Resumptive pronouns and structural complexity in Cantonese relative clause production

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Background

Resumptive pronouns (RPs) are sometimes used to fill the gap in a relative clause (RC). The use of these pronouns is associated with structural complexity:

- In grammar: RP distributions across languages follow the NP Accessibility Hierarchy (Keenan & Comrie 1977): if the grammar allows RPs in one position, it allows them in more deeply embedded positions.
- Subject > Direct Object > Indirect Object > Possessor
- In usage: when the grammar allows either RP or gap, RPs should be preferred more as structural complexity increases, to facilitate processing (Hawkins 2004).

Research Questions

1. What are the grammatical constraints on resumptive pronoun use in Cantonese?
   - Hypothsis: RPs are banned in subject position and required in coverb object position to avoid an island violation (Francis & Matthews 2006).
2. How are RPs distributed in grammatically optional contexts?
   - Hypothesis: the acceptability and use of optional RPs should increase with increased structural complexity (Hawkins 2004).
3. Does RP use differ in subject versus object relatives?
   - Hypothesis: yes, RP use should be optional in direct object RCs and the acceptability and use of optional RPs should increase.