

On the interpretation of stressed pronouns

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The aim of this contribution is to explore the meaning effects of stress on pronoun resolution. In the literature it has been argued that the interpretation preference of an unstressed pronoun can be taken as the base from which to predict the interpretation preference of its stressed counterpart in the same discourse position. For example, in the famous sequence "Paul called Jim a Republican. Then he insulted him", the pronouns "he" and "him" refer to Paul and Jim when they are unstressed, but to Jim and Paul when they are stressed. On the basis of these examples, it has been argued that there is a systematic relation between stressed and unstressed pronouns which is of a complementary preference within a suitable subset of the domain. The assumption is that stressed and unstressed counterparts have the same range of possible values. However, in "Paul called Jane a Republican. Then she insulted him" the pronouns are readily stressed as well, despite the fact that the two pronouns do not have the same range of possible values. The stress on the pronouns seems to be the result of the interpretation of the sentence in context, rather than of a shift in preferred reference. It will be argued that the condition that interprets a stressed pronoun on the basis of its unstressed complement is neither sufficient nor necessary for a proper treatment of the use of stressed pronouns in context. If it is to be maintained at all, it must be a rather weak constraint. In this paper, the optimal interpretations that are assigned to stressed and unstressed pronouns in discourse will be analyzed in terms of a small set of ranked constraints. The analysis will be evaluated against a set of actual data taken from a novel.