect on coreference:

(4) John hit Bill, and then he hit Frank.
(5) John hit Bill, and then HE hit Frank

Previous accounts:
  - Accent on Pronouns = Complementary Referential Preferences based on grammatical role of the antecedent (Kameyama 1996)
  - Accent = Marks non-GIVEN-ness (Schwarzschild 1999)

However, neither GIVEN-ness nor grammatical role will work to explain the contrasts in (6-7):

(6) CONTEXT: John can be a bit of a jerk, and Bill sometimes takes things too personally.
   a. John insulted Bill and he felt sad.
   b. John insulted Bill and he felt guilty.

(7) a. John insulted Bill and HE felt sad.
   b. John insulted Bill and HE felt guilty.
Contrast with:

(8) John saw Bill across the street and he$_{J/B}$/#HE waved. (Beaver 2004)

The accentual possibilities in (6-8) are not captured either by the grammatical roles of the antecedents or by \textsc{Given}-ness. The crucial differences here seem to be based on our expectations: (7) contrast with our expectations of who should feel sad or guilty; on the other hand, we have no expectations about who will wave in (8).

This Talk:
- Suggest that the distribution of accented pronouns like those in (7) is predictable based on the presence of a Violated Expectation coherence relation
- Propose the beginnings of an account for this descriptive generalization based on the interpretation of \textsc{Focus}
- Discuss how this approach captures data that is problematic for other accounts

2 Violated Expectations and Accent

2.1 Violated Expectations

Relationship between two clauses:

(9) Infer $P$ from the assertion of $S_1$ and $Q$ from the assertion of $S_2$, where normally $P \rightarrow \neg Q$. (Hobbs 1979)

Textbook example:

(10) John is a Republican but he’s honest. (Lakoff 1971)

\textsc{Speaker Presupposes}: Republicans are dishonest.

2.2 Accent on Violated Expectations

Generalization: Accent falls on elements that violate expectations:

(11) a. John is a Republican but he’s HONEST.
    b. # John is a Republican but HE’s honest.

(12) John is a Republican but he PAYS his taxes.

(13) John is a Republican but his investments AREN’T primarily composed of off-shore accounts.

(14) John is a Republican, but he cares for people OTHER than himself.
3 Linking Violated Expectations to Focus

Accent in Violated Expectation = roughly the same meaning as “instead”:

(15) John went shopping. vs.
(16) JOHN went shopping (instead)

Above:
- Both sentences assert the same thing (the proposition expressed by (15)).
- (16) presupposes that someone else was expected to go.

(17) John went SHOPPING (instead)

- (17) presupposes that John was expected to do something else.
→ instead associates with Focus.

3.1 Expressing the presupposition and the assertion associated with “instead” (à la Rooth (1992))

Assumption: Violated Expectations require the presence of a covert instead operator, defined as follows:

If $\alpha$ = a sentence of the form [ ... XP $\_F$ ... ]:

(18) $[\alpha]^F$ = A set of propositions formed by replacing the Focus-marked element XP with its same-typed alternatives, the Focus Semantic Value of $\alpha$

(19) $[\alpha]^\circ$ = The Ordinary Semantic Value of $\alpha$ (ie, the proposition it would express without Focus)

(20) $[\text{instead } \alpha] = \exists p, p' \in [\alpha]^F$ such that expected($p$) $\land \neg$expected($p'$) $\land p' = [\alpha]^\circ$. $[\alpha]^\circ$

→ Analogous to the Exhaustivity operator, $O$, a covert counterpart of “only” that generates scalar implicatures (Chierchia et al. 2008).

For the sentence in (7a), repeated here as (21):

(21) John insulted Bill and HE$_{J/B}$ felt sad.
$[\text{JOHN}_F$ felt sad $]^F$ = John felt sad, Bill felt sad, Frank felt sad....
$[\text{JOHN}_F$ felt sad $]^\circ$ = John felt sad.

What we expect: Bill should feel sad.
What we don’t expect: John feeling sad.

Result: Accent on “he” referring to John.

On the other hand, for (8), repeated here as (22):

(22) John saw Bill across the street and he$_{J/B}/\text{HE}$ waved.

What we expect: ??
Result: No accent possible.
4 Predicted Distribution of Accented Pronouns due to Violated Expectations

Deriving accent based on Violated Expectations better accounts for data that was problematic for Pronoun-Specific theories of accented pronouns, which suggest that accented and unaccented pronouns simply have “complementary referential preferences,” and semantic theories that derive accent in general based on \textit{Given}-ness.

4.1 Problems for Pronoun-Specific Theories

4.1.1 Accent is not due to ambiguity

Unambiguous pronouns must occasionally bear accent, which is not predicted by theories that suggest that the function of pronominal accentuation is to disambiguate reference:

\textbf{CONTEXT}: John is a heavy-weight boxer and Mary is a 90-lb model.

(23) John pushed Bill and HE$_J$ fell.
(24) John pushed Mary and HE$_J$ fell. (Kehler 2005)

\textbf{Expectation}: The person who is pushed will fall.

4.1.2 Missing Generalization: Noun Phrases with the same referents get the same accent

(25) John pushed Mary and Mary fell.
(26) John pushed Mary and JOHN fell. (Kehler 2005)

4.1.3 Some accented pronouns are still ambiguous

Complementary Preferences suggest that the reason for accenting is to disambiguate vs. the unaccented pronoun. However, it is possible to construct ambiguous accented pronouns:

(27) John asked Bill to get a glass of water for Mary and ...
   a. she/#SHE drank it.
   b. HE$_J$/#B/he drank it.
(28) John asked Mary to get a glass of water for Bill and ...
   a. SHE/#she drank it.
   b. HE$_J$/#B/he$_B$/#J drank it.
(29) Mary asked John to get a glass of water for Bill and ...
   a. SHE/#she drank it.
   b. HE$_J$/#B/he$_B$/#J drank it.

\textbf{Expectation}: The recipient of the water will drink it, not the person issuing the request or the person fulfilling it.
4.1.4 Any other non-expected alternative may receive accent

Theories based on Complementary Preferences will fail to account for the placement of accent below:

CONTEXT: I’m explaining to you how my apartment is a rickety death-trap.

(30) I pushed my roommate and...
   a. # the clock fell.
   b. the CLOCK fell.

Expectation: My roommate will fall.

4.2 Problems for Semantic Theories of accent placement (as well)

4.2.1 Pronouns are only marked accentually when they are the CAUSE of the violated expectation (because some other alternative was expected)

Based either on GIVEN-ness or on Complementary Preferences, it is impossible to explain the contrast below – the subject John is GIVEN in either case:

(31) John went on a rampage with a super-soaker, but
    a. HE got wet.
        → Alternatives: {Someone else got wet, John got wet...}
    b. # he got WET.
        → Alternatives: {John got wet, John got hurt, John got rich ...}

Expectation: Someone else gets wet.
# Expectation: John has some property other than wetness.
        → Accent on “he” referring to John; no accent on “wet.”

Contrast this with:

(32) John was walking down the street and....
    a. # HE tripped.
        → Alternatives: {Someone else tripped, John tripped.....}
    b. he TRIPPED.
        → Alternatives: {John tripped, John kept on walking, John bought a sandwich...}

Expectation: John will keep on walking.
# Expectation: Someone else will trip.
        → Accent on “trip”; no accent on “he” referring to John.

4.2.2 Expectations are context-sensitive, and so is accent

John and Mary have the same GIVEN-ness and the same grammatical roles below:

CONTEXT: John and Mary are a heteronormative couple shopping for clothes.
(33) John and Mary picked out a dress together, and she/#SHE tried it on.
(34) John and Mary picked out a dress together, and HE/#he tried it on.

Expectation: Heteronormative women try on dresses.
→ No accent on “she”; accent on “he”

Changing the context changes the accent:
CONTEXT: We know that John is a drag performer, and Mary hates wearing feminine clothes.

(35) John and Mary picked out a dress together, and he/SHE tried it on.

Expectation: Drag performers need to try on dresses.
→ No accent on “he”; accent on “she”

5 Conclusions

• Some accented pronouns arise because they violate expectations
• Accent in these cases can be linked to Focus in that it expresses something similar to the Focus-sensitive operator “instead”
• This more successfully accounts for the distribution of accented pronouns and other nominal expressions:
  – Not all ambiguous pronouns are accentable
  – Not all accented pronouns would have been ambiguous
  – Moves towards a unifying analysis for this kind of accented noun, pronoun, as well as other parts of speech

Remaining issues:
What is the difference in distribution between overt and covert “instead”? What explains the contrast below in (36-37)?

(36) John pushed Bill and HE$_J$ fell.
(37) ?# John pushed Bill and HE$_J$ fell instead.

Put another way, why do Violated Expectation coherence relations need to be marked with accent, rather than an overt “instead”?

References


