Resumptive pronouns = pronouns ≠ traces: Evidence from Arabic varieties

Resumptive pronouns alternate with gaps in certain positions in *wh*-questions in Arabic varieties, most prominently in direct object position. A substantial tradition of work on resumption has analyzed (a subset of) resumptive pronouns as the derivational residue of movement (especially Aoun et al. 2001; Boeckx 2003; Sichel 2014; Sportiche 2018, 2020). I show from novel data that this position is untenable for Arabic varieties where standard anti-cyclicity and anti-connectivity diagnostics distinguish resumptives *qua* base-generated elements from traces. I follow and expand upon work by Guilliot & Malkawi (2006, 2011) and Salzmann (2017), arguing that **resumptives, being pronouns, are definite determiners with elided NP content**.

1. Resumptive pronouns are not sensitive to islands. Traces are (see Choueiri 2002, 2017). The *wh*-question in (1) spans a relative clause island and must terminate in a resumptive pronoun.

(1) ja: laːʕibiːn tħibbiːn ajj aħad [jħibb-*(hum)]?
which players like.2.F.SG any one [likes.3.M.SG-*(them)]
'Which players do you like anyone who likes {*__ / them}?' (Iraqi Arabic)

Similar data (omitted here) distinguishing resumptives from traces are adduced for other islands. This contrast is straightforwardly explained if resumptives are base-generated in-situ and A-bar bound by operators, because binding, but not A-bar movement, is island-insensitive.

2. Resumptive pronouns do not license parasitic gaps in adjunct clauses. Traces do. In (2), only a trace in the main clause licenses a parasitic gap in the adjunct clause headed by 'without.'

(2) ja: mumaθθiliːn waðˤðˤafti {__ / *-hum} [biduːnma tqaːbiliːn *pg*]?
which actors hired.2.F.SG { / *-them} [without meet.2.F.SG]
'Which actors did you hire {__ / *them} [without meeting *pg*]?' (Iraqi Arabic)

The same asymmetry between traces and resumptives is found with long-distance *wh*-questions (see (3)): only if there is a trace in the base position are parasitic gaps licensed along the dependency. Arabic varieties thus seem to lack 'mixed chains' (cf. McCloskey 2002; Sportiche 2018).

(3) minu ʧinti [tiʕrufiːn [in-ni raħ aħibb {?__ / *-ha}] [min gabl ma
who were.2.F.SG know.2.F.SG that-1.SG FUT like.1.SG { / *-her} from before what
aːni aʃuːf *pg*]].
1.SG see.1.SG
'Who did you [know [that I would like {?__ / *her}] [before I ever met *pg*]]?' (Iraqi Arabic)

Assuming that parasitic gaps diagnose movement (e.g. Nissenbaum 2000), such movement must *only* be available when the A-bar dependency terminates in a gap. Accounts which do not specifically tie parasitic gap licensing to movement fail to explain the contrast.

3. Resumptive pronouns cannot be bound by a case-marked operator. Traces can be. The differentially object marked *wh*-word *ʔil-man* 'whom (ACC-who)' in Iraqi Arabic is not compatible with resumption (see (4b)), whereas its caseless counterpart *minu* 'who' is (see (4a)).

(4) a. **minu** titwaqqaʕiːn Hend ixtaːrat {__ / -ah}
who suspect.2.F.SG Hend chose.3.F.SG {__ / -him}

b. **ʔil-man** titwaqqaʕiːn Hend ixtaːrat {__ / *-ah}
ACC-who suspect.2.F.SG Hend chose.3.F.SG {__ / *-him}
Both: 'Who(m) do you suspect Hend chose?' (Iraqi Arabic)

This bears out Merchant's (2001) generalization that no resumptive-binding operator can be case-marked. In a resumptive dependency, the *wh*-phrase is not generated in the variable site but rather

in Spec, CP, hence it is never in a position to receive case, contrasting with gapped dependencies. To summarize so far, the contrast between resumptive and gapped A-bar dependencies with respect to the island, parasitic gap, and case facts argues for an approach in which resumptive pronouns are not gaps, and resumptive-binding operators are base-generated separately from their bindees.

4. The reconstruction wrinkle. A naïve base-generation theory of resumptives would predict the absence of *all* connectivity effects, in contrast to traces. This is not, however, what we find: resumptive pronouns license reconstruction for scope and binding in Arabic (Choueiri 2002). For example, the pronominal variable *-u* 'his' in (5) which is pied-piped by a *wh*-phrase can be bound by the non-c-commanding quantifier NPI *ħadd* 'one' which is interpreted as 'nobody' under negation. Crucially, the quantifier *does* c-command the resumptive pronoun which the *wh*-phrase binds.

(5) [amma fatra mtaʕ ħjeːt-u$_i$] ħadd$_i$ ma-jħibb jtðakkar-ha?
[which period.F.SG of life-his$_i$] one$_i$ NEG-want.3.M.SG remember.3.M.SG-it.F.SG
'[Which period of his$_i$ life] does nobody$_i$ want to remember (it)?' (Tunisian Arabic)

The reconstruction evidence seems *a priori* incompatible with the anti-cyclicity and anti-connectivity effects from (1)–(4). There are in principle two ways to resolve this tension: either (i) modify a movement analysis of resumption to explain why spelled-out traces (= resumptives) behave differently from silent ones (= gaps), or (ii) modify a base generation analysis of resumption to predict the presence of (limited) semantic connectivity effects.

5. Resumption as nominal ellipsis. I follow Guilliot & Malkawi (2006, 2011) and Salzmann (2017) in pursuing the second approach, extending Elbourne's (2001, 2005) NP-deletion theory of E-type anaphora to a base-generation analysis of resumptive pronouns. Specifically, resumptive pronouns are analyzed as hidden definite descriptions with elided NP content (see also Postal 1966). Prior to ellipsis, (5) will have the structure in (6). Reconstruction results from interpreting the lower, elided NP where the variable *-u* 'his' can be bound by *ħadd* 'nobody'.

(6) amma fatra mtaʕ ħjeːt-u$_i$ ħadd$_i$ ma-jħibb jtðakkar [$_{DP}$ -ha [$_{NP}$ ~~fatra~~ ~~mtaʕ ħjeːt-u$_i$~~]]?
which period of life-his$_i$ one$_i$ NEG-want remember -it period of life-his$_i$

The fact that resumptive pronouns show connectivity effects now follows from the fact that pronouns *in general* show connectivity, as shown by paycheck sentences like (7) (Elbourne 2001).

(7) Joni baʕθet taswiːret ʃeːk-ha lel-banka, amma ħatta ħadd eːxer ma-baʕaθ-ha
Joni sent.3.F.SG picture.F.SG check-her to.the-bank, but even one else NEG-sent.3.M.SG-it.F.SG
l-ɣadi.
to-there
'Joni sent the picture of her check to the bank, but no one else sent it there.' (Tunisian Arabic)

In (7), we find apparent covariance without c-command. However, under the NP-ellipsis theory of pronouns, the quantifier in (7) *does* c-command a pronominal variable *-u*$_i$ at LF:

(8) … ħatta ħadd$_i$ eːxer ma-baʕaθ [$_{DP}$ -ha [$_{NP}$ ~~taswiːret~~ ~~ʃeːk-u$_i$~~]] l-ɣadi
even one else NEG-sent.3.M.SG -it.F.SG picture.F.SG check-his to-there

The NP-ellipsis theory of pronouns predicts limited semantic connectivity within a broader base-generation theory of resumption, providing a unified account of anti-cyclicity and (anti-)connectivity effects present under resumption. By generalizing a theory of pronominal anaphora to resumptives, we also account for McCloskey's (2002: 192) observation that resumptives are indistinguishable from regular pronouns. Time permitting, I will also argue against analyses of resumptive dependencies as structurally ambiguous between movement and base generation (e.g. Sichel 2014), since resumptives can license reconstruction simultaneous with anti-cyclicity/-connectivity effects.