

Ellipsis of terms of address and reference in casual communication events in Vietnamese

Thoai Nu-Linh Ton
University of New England

There is a general view that pro-drop only occurs in languages with either a ‘rich’ inflectional system (Taraldsen 1978; Chomsky 1981; Jaeggli 1982; Suñer 1982), or in languages whose pronouns are agglutinating for case, number, or other nominal feature (Huang 1989; Neeleman & Szendrői 2005). The Vietnamese language fits neither of these categories. The explanation of the phenomenon of ellipsis of terms of address and reference (TOA) in this paper is, therefore, not based on these morphological grounds. Rather, it is presented from a pragmatic perspective, which employs discourse analysis as its major methodology. The paper attempts to demonstrate the fact that although Vietnamese is not a pro-drop language in its traditional definition, ellipsis of TOA in casual communication events among Vietnamese speakers is very common, and highly situational. In other words, these elliptic items in this case are referred to as references “in a form of situational (exophoric) presupposition” (Halliday & Hasan 1976: 145).

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