Do resumptive pronouns ever rescue illicit gaps in English?
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Background
The literature presents a contradictory picture of resumptive pronouns in English. On the one hand, corpus studies [1, 2, 3] show that:

- Resumptive pronouns are frequent in speech.
- Theoretical syntacticians [4, 5] and an experimental study [6] claim that:
  - Resumptive pronouns can “rescue” illicit gaps.
- On the other hand, other experimental studies [7, 8] show that:
  - Resumptive pronouns are never better than illicit gaps.

Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Gap</th>
<th>Resumptive pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain Relative</td>
<td>This is the chef that ___ prepared the potatoes.</td>
<td>This is the chef that she prepared the potatoes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded that-clause</td>
<td>This is the chef that Ted realized that ___ prepared the potatoes.</td>
<td>This is the chef that she realized that she prepared the potatoes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wh-island</td>
<td>This is the chef that Ted inquired how ___ prepared the potatoes.</td>
<td>This is the chef that she inquired how she prepared the potatoes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Clause Island</td>
<td>This is the chef that Ted devoured the potatoes that ___ prepared.</td>
<td>This is the chef that she devoured the potatoes that she prepared.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Gap</th>
<th>Resumptive pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain Relative</td>
<td>These are the potatoes that Ted prepared ___</td>
<td>These are the potatoes that Ted prepared them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded that-clause</td>
<td>These are the potatoes that Ted realized that the chef prepared ___</td>
<td>These are the potatoes that Ted realized that the chef prepared them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wh-island</td>
<td>These are the potatoes that Ted inquired how the chef prepared ___</td>
<td>These are the potatoes that Ted inquired how the chef prepared them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Clause Island</td>
<td>These are the potatoes that Ted flirted with the chef that prepared ___</td>
<td>These are the potatoes that Ted flirted with the chef that prepared them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experiment
Large-scale acceptability study
- 121 participants
- 11-point scale
- 4 x 2 x 2 design
  - 4 levels of sentence type
  - 2 levels of position (subject, object)
  - 2 levels of gap type (gap, resumptive)
- Each participant sees 2 tokens of each condition.
- Latin square design
- 2:1 filler/experimental ratio

Results
Acceptability on 1 – 11 scale (zoomed in on 3 – 9):

References