The Effect of Position on Understanding: Preposed vs Inserted ’selon X’ (’according to X’)
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The Effect of Position on Understanding: Preposed vs Inserted ‘selon X’ (according to X)

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INTRODUCTION

Centering theory (Grosz et al., 1983, Walker et al., 1998) establishes a structural relationship between the form of referential expressions and attentional focus. It predicts specifically that highly focused entities tend to be realized with less marked forms (e.g. pronouns) and that factors such as grammatical status or surface position affect prominence. The experiments reported here aimed to test a claim put forward in linguistic studies on French evidential adverbials (Schreiber, 2005) concerning the functioning of the preposed position as a potential frame influencing the following pronominal resolution: a preposed prepositional phrase (PP), but not an inserted one, frames an informational bloc in which antecedents are easily accessed compared to antecedents located outside the bloc.

EXPERIMENT 1

Counterbalanced Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prepositional Phrase Position</th>
<th>Target Pronoun Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preposed</td>
<td>Gender of the NP complement of the evidential PP (here the Speaker)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inserted</td>
<td>or Previous Grammatical Subject Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Material

P1: Selon Francine, Vincent a trouvé un stage dans une agence de publicité. (According to Francine, Vincent found an advertising agency internship.)

P2: Elle apprécie que les cursus étudiants incluent une expérience professionnelle… (She appreciates the fact that the curriculum includes a work experience…)

Hypothesis

Preposed Position x Subject’s Gender Pronoun

Quick x Inside Frame > Reading

Inserted Position x Speaker’s Gender Pronoun

Slow Reading due to inaccessibility of antecedent

Methodology

Self-Paced Reading Paradigm with P2 as Target + Comprehension task

Participants: 24 students (University of Paris III)

EXPERIMENT 2

Counterbalanced Factors: Pronomence x Position x Pronoun

Material

Same text material with two introductory sentences added

P2: Vincent/Francine prépare un master de gestion à Paris-Dauphine. (Vincent/Francine is taking a Master in Management at Paris-Dauphine.)

P1: Les programmes comprennent des enseignements théoriques et des mises en situation… (The syllabus includes theoretical knowledge and applied skills…)

Hypothesis

The Speaker in introduction

Same results as Expt. 1

The Subject in introduction

In the Preposed Position, shorter Reading time for Subject Gender Pronoun than for Speaker Gender Pronoun

Methodology

Self-Paced Reading Paradigm with P2 as Target + Comprehension task

Participants: 64 students (University of Paris III)

RESULTS

Main effect: Shorter Reading time for Target sentence for Subject Gender Pronoun (F(1,63)= 7.6, p=0.007)

Interaction: Shorter Reading time for Inserted Pronoun x Subject’s Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F(1,23)= 4.45, p=0.046)

EXPERIMENT 3

Counterbalanced Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposed Position</th>
<th>Inserted Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Material

Preposed Position x Speaker’s Gender Pronoun

Preposed Inserted

Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F(1,23)=0.65, p=0.8)

Interaction: Shorter Reading time for Inserted Position x Subject’s Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F(1,23)= 6.96, p < 0.01)

Methodology

Self-Paced Reading Paradigm with P2 as Target + Comprehension task

Participants: 48 students (University of Paris III)

RESULTS

Main effect: as previously (F(1,47)= 16, p < 0.001)

No longer any Position x Pronoun Interaction (F(1,188)= 0.65, p=0.8)

Prominence x Pronoun Interaction

Longer Reading for Subject than for Speaker Gender Pronoun condition (F(1,188)= 6.96, p < 0.01)

Bibliography


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