

Contrast

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Wind Cowles (2003)

processing information structure

- Lambrecht (1994): information structure is a level of representation
- contrastive vs. informational focus

Wind Cowles (2003): Experiment 3.1

violation of IS expectations

context:

A queen, an advisor, and a banker were arguing over taxes. Who did the queen silence with a word, the banker or the advisor?

congruent target:

It was the banker that the queen silenced.

anomalous target:

It was the queen that silenced the banker.

reading, ERP recording

results

- N400-like effect
- indication of semantic violation
- expectation *in favor of* or *against* some discourse participant(s)?

Wind Cowles (2003): Experiment 3.2

information focus vs. contrastive focus

contrastive focus:

- small group, equally salient
- one singled out using “only”
- “which x did y?”

information focus:

- no group of participants is prominent
- “did anyone do y”?

contrastive focus: A butcher, a chef and a specialist were in the kitchen of a posh restaurant. They had started up the business together. It was successful, but they were very busy. All of them wanted everything to be perfect, but only one had time to stop and check the soup. Which one tasted the soup?

information focus: The kitchen of a posh restaurant was filled with people trying to get orders filled. Near the door was a butcher and another person. A group of cooks was clustered around the stove, including a chef and a specialist. There was a pot of soup in the corner that was almost ready to be served. Did anyone taste the soup?

target: After a moment, the butcher tasted the soup.

reading, ERP recording

results

- anterior negativity (LAN) in contrastive condition:
memory load due to unfilled role or contrast set
- positivity 200-900ms at “butcher” in contrastive condition:
integration cost

Sanford, Moxey and Paterson (1994)

hypothesis: (right) monotone decreasing quantifiers (e.g. *few*) focus the complement set, others focus the reference set

assumptions:

- pronouns can only refer to the set which the quantifier “focuses”
- if the complement set is focused the reference set is marginally available but not vice versa

Context:

Local MPs were invited to take part in a public inquiry about proposals to build a new nuclear power station.

- a. A few of the MPs attended the meeting. Their presence helped the meeting to run more smoothly.
- b. A few of the MPs attended the meeting. Their absence helped the meeting to run more smoothly.
- c. Few of the MPs attended the meeting. Their presence helped the meeting to run more smoothly.
- d. Few of the MPs attended the meeting. Their absence helped the meeting to run more smoothly.

a series of experiments:

- self-paced reading sentence-by-sentence
- eye-tracking

results: (1b,c) slower than (1a,d) (total times)

Processing data:

- larger database
- finer distinctions
- evidence about the time course of interpretation

Processing data:

- larger database
 - can naive speakers get relevant aspects of meaning?
 - task-related artefacts
- finer distinctions
 - but how to interpret them?
- evidence about the time course of interpretation
 - what (degree of) interpretation?

THANK YOU