

Animacy effects in English contraction

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Outline

- Background on animacy
- The contraction case study
- Investigating other possible explanations

Animacy and variation

Genitive (Rosenbach 2002, Tagliamonte & Jarasz 2008)

- a) The woman's shadow.
- b) The shadow of the tree.

Dative (Bock and Irwin 1980, Bresnan et al. 2007, Bresnan & Ford 2009, Bresnan & Hay 2008)

- a) We gave my sister the book.
- b) We gave the book to the library.

Animacy and verbal morphology

Verbal -s in AAVE

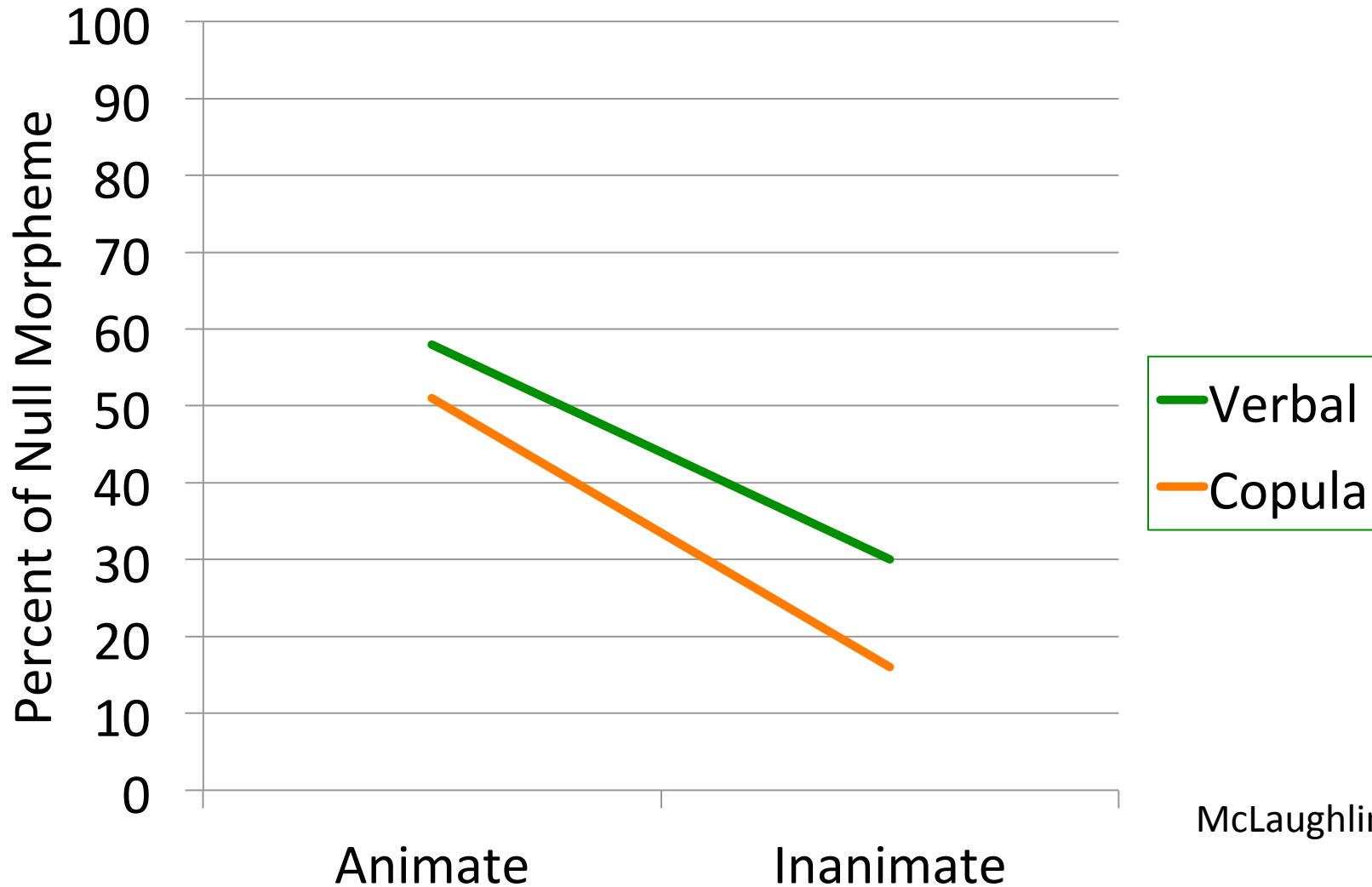
- a. [...] as long as he **stay**∅ out of my way.
- b. [...] before September **ends**.

Copula deletion in AAVE

- a. She ∅ not mad though.
- b. No **she's** not mad at you.

Animacy and verbal morphology

NP subjects



McLaughlin (2013)

Research question

An analog to AAVE verbal morphology variation in Standard English is **contraction**. Is this effect present there?

Contraction

Is

- a. Yeah Salzburg's nice. Austria's nice.
- b. Europe **is** nice.

Has

- a. Well I'm sure it's been done!
- b. I'm sure it **has** been done.

Contraction

- a. Yeah Salzburg's nice. Austria's nice.
b. Europe is nice.

This talk: NP subjects only

Data sources

- The Switchboard corpus (Godfrey et al., 1992)
- The Fisher corpus (Cieri et al., 2004)
 - 5-minute telephone conversations between strangers on a given topic
- The Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus (Labov & Rosenfelder, 2011)
 - Sociolinguistic interviews carried out by Penn Linguistics students

The dependent variable

Underlyingly: a bipartite allomorphic alternation

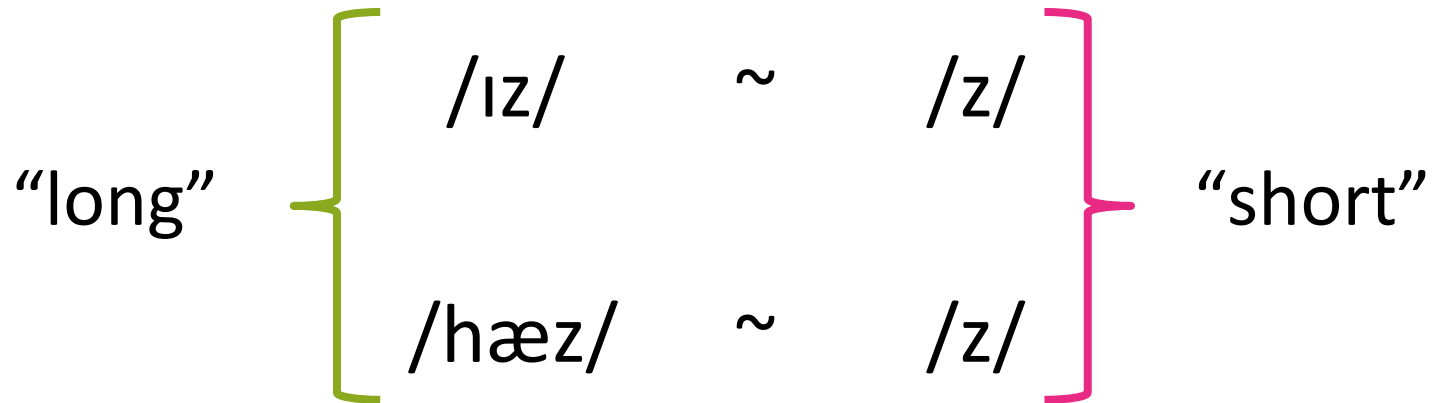
is /ɪz/ ~ /z/

has /hæz/ ~ /z/

(MacKenzie 2013)

The dependent variable

Underlyingly: a bipartite allomorphic alternation



(MacKenzie 2013)

The dependent variable

Surface forms can be reclassified:

Underlying long

is

[ɪz]

[əz]

[s], [z]

has

[hæz]

[həz]

[əz]

[s], [z]

(MacKenzie 2013)

Conditioning factors

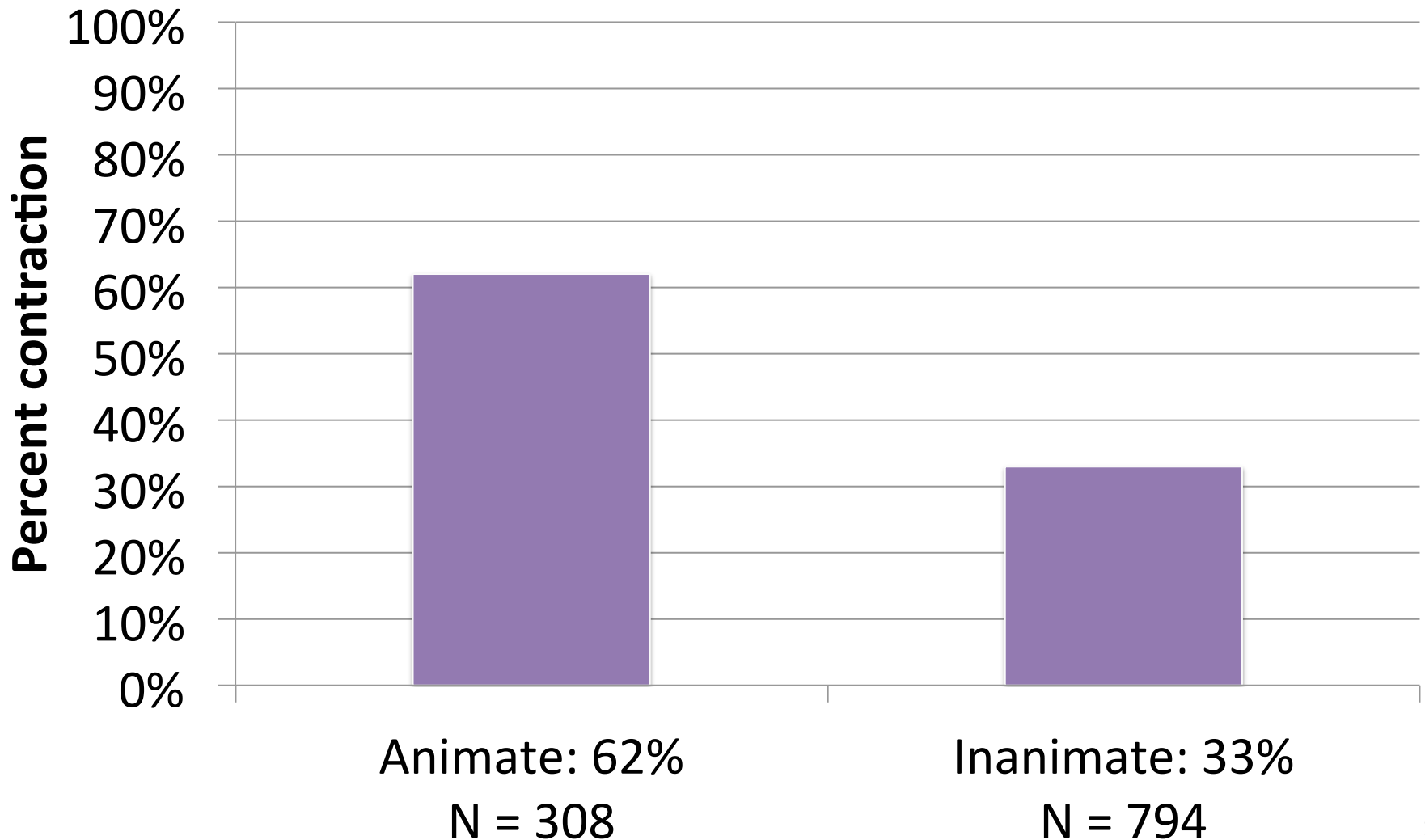
- Subject length in words
shorter > longer
- Preceding segment (only for *is*)
vowel > consonant
- Following constituent (only for *is*)
verbal > adjectival > nominal

(Frank & Jaeger 2008; Labov, 1969; MacKenzie, 2012, 2013)

- Subject animacy
human vs. non-human

Contraction of *is* by animacy

N = 1102



Generalized Linear Model

- Random effects:
 - Speaker
 - Preceding word
 - Following word
- Fixed effects:
 - Animacy
 - Subject length in words
 - Preceding segment (only for *is*)
 - Following constituent (only for *is*)

Results: *is*

	Estimate	Standard Error	<i>p</i> value
(Intercept)	1.48	0.38	< 0.001
Animacy = human	1.36	0.22	< 0.001
Subject length (words)	-0.51	0.09	< 0.001
Prec. segment = cons.	-0.78	0.22	< 0.001
Foll. constituent = NP	-1.30	0.33	< 0.001
Foll. constituent = adj.	-0.63	0.30	0.03

N = 1102

Results: *has*

	Estimate	Standard Error	<i>p</i> value
(Intercept)	-1.05	0.53	0.045
Animacy = human	1.00	0.31	0.0014
Subject length (words)	-0.42	0.12	< 0.001
Prec. segment = cons.	0.43	0.38	0.26

N = 379

An epiphenomenon?

Of...

- Weight?

Results: *is*

after 2-word subjects

	Estimate	Standard Error	<i>p</i> value
(Intercept)	0.55	0.43	0.21
Animacy = human	1.61	0.29	<0.001
Subject length (words)	-0.42	0.12	< 0.001
Prec. segment = cons.	-0.93	0.33	0.004
Foll. constituent = NP	-1.18	0.39	0.003
Foll. constituent = adj.	-0.65	0.35	0.065

N = 617

Compare Rosenbach (2005): animacy a separate effect from subject weight in other variable phenomena

An epiphenomenon?

Of...

- ~~Weight?~~
- Frequency?

Frequency

Measure: $\log(\text{SUBTLEX-US frequency})$, *is only*

- 51 million words from American English movie subtitles
- Best correlated with behavioral measures

(Brysbaert & New 2009)

No significant effect of frequency of...

- word immediately preceding auxiliary ($p = 0.27$)
- head noun of subject ($p = 0.40$)

Inanimate subjects are more frequent in our data (794/1102), yet contract less

An epiphenomenon?

Of...

- ~~Weight?~~
- ~~Frequency?~~
- Proper names?
 - With proper names excluded, the effect is still present ($p < 0.001$)
 - Proper names not a significant factor ($p = 0.722$)

An epiphenomenon?

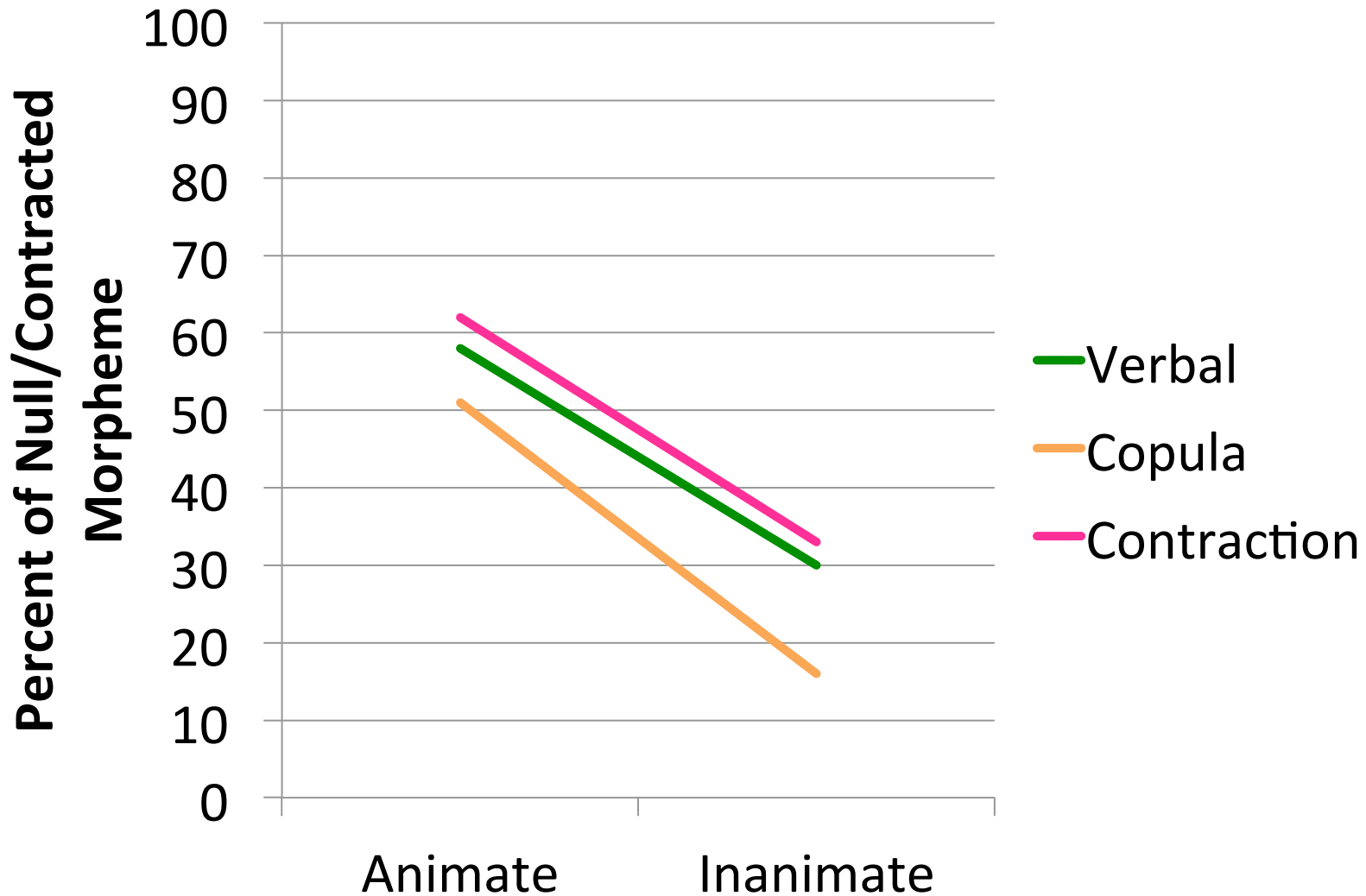
Of...

- ~~Weight?~~
- ~~Frequency?~~
- ~~Proper names?~~
- Prosodic factors?
 - No effect of preceding syllable stress ($p = 0.318$)
 - But more remain to be examined...

Other interpretations

- Human vs. non-human
- Concrete vs. abstract
- Agentivity
- Definiteness / specificity
- Discourse-newness

Multiple variables after NP Subjects



Conclusions

- Not just in copula; in *has* as well
- Possibly epiphenomenal, but source is elusive
- Raises questions concerning whether and how conditions on variation are encoded in the grammar

(Coetzee & Kawahara 2010, Coetzee & Pater 2011, MacKenzie 2012)

Thank you!