The Effect of Position on Understanding: Preposed vs Inserted ‘selon X’ (‘according to X’)
Anne-Marie Argenti, Michel Charolles

To cite this version:
Anne-Marie Argenti, Michel Charolles. The Effect of Position on Understanding: Preposed vs Inserted ‘selon X’ (‘according to X’). AMLaP 2011 - Architectures and Mechanisms for Language Processing, Sep 2011, Paris, France. halshs-00661755

HAL Id: halshs-00661755
https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00661755
Submitted on 31 Jan 2012
The Effect of Position on Understanding: Preposed vs Inserted `selon X` (according to X)

Anne-Marie ARGENTI1,2, Michel CHAROLLES2

1 Unité mixte de recherche 8904 du CNRS, 2 École Normale Supérieure, Université de Paris III
Contact: anne-marie.argenti@ens.fr

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 (Schröper, 2005) concerning the functioning of the preposed position as a potential frame influencing the following pronounal 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

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 Genbauder et al. (1989)

Adjustment of a new factor to manipulate protagonist Prominence

Two introductory sentences are added to the previous texts: the first sentence starts with the mention of one of the protagonists, the Speaker or the Subject.

Counterbalanced Factors

Prepositional Phrase Position
Target Pronoun Gender
Preposed or Inserted
Gender of the NP complement of the evidential PP (here the Speaker) or Previous Grammatical Subject Gender

Material

P1: Selon Francine, Vincent a trouvé un stage dans une agence de publicité.
(According to Francine, Vincent found an advertising agency internship.)
P2: Il/Elle apprécie que les cursus étudiants incluent une expérience professionnelle.
(He/She appreciates that the curriculum includes a work experience.)

Hypothesis

Preposed Position x Subject’s Gender Pronoun:
Quick in Inside Frame > Reading last result shows that Preposed PPs have a specific framing function (Charolles, 1987) in certain conditions which further studies will focus on and develop

Interpretation

Hypothesis

Counterbalanced Factors: Prominence x Position x Pronoun

Hypothesis

The Speaker in introduction
The Subject in introduction
Same results in Expt. 1
In the Preposed Position, shorter Reading time for Subject Gender Pronoun than for Speaker Gender Pronoun

Participants: 42 students (University of Paris III)

Results

Main effect: Shorter Reading time of Target sentence for Subject Gender Pronoun (F(1,188)=7,6, p=0.007)

Interaction

Longer Reading in Inserted Position x Speaker Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F(1,252)=4.3, p=0.04)

Interpretation

No effect of the Prominence manipulated factor
Possibly due to interaction between the meaning of the evidential PP and opinion verbs such as `appreciate`, `find`, `think`, `hope`, ... systematically used in Target sentences

Replacement of the opinion verbs of Target sentences by verbs describing the Subject’s action

EXPERIMENT 2

Same 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.)
P4: Les programmes comprennent des enseignements théoriques et des mises en situation.
(The syllabus includes theoretical knowledge and applied skills...)

Hypothesis

The Speaker in introduction
The Subject in introduction
Same results in Expt. 1
In the Preposed Position, shorter Reading time for Subject Gender Pronoun than for Speaker Gender Pronoun

Participants: 64 students (University of Paris III)

Results

Main effect: Shorter Reading time of Target sentence for Subject Gender Pronoun (F(1,15)=3,6, p=0.007)

Interaction

Longer Reading in Inserted Position x Speaker Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F(1,252)=4,3, p=0.04)

Interpretation

No effect of the Prominence manipulated factor
Possibly due to interaction between the meaning of the evidential PP and opinion verbs such as `appreciate`, `find`, `think`, `hope`, ... systematically used in Target sentences

Replacement of the opinion verbs of Target sentences by verbs describing the Subject’s action

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