

Abstract submitted for the Workshop  
The relative frequencies of nouns, pronouns,  
and verbs in discourse  
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**Where do all the objects go? Investigating the impact of bound object marking  
on the relative frequencies of lexical expression of objects in discourse**

Relative frequencies of nominal expressions can be calculated across the entirety of a given text, expressed in measures such as Referential Density (Bickel 2003, Stoll & Bickel 2009), or differentiated according to factors such as syntactic function, animacy, person, or other. The latter approach was initiated by Du Bois (1987, 2003), where relative rates of “lexicality” (i.e. lexical NP as opposed to pronominal or zero) expressions for different syntactic functions was investigated. This line of research has tended to focus on the S/A grammatical relation, and has yielded several cross-linguistic generalizations such as Chafe’s (1994) “Light Subject Constraint”, or Du Bois’ “Avoid Lexical A”. An additional robust finding is that direct objects are cross-linguistically significantly more likely to be expressed lexically than transitive subjects (Haig 2013, Haig & Schnell, in prep.), although there is considerable cross-linguistic variation in the rates of lexicality of direct objects. However, comparatively little attention has been afforded to the expression of objects, and to the factors that influence the divergent levels of lexicality of objects cross-linguistically.

Preliminary investigations of objects in discourse (Haig 2013) suggests that they do not comply with widely-held views on the correlation of expression type with cognitive accessibility (Ariel 2000). Rather, there is a striking tendency for direct objects to be either prosodically bound (clitic or affix), or full NPs, or zero. What is strikingly absent are free object pronouns, a tendency which is almost categorical when the referent concerned is [-human] (cf. also Genetti & Crain 2003, Schnell 2012). This paper investigates the possible impact of a typological factor on the lexicality of objects: The presence/absence of a distinct set of prosodically bound pronominal clitics for the expression of objects. The hypothesis is that if a language does not offer this option in its morphosyntax, we should find a corresponding increase in either zero-expression, or full-NP expression of objects in discourse relative to languages that do have this option. The hypothesis will be tested on two closely-related varieties of Kurdish (West Iranian), one of which has a distinct paradigm of object clitics, while the other lacks them completely. Data is taken from spoken narrative texts which have been coded for animacy and syntactic function using the annotation system GRAID (Haig & Schnell 2010, Haig et al. 2011).

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