



snippets

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4.

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Does English resumption really help to repair island violations?

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Ross (1967) discovered island constraints that block long-distance dependency formation across certain structures, but he also noted that island violations do not arise when resumptive pronouns are used. This finding has led to many proposals on the nature of island constraints (Boeckx 2008; Cinque 1990), but a magnitude estimation study by Alexopoulou and Keller (2007) questions the presence of ‘island repair’ effects in English. For example, they examined the relative acceptability of relative clause (RC) island violations and their counterparts with resumptive pronouns (1), but found no difference in acceptability.

(1) Who₁ does Mary meet the people that will fire **t₁/him₁**.

This is rather surprising, given that many linguists have reported English judgments that support Ross’s original observation. One possible reason is that island repair effects are restricted to the subject position (McDaniel and Cowart 1999), but another potential reason is the property of the specific *wh*-phrase in (1). Erteschik-Shir (1992) observes that in a language like Hebrew where resumption can be used in the absence of island violations, resumptive pronouns need antecedents with a restrictive focus, i.e., they must refer to a set of individuals that are known to the speaker/hearer. Alexopoulou and Keller used the bare *wh*-phrase *who*, which does not meet this pragmatic condition. Moreover, the participants may have treated *him* as a deictic pronoun. This would cause a vacuous quantification and render the sentence ungrammatical.

We conducted a 7-point-scale acceptability judgment study that addresses these methodological concerns. Our experimental materials consisted of 16 sentence sets, and each set consisted of four conditions as shown in (2).

(2) The director remembered *which hairdresser*...

a/b. ...the cameraman speculated that the actor had kissed ___/her. (no island)

c/d. ...the cameraman hated the actor that had kissed ___/her. (RC island)

We used d-linked *wh*-phrases that meet the restrictive focus condition (Pesetsky 1987), and also avoided the deictic reading of the pronoun by ensuring that the *wh*-phrase is the only NP in the sentence that matches the pronoun in gender bias (based on Kennison and Trofe 2003), number and animacy features. We manipulated two factors (islandhood and resumption) to examine island repair effects and the baseline cost of resumption, and counter-balanced these items across four lists together with 36 fillers of similar length and complexity.

The data from 16 native speakers of American English (Figure 1) showed a main effect of island [$F(1,15) = 70.9, p. < .001$] and resumption [$F(1,15) = 50.7, p. < .001$], as well as a significant interaction of the two factors [$F(1,15) = 25.8, p. < .001$]. The pair-wise comparison revealed that resumption significantly degraded the no-island condition [2a vs. 2b: $t(1,15) = 7.2, p. < .001$], while there was no difference between the two RC island conditions [2c vs. 2d: $t(1,15) = 1.7, p. = .109$].

These results indicate that resumption does not improve English RC island violations even when the *wh*-phrases meet the restrictive focus condition and the antecedent is made clear. This finding lends further support to Alexopoulou and Keller’s claim that English resumption in object positions does not repair island violations.

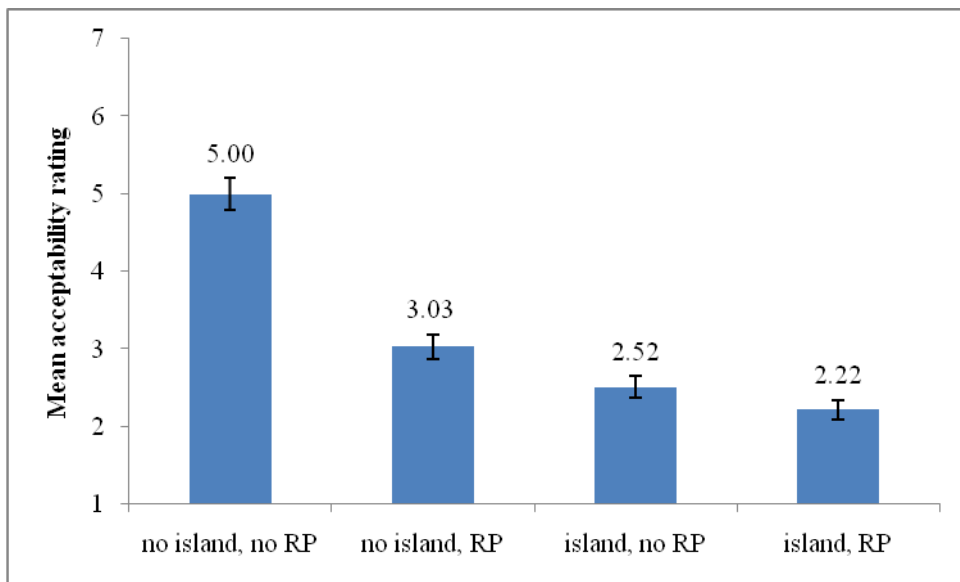


Figure 1. Mean acceptability rating on resumption and island (n=16)

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