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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 (Schrepfer, 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.

**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) or Previous Grammatical Subject Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESULTS**

- **Main effect**: Shorter Reading time of Target sentence for Subject’s Gender Pronoun (F(1,23)=7, p<0.01)
- **Interaction**: Shorter Reading time for Inserted Position x Subject’s Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F(1,23)=4.45, p=0.046)

**INTERPRETATION**

- In Preposed Position no Reading time difference of Target sentence whatever the Pronoun
- Possibly due to the first mention effect reported by Genbaucher et al. (1989)

**EXPERIMENT 1**

**EXPERIMENT 2**

**EXPERIMENT 3**

**SUMMARY**

In our first experiment, results were similar to those obtained by Gordon et al. (1993) in their 5th test with the Repeated Name Penalty Paradigm, results they interpreted as indicating that “an initial and non subject” or a “non-initial and subject” entity equally provides prominence. Our second experiment, however, suggests that the rather robust effect obtained with our material was probably not only a question of surface order. Our third experiment shows the importance of the verbal phrase in our preceding results. Altogether, these experiments confirm the importance of antecedent prominence in pronominal resolution as pointed out by Centering Theory and suggest a new factor of prominence, besides surface order and grammatical status, namely the semantic affinity between Evidential Preposition and subsequent Verb Phrases whose Subject pronoun is the mentioned Speaker. The Speaker’s point of view signaled by the PP seems to prime opinion VP, possibly changing the narrative from an objective story about the previous Grammatical Subject to a story concerning the subjectivity of the Speaker. This

Bibliographie


Schrepfer, G. (2005), Stances de genre ou stances d’exclusion ou sur les pronom centraux: une étude sur les évidences pronominales. Langue Française, 30-94.


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