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Why are pronouns bad pivots?

1. The problem
2. Pragmatic basis of the DE
   - Prince, Birner, Ward
   - McNally
   - Francez
3. Pronouns and existentials
4. Conclusions

They fall under the definiteness effect

(1) a. *There is him/he in the room. [Milsark(1974), ex.64]
   b. #There were them/those waiting outside.
      [McNally(1992), ex.6b]

(2) a. *There is him/he in the room. [Milsark(1974), ex.64]
   b. #There were them/those waiting outside.
      [McNally(1992), ex.6b]

(3) a. #There is Mary at the front door.
   b. #There is the solution.
They fall under the definiteness effect

(4)  
   a. A. My God! How many people know about this?  
      B. There's me and there's you. That's all.  
      [Rando & Napoli(1978), ex.37]
   b. OK, let's finish up this guest list. There's you and me. Who else is coming? [Abbott(1997), 6]

(5)  
   A. I don't have any friends.  
   B. Oh, don't be silly! There's John and me and Susan and Peggy...  
   [Rando & Napoli(1978), fn9]

"Complex problems have simple, easy to understand wrong answers."
H. L. Mencken

Why are pronouns worse pivots than definites in Catalan?

(6)  
   a. Hi havia el degà, a la reunió.  
      LOC had the dean at the meeting
   b. Hi ha la Maria/*ella rondinant.  
      LOC has the Mary/she grumbling
   c. *En aquella assemblea, hi havia ella, tu i jo.  
      at that meeting LOC had she you and I 'At that meeting it was she, you and I who where present.' [Ramos(1998), ex. 7b]

Which role do focus particles play?

(7)  
   Rafael Azcona representa la literatura cinematogràfica. A Itàlia els millors escriptors escriuen per al cinema, però en Espanya, gairebé només hi ha ell.  
   in Spain almost only LOC has he El Punt 23/12/11
The pivot must be hearer-new

Empirical problems:

(8) a. There is no assistant available. [McNally(1992), 35]
   b. There were both kinds of apples in the sauce.

(9) a. A: lama halaxt le-MIT im at lo ohevet
   why go[2.f.s.pst] to-MIT if you[f] not like[f.s.prs]
et xomsky? [Francez(2007), 111]
   ‘Why did you go to MIT if you don’t like Chomsky?’
      neg know[1.s] that-EX him there
      ‘I didn’t know he was there.’ (Lit: I didn’t know there is him there.)

Combining semantics and pragmatics

- semantics: \([be_{exist}]\) is a property of nominalized functions; therefore, its argument must be a nominalized function.
- pragmatics (felicity condition): The discourse referent corresponding to the instantiation of the nf-argument of the existential predicate must be novel.

(10) There was the top to a/#the box floating in the stream.
Combining semantics and pragmatics

[McNally(1992), 198]:

(11) a. There was only/even Kent available.
   b. Among those in the cage, there was only/even the brown dog barking.

(12) [[only]](α) [Rooth(1985), 120]:
   a. Assertion: ∀p[C(p) ∧ p → p = α]
   b. Conventional Implicature: α is true

(13) [[even]](α) [Rooth(1985), 120]:
   a. Assertion: α is true
   b. Conventional Implicature:
      $$\exists p[C(p) ∧ p ∧ [p \neq α] ∧ unlikely(p)]$$

Empirical problems:

(15) a. He was doing that at the expense of String Theory and Lego fun time. And there was even him tolerating harp music in the midst of it all.
   b. Hell, there was even him to consider!
“the DE arises as a consequence of the fact that pivots are predicates and as such required to be focal. Thus, while in principle no NPs are blocked from occurring as pivots, highly topical NPs such as definites, proper names and pronouns are generally blocked by truth-conditionally equivalent copular constructions in which they function as topics. Such NPs occur as pivots only when they must, i.e. in contexts where no such construction is available.”

Empirical problem:

[Who is there available?]

(18) a. #En Joan hi és./ Hi ha en Joan. the John LOC is LOC has the John
b. #Juan está./ *Hay Juan./ Está Juan. John is has John is John

[Who is there available?]

(19) a. #Ell hi és./ ??Hi ha ell. he LOC is LOC has he
b. #Él está./ *Hay él./ Está él. he is has he is he

They propose a unified solution for definites, proper names and pronouns.

They offer no clear answer to the relation between pronouns and focus particles in Catalan/Spanish.
contextualized existentials (list reading) [also definites]

(20) A. My God! How many people know about this?
B. There’s me and there’s you. That’s all.
[Rando & Napoli (1978), ex.37]

focus particles: only, even, also [also definites]

(21) a. Behind him, they finished by shooting the already-dead Stebbins, and now there was only him, alone on the road, walking toward where the Major’s jeep had stopped diagonally across the white line… (Stephen King, The long walk)

b. He was doing that at the expense of String Theory and Lego fun time. And there was even him tolerating harp music in the midst of it all.

c. Besides me being a coward there is also HIM stopping me.

contextualized existentials (list reading) [also definites]

(22) a. dones, entre les quals hi havia ella i la women among the which LOC had her and the Victòria.

b. Hi havia ella i el company de pis. I jo que LOC had her and the mate of house and I that m’estava a la tercera habitació… me-was at the third room

focus particles: només, #fins i tot, #també [definites OK]

(23) Rafael Azcona representa la literatura cinematogràfica. A Rafael Azcona represents the literature of film. In Itàlia els millors escriptors escrivien per al cinema, Italy the.PL best.PL writers wrote for the cinema però a Espanya, gairebé només hi ha ell. but in Spain almost only LOC has he El Punt 23/12/11
Catalan

- focus particles: *només*, *#fins i tot*, *#també* [definites fine in all cases]

(24) On *hi* ha Lancelot *també* *hi* ha *ella*, Ginebra, i where *LOC* has Lancelot also *LOC* has *she* Ginebra and l’altre, Artús.
The other Arthur

(25) *hi* ha taurons enormes, pingüins, piranyes, estrelles de LOC has sharks huge.PL penguins piranhas stars of mar, peixos pallasso, verinosos, tropicals i, *fins i tot*, sea fishes clown poisonous tropical and up and all *hi* havia el Nemo i la Doris!LOC had the Nemo and the.F Doris

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The role of only

[Beaver & Clark(2008), 252]: “The presence of an expectation that something stronger than the prejacent is true is an essential part of the meaning of only.”

(26) a. I really expected a suite but only got a single room with 2 beds.
   b. #I really expected a single room with 2 beds but only got a suite.

- prejacent: I got a single room with 2 beds.
- expectation: I’ll get a suite.

Only vs. even/also

Note that with *even* and *also* this expectation is not present:

(27) a. #I really expected a suite but even/also got a single room with 2 beds.
   b. I really expected a single room with 2 beds but even/also got a suite.
Contrastive nature of strong pronouns in Catalan/Spanish

(28) Vaig veure un home sospitós. (#Ell) era alt.
PAST.1SG see a man suspect he was tall
‘I saw a suspect man. He was tall.’

(29) Vaig veure un home sospitós. Només ell era alt.
PAST.1SG see a man suspect only he was tall
‘I saw a suspect man. Only he was tall.’

(30) a. Menja (#tu)!
eat you
‘You, eat!’

b. A: Passa.
   B: No, passa #(#tu).
pass not pass you
‘A: Come in. B: No, YOU come in.’

(31) Tothom diu que pro / ell és molt content.
everybody says that he is very happy
‘Everybody says that he is very happy.’

[Luján(1985)]:

(32) Ana se enoja cada vez que pro / ella / sólo ella
Ana SELF upsets every time that she only she
pierde.
loses

A Gricean view of contrast

- The choice of overt/null (Catalan) (see [Kaiser(2011)] for strong/weak pronouns in Dutch) generates an implicature of contrast.
- Where no option exists, no contrast implicature is generated.

(33) Vaig veure un home sospitós. Tothom és
PAST.1SG see a man suspect everybody SELF
va girar cap a ell.
PAST.3SG turn toward to he
‘I saw a suspect man. Everybody turn his head toward him.’
The problem
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Vielen Dank!

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What about clitic pronouns?

(34) En aquella festa també hi havia la teva germana?
in that.F party also LOC had the.F your.F sister
*No, no la hi havia. [Ramos(2002), 2004]
not not her LOC had

Conclusions

- the proper treatment of the DE is pragmatic;
- Catalan pronouns cannot be given a uniform solution within current analyses of the DE, probably due to their inherent contrastive nature;
- the prevalent association of Catalan pronouns with només ‘only’ might be a pragmatic consequence of the combination of contrast and unexpectedness.

References I

Discussion note: Definiteness and Existentials.

A pragmatic account of the definiteness effect in existential sentences.

Beaver, David & Brady Clark. 2008.
*Sense and sentivity. how focus determines meaning.*


