

Variable nominative anaphora resolution in Cabo-Verdean Creole

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Cabo-Verdean Creole (CVC) has 3 primary nominative anaphora: a subject clitic (sc) (1), zero (\emptyset) (2), and a double-subject construction (tonic subject pronoun + sc) (x2SBJ) (3). This study examines the variable system underlying the probabilistic selection of these forms using a quantitative analysis.

The clausal position and formal status of scs has been contested both in CVC and cross-linguistically. In formal approaches, it has been argued that scs are pronouns in the canonical subject position that only cliticize at the phonological level (Kayne 1975; Déprez 1994; De Cat 2005; Costa & Pratas 2013), or alternatively that they are inflectional affixes within the VP layer (DeGraff 1993; Baptista 1995, 2002; Culbertson 2010). In functionalist/typology approaches scs are called ‘person markers’; they are assumed to engage in local ‘grammatical agreement’ or nonlocal ‘anaphoric agreement’ (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987; Siewierska 2004). CVC’s classification as a Null Subject Language (NSL) has also been disputed; Baptista (1995, 2002) argues for a +NSL language classification while Costa & Pratas (2013) argue that CVC has \emptyset subjects in certain embedded contexts, but never in root contexts. Part of this disagreement follows from each researcher’s classification of scs, but Baptista (2002) also finds several instances of anaphoric \emptyset (no pre-verbal subject element whatsoever), and I confirm their availability in my own corpus. The distribution and referential properties of x2SBJs have scarcely been explored from a quantitative perspective.

33 sociolinguistic interviews and picture description narratives were collected from the islands of Santiago and Maio and transcribed prosodically (Chafe 1993; Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2019) to evaluate several aspects of discourse organization. Data were submitted to descriptive and inferential inspection in four analyses using R: 1 was an exploratory test for delimiting the variable context, the 2nd involved a fixed-effects multinomial logistic regression, and the 3rd and 4th were based on mixed-effects binomial logistic regressions.

Results revealed highly significant effects for linguistic structural priming: x2SBJs and singleton tonic pronouns primed subsequent x2SBJs, while \emptyset subjects primed additional \emptyset subjects. Lexical DP antecedents that were semantically referentially deficient (i.e. they bore inanimate, indefinite, or nonspecific reference) also promoted anaphoric \emptyset . These results lend support to the claims for the semantic properties of strong pronominals under the Typology of Structural Deficiency (Cardinaletti & Starke 1999), and suggest that, as in Brazilian Portuguese, there is an “avoid referentially deficient pronoun” constraint (Duarte & Soares da Silva 2016) that is probabilistically active in CVC. The \emptyset -to- \emptyset priming effect and the favoring effect from referentially deficient lexical DPs were only active at short anaphoric distances and were promoted when adjacent intonational units were prosodically linked (Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2019). The priming effect for x2SBJs obtained at longer anaphoric distances; they are promoted when their antecedent is in a non-adjacent clause. x2SBJs have much the same functional and discursive values as singleton tonic pronouns cross-linguistically: they are switch-reference devices, establish contrastive focus, and reintroduce old discourse referents (Givón 2001). Use of \emptyset subjects is mostly contingent on antecedent accessibility (Givón 1976; 2017, Ariel 1990), but is also modulated by the “avoid referentially deficient pronoun” constraint.

Inferring from the results for \emptyset and x2SBJs, it appears that CVC scs are ‘ambiguous person agreement markers’ (Siewierska 2004): like independent pronouns, they engage in nonlocal anaphoric agreement, but like inflectional affixes, they also engage in local grammatical agreement. This in-between morphosyntactic status is related to the infinitival origin of CVC verbs (Quint 2008): the absence of bound person-number inflection is likely to have initiated grammaticalization on tonic pronouns, causing them to be eroded into scs, and eventually ambiguous person agreement markers which are probabilistically dropped according to the properties of their controllers and the dynamics of antecedent accessibility. In line with Wratil’s (2011) ‘Null

Subject Cycle', it could be argued that CVC scs have stagnated at an early stage of a grammaticalization cline which entails the transformation of independent pronouns into clitics and eventually into bound affixes.

- (1) **N=** ta kumi
1S.CL HAB eat
I eat.
- (2) **E=** kai dentu di lagoua... i ali dja \emptyset labanta
3S.CL fall into pond CONJ here PERF \emptyset rise
He falls into the pond... and here he rises.
- (3) **Ami N=** ten sinku fijdu
1S.STR 1S.CL have five child
I have five children.

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