Pronoun preferences unmasked: an experimental study on Ewe and Yoruba

Silvia Silleresi[1], Itai Bassi[2], Abigail A. Bimpeh[3], Imke Driemel[4],
Johnson F. Iḷọri[5], Anastasia Nuworsu[6]

❖ GLOW 47 ❖

UniMiB[1], ZAS[2], HU-Berlin[3], UoY[4], UniLag[5], HTU[6]

Background

Several West-African languages like Ewe and Yoruba employ **logophoric pronouns in indirect speech reports** (e.g., clausal complements of verbs like *say*, *think*, a.o.) **as special anaphoric elements that denote the author** of the event referred to **in the matrix clause**.

(1) $Kofi_1$ gblɔ be **yè**$_{1/*2}$ / **é**$_{\%1/2}$ -dzo.   **Ewe**
    Kofi say COMP **LOGP** / **ORDP** -left
    'Kofi said that he left.'

(2) Olu_1 wí pé **òun**$_{1/*2}$ / **ó**$_{(*)1/2}$ wa.   **Yoruba**
    Olu say COMP **LOGP** / **ORDP** come
    'Olu said that he came.'

- Logophoric pronoun (**LOGP**): the co-reference possibilities are consistently reported to be restricted to the attitude holder (Clements 1975; Manfredi 1987; Adésola 2005; Pearson 2015; Bimpeh et al. 2024).

- Ordinary pronoun (**ORDP**): diverging observations. It must refer to someone (contextually salient) other than the attitude holder (Clements 1975; Manfredi 1987; Bimpeh et al. 2024), *vs.* it can co-refer to the attitude holder (Adésola 2005; Pearson 2015).

- **Research Question**: What is the distribution and interpretation of logophoric and non-logophoric pronouns in Ewe and Yoruba?

Methods

❖ PARTICIPANTS ❖

Participants' characteristics. Mean (SD) and min-max values.

	Gender	Age	Dialects	Years of education	Level of education
38 Ewe-speakers	21 females 16 males 1 neutral	29.5 (11.2) 20-55	15 Northern 23 Southern	9.9 (6.2) 2-20	5.2 (1.5) 3-8
25 Yoruba-speakers	7 females 18 males	45.4 (20.5) 24-68	16 Northern 9 Central	17.8 (8) 4-38	8.1 (1.1) 4-9

❖ DESIGN ❖

- Acceptability judgment task - joint presentation (Sprouse & Aronoff 2013; Marty et al. 2020) We manipulated:
  - Test sentences: **LOGP** *vs.* **ORDP**
  - Types of contexts: **SELF** (attitude holder) *vs.* **ANTI-SELF** (other individual)
  - Verbs: **SAY** *vs.* **THINK**

❖ MATERIALS ❖

Common incipit: Sefa and Fafali are at home and decide to have a singing competition. In order to decide the winner they decide to record their voices. At the end of the competition Sefa hears one of the recordings. Then Sefa says:

- **SELF**: "What a beautiful voice! **It must be Fafali's voice**. In fact Fafali is very good at singing!" **Then Sefa realizes that it is her own voice**. So Sefa says "Oh no wait! But this is my voice! **So I'm very good at singing, not Fafali!**".

- **ANTI-SELF**: "What a beautiful voice! **It must be my voice**. In fact I'm very good at singing!" **Then Sefa realizes that it is Fafali's voice.** So Sefa says "Oh no wait! **But this is Fafali's voice! So Fafali is very good at singing, not me!**".

(3) Mlɔ̀èbá la, Sefa gblɔ be yè-nyé hà-dzì-lá nyuie.   **Ewe**
    In.end DEF, Sefa say COMP **LOGP**-is song-sing-one.who great
    "In the end, Sefa said that she is a great singer.'

(4) Mlɔ̀èbá la, Sefa gblɔ be é-nyé hà-dzì-lá nyuie.   **Ewe**
    In.end DEF, Sefa say COMP **ORDP**-is song-sing-one.who great
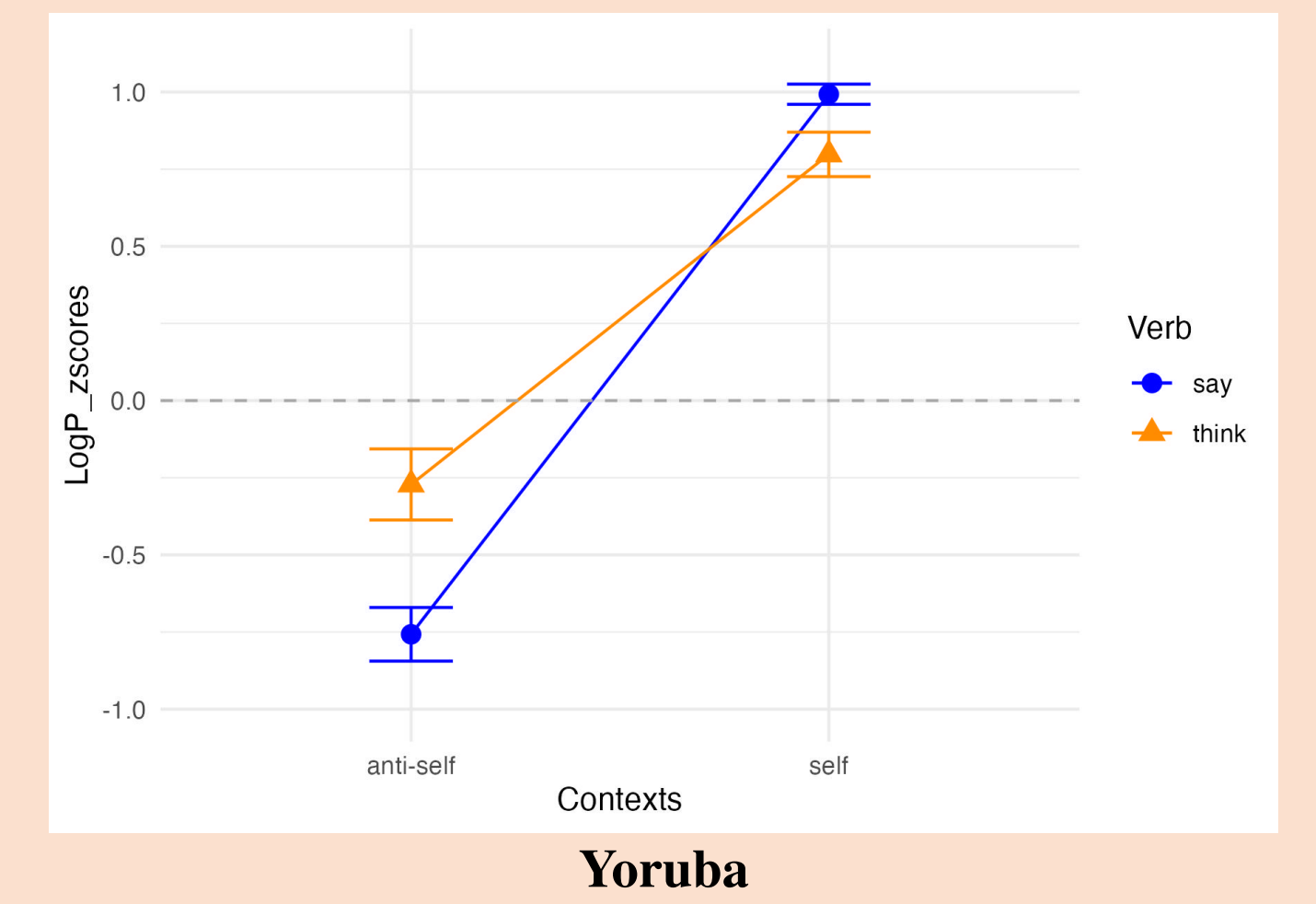   'In the end, Sefa said that she is a great singer.'

→ (3) and (4) were rated on a Likert scale (1-7 points).

Results

- **LOGP** was significantly preferred in self contexts.

- Significant effect of verbs in anti-self contexts.

	Ewe	Yoruba
anti-self vs. self	$\beta = -0.63$, SE = 0.06, t = -10.27, p <.001	$\beta = -1.45$, SE = 0.08, t = -17.63, p <.001
say vs. think (anti-self)	$\beta = -0.24$, SE = 0.09, t = -2.67, p =0.06	$\beta = -0.41$, SE = 0.11, t = -3.60, p =0.002

- **ORDP** was significantly preferred in anti-self contexts.

	Ewe	Yoruba
anti-self vs. self	$\beta = 0.12$, SE = 0.06, t = 2.04, p =0.04	$\beta = 0.64$, SE = 0.08, t = 7.24, p <.001
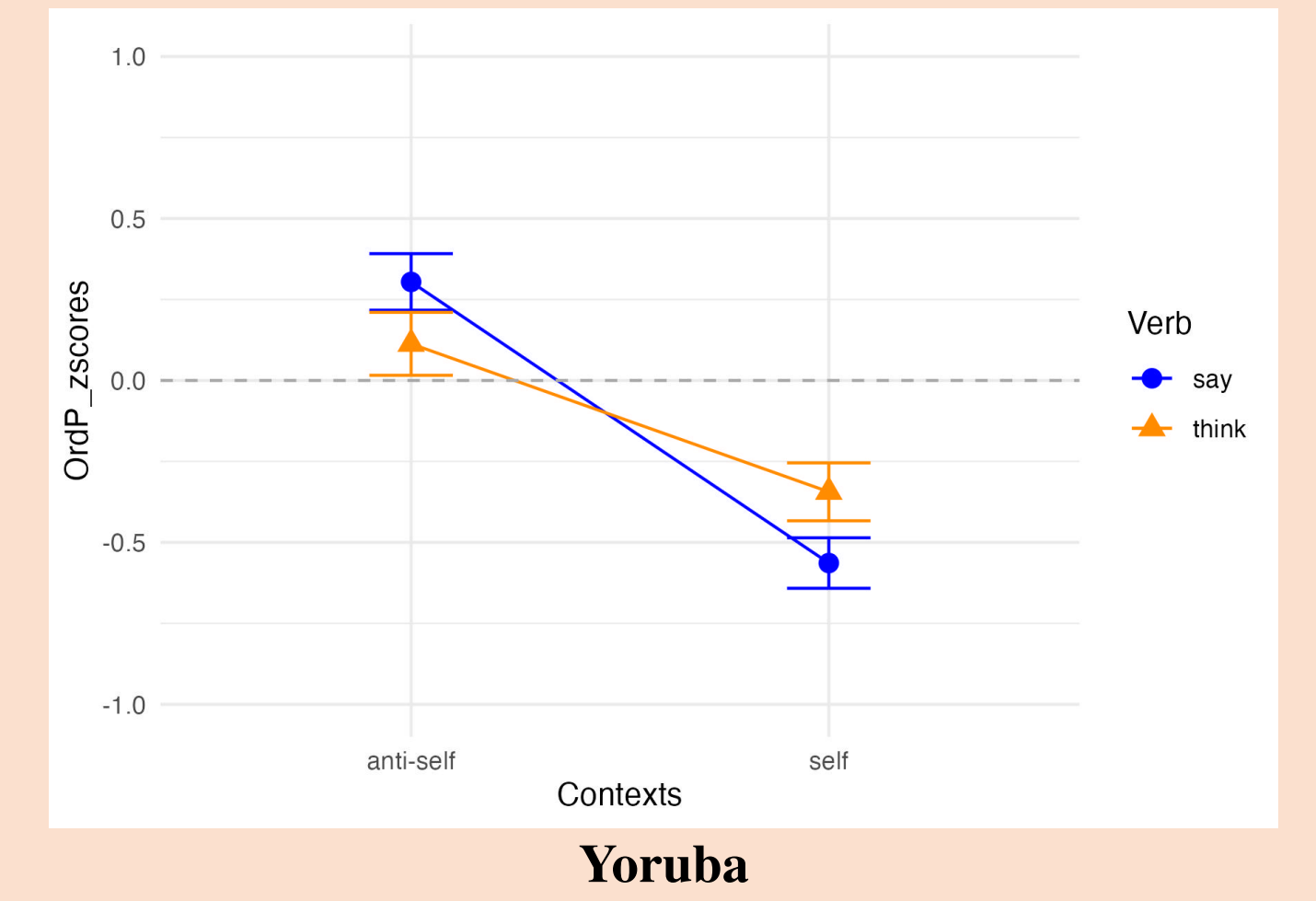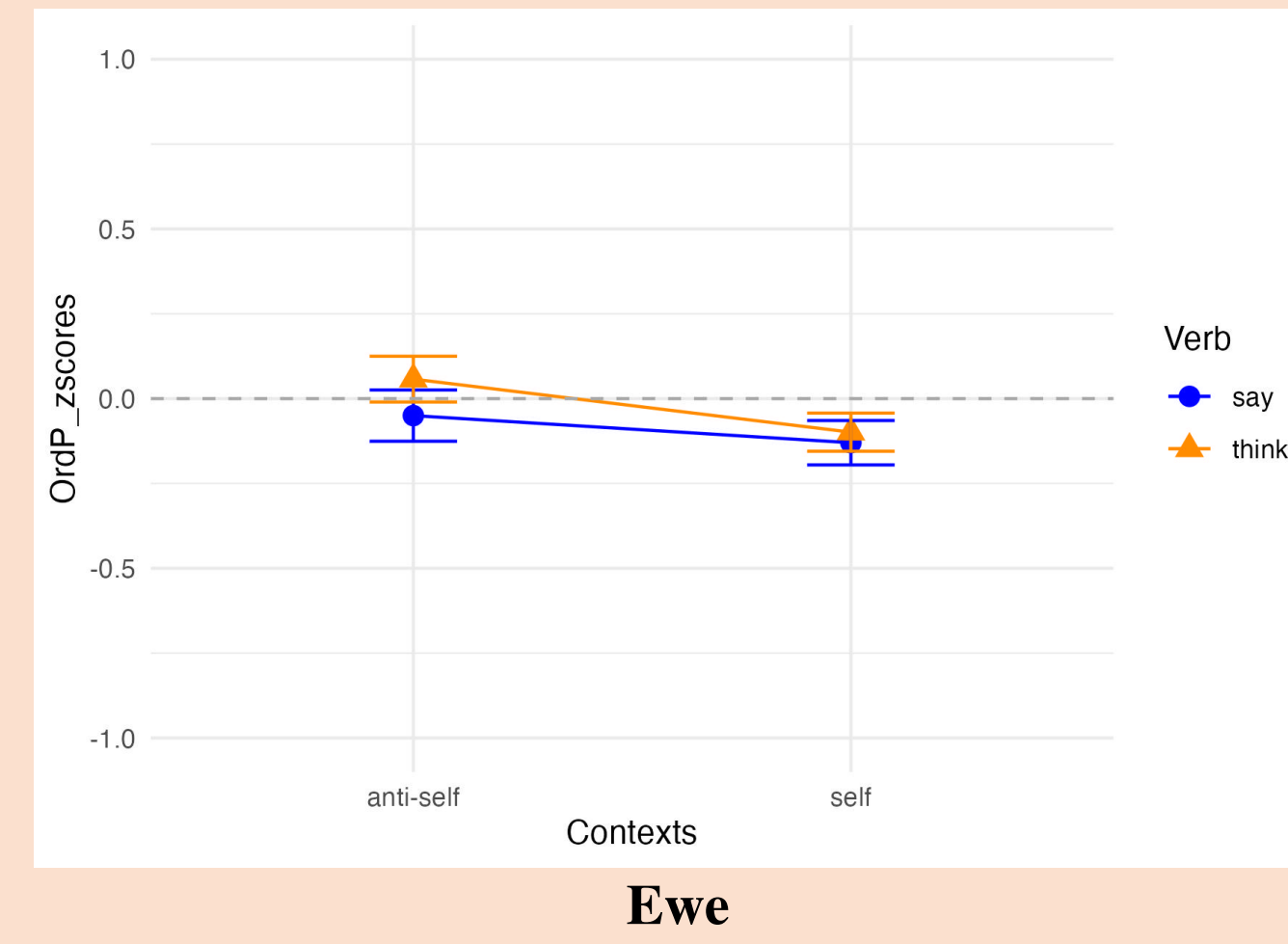
- Significant interaction between education level/years of education and conditions.

- No dialectal variation.

Analysis

Main results:

- Logophors **obligatorily refer to attitude holder** (*de se* coreference).

- Ordinary pronouns block *de se* in Ewe and Yoruba.

Co-referent	LOGP	ORDP	
Attitude holder	✓	✗	→Clements 1975; Manfredi 1987; Adésola 2005; Pearson 2015; Bimpeh et al. 2024
Other (salient) individual	✗	✓	→Clements 1975; Manfredi 1987; Bimpeh et al. 2024. Contra: Adésola 2005; Pearson 2015

- These findings align with the MP theory of **LOGPs** (Bimpeh et al. 2024):
  - A novel **presuppositional** semantics for **LOGP** (Bimpeh et al. 2024):

    $$\text{LOGP} \equiv \left[\text{LOG} \left[pro_i \right] \right] \sim \text{two elements in the syntax: one is a pronoun that denotes}$$
    a variable, and the other is a morpho-syntactic feature LOG.
    · The [LOG] feature introduces a presupposition that makes the logophor as a whole denote the attitude holder's center (as in Lewis 1979).

    $$\text{ORDP} \equiv \left[\text{3RD} \left[pro_i \right] \right] \sim \text{two elements in the syntax: one is a pronoun that denotes}$$
    a variable, and the other is a semantically-vacuous 3rd person feature.
    · Since LOG is absent, so is its semantic contribution. In other words, ORDP is semantically unconstrained (apart from contextual recoverability).

  - **MAXIMIZE PRESUPPOSITION! (MP)**   (Heim 1991; Sauerland 2003)

    Of two lexical items of the same complexity, where one has stronger presuppositions than the other but which lead to the same truth conditions in all contexts where both of their presuppositions are satisfied, the presuppositionally stronger item must be used whenever its presuppositions are contextually satisfied.

  - ∼ LOGP is presuppositionally stronger, thereby blocking the occurrence of ORDP in self contexts.
  - ∼ Disjointness effect of ORDP in self contexts by an 'anti-presupposition' (Percus 2006).

Other findings:

- Speech verbs (*say*) show a clearer pattern than thought verbs (*think*): Culy (1994)'s hierarchy of attitude verbs: speech > thought > knowledge > direct perception (see also Koopman & Sportiche 1989; Bimpeh 2023; Silleresi et al. 2024).

- Higher educational levels contribute to increased metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok & Ryan 1985; Schütze 2016; Silleresi et al. 2024).

Selected references: **Adésolá** (2005). *Pronouns and null operators: A-bar dependencies and relations in Yoruba*: Rutgers University of New Jersey-New Brunswick dissertation. ● **Bimpeh** (2023). *Logophoricity: an empirical-semantic assessment of yè in Ewe*. PhD thesis. Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg. ● **Bimpeh et al.** (2024). "Obligatory de se logophors in Ewe, Yoruba and Igbo: Variation and competition". In: *Proceedings of the 40th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*. Ed. by Jiayi Lu et al. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 1–10. ● **Clements** (1975) The logophoric pronoun in Ewe: Its role in discourse. *JWAL* 10. 141–177. ● **Culy** (1994). Aspects of logophoric marking. *Linguistics*, 1055–1094. ● **Heim** (1991) "Artikel und Definitheit". In: *Semantik / Semantics: Ein internationales Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung*. Ed. by Arnim von Stechow and Dieter Wunderlich. De Gruyter Mouton, 487–535. ● **Manfredi** (1987). Antilogophoricity as Domain Extension in Igbo and Yoruba. *Niger-Congo Syntax and Semantics*, 1:97–117. ● **Marty et al.** (2020). "The effect of three basic task features on the sensitivity of acceptability judgment tasks". *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 5(1): 72. 1–23. ● **Pearson** (2015) The interpretation of the logophoric pronoun in Ewe. *NLS* 23(2). 77–118. ● **Percus.** (2006). Antipresuppositions. In: *Theoretical and empirical studies of reference and anaphora: Toward the establishment of generative grammar as an empirical science*, pp. 52–73. ● **Schütze** (2016). *The empirical base of linguistics: Grammaticality judgments and linguistic methodology*. Language Science Press. ● **Sauerland** (2003). A New Semantics for Number. In: *Proceedings of SALT 13*. Ed. by Young and Zhou. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 258–275. ● **Sprouse & Aronoff** (2013). *Acceptability judgments*. Oxford University Press Oxford.