

Introduction

The grammatical exponents of information structure (e.g., prosodic focus, topic marking, discourse-sensitive operators such as *only*, etc.) are often identified in linguistics literature, but when compared with other areas of linguistic investigation, are usually subject to less in-depth analysis

This poster presents an analysis of the double pronoun system of Falam Chin, wherein two sets of pronouns appear in different pragmatic contexts, with one set of pronouns employed in focus contexts and the other set in non-focus contexts, a typologically rare phenomenon in natural language

Falam Personal Pronouns

Falam Chin (ISO 639-3 cfm), a South Central Tibeto-Burman (or ‘Chin’) language, exhibits a two-way pronominal paradigm which includes standard pronouns (Table 1) and contrastive (Table 2) pronouns

| | 1 st person | 2 nd person | 3 rd person |
|----------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Singular | keimah | nangmah | amah |
| Plural | kanmah | nanmah | anmah |

Table 1. Falam Chin Standard Personal Pronouns

| | 1 st Person | 2 nd Person | 3 rd Person |
|----------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Singular | kei | nang | ani |
| Plural | kan | nan | anni |

Table 2. Falam Chin Contrastive Personal Pronouns

Falam Chin pronouns encode person and number, and exhibit allomorphic variation between *standard* and *contrastive* forms that is sensitive to information structure

- (1) a. Keimah hai ka-duh.
1SG.PRO.STD mango 1SG-like
‘I like mangoes.’
- b. Kei cu hai ka-duh
1SG.PRO.CONT TOP mango 1SG-like
‘I like mangoes.’

The sentences in (1) contain the same propositional content, but the usage of different pronominal forms is reflective of discourse-level properties of the utterance, e.g., whether or not the pronominal referent is in focus

This two-way split in Chin personal pronouns is well-known (Lehman and Van Bik (1997); Ceu Hlun (2007); Haokip (2019), though there has been relatively little in-depth analysis

Goals

- Share new data from a native speaker to analyze the pragmatic distribution of Falam Chin standard and contrastive pronouns
- Present evidence that personal pronouns in Falam Chin are sensitive to information structure, namely the current question under discussion
- Ground the analysis in the QUD framework, wherein discourse is modeled as a strategy of inquiry comprised of a series of questions (Roberts 2012; Beaver et al. 2017)

Investigating Information Structure

One useful way of exploring sensitivity to information structure is by analyzing constituent question contexts:

- A: ‘Who wants a mango?’
- B: ‘I want a mango.’

- A: ‘Which fruit do you want?’
- B: ‘I want a *a mango*’

In constituent question contexts, the element of the response which answers the question is said to be *in focus* or the focus constituent. In English, focus is often marked through prosodic stress, as seen in the examples above. Cross-linguistically, methods of indicating focus status include prosody, syntax, and morphology.

The Question Under Discussion Framework

In question-based models of information structure, discourse is represented as a series of (both explicit and implicit) questions under discussion. The felicitousness of potential discourse contributions is seen as constrained by the current Question Under Discussion (QUD). Such analyses are based on previous frameworks on discourse (Roberts 2012), and the semantics of questions (Hamblin 1973).

Analyzing Falam Chin Pronouns: A QUD Analysis

In the Question Under Discussion framework, questions denote sets of contextually restricted alternative propositions:

- Q: {**What fruit**} does Liang like?
- Focus meaning of Q: Liang likes {**apples, watermelon, pineapple, mangoes, etc.**}

The question above contains presupposed content, information that is already taken for granted by the speaker, rather than being asserted or questioned (Beaver et al. 2017), and alternative content, the set of alternatives triggered by the question

Some part of any potentially felicitous contribution to the discourse should evoke a set of alternatives containing all of the Rooth-Hamblin alternatives to the current QUD

The advantage of this framework is that it provides a formalized account of the conditions under which discourse-sensitive grammatical constructions (such as Falam Chin personal pronouns) are (un)acceptable

References

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Results

Standard Pronouns

CONTEXT: Art approaches a group of people with a basket of oranges. He asks them who likes oranges. (Scenario 31a)

- (2) a. Zo saw dawhlei a-duh?
 who Q orange 3SG-want
 ‘Who likes oranges?’
- b. **Amah=in**/Liang=in a-duh
3SG.STD=ERG/Liang=ERG 3SG-want
 ‘She/Liang likes oranges (pointing).’
- c. *Anih=in/() a-duh
3SG.CONT=ERG/*pro* 3SG-want

When the pronominal referent is among the alternatives, the standard pronoun or an overt lexical expression is acceptable. The contrastive pronoun (or no pronoun) is unacceptable.

Contrastive Pronouns

CONTEXT: David is going out to get fruit and he asks Hiro if he wants some. Hiro says he does. David asks which fruit Hiro would like (Scenario 25a)

- (3) a. Ziang thingthei saw na-duh?
 what fruit Q 2SG-want
 ‘What fruit do you want?’
- b. Kei=cu/ [] hai ka-duh.
1SG.CONT=TOP/ **pro** mango 1SG-want
 ‘I want a mango.’
- c. *Keimah=cu hai ka-duh
1SG.STD=TOP mango 1SG-want

When the pronominal referent **is not** among the alternatives, the contrastive pronoun (or no pronoun) is acceptable. The standard pronoun is unacceptable.

Conclusions

- Personal pronouns in Falam Chin are sensitive to discourse-level properties
- Standard pronouns project an inference that the pronominal referent *is* among the pragmatic alternatives in the current QUD
- Contrastive pronouns do not project this inference
- The QUD framework provides a formalized analysis of the conditions under which different pronominal forms surface in Falam Chin