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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 pronoun 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

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.’

P2 : ‘Selon Francine, l’agence de publicité de Vincent a trouvé un stage pour les étudiants.’

Hypothesis

Preposed Position x Subject’s Gender Pronoun

Quick Inside Frame Reading

Inserted Position x Speaker’s Gender Pronoun

Slow Outside Frame Reading

RESULTS

Main effect: Shorter Reading time for Target sentence for Subject’s Gender Pronoun (F1,23)=7, p=0.01

Interaction: Shorter Reading time for Inserted Position x Subject’s Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F1,23)=4.45, p=0.046

Interpretation

In Preposed Position ➔ no Reading time difference of Target sentence whatever the Pronoun

P1: ‘Elle apprécie le fait que la curriculum inclut un stage d’expérience...’

(He/She appreciates the fact that the curriculum includes a work experience....)

Legende X

Adaptation 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

EXPERIMENT 2

Same material with two introductory sentences added

P2 : ‘Selon Francine, Vincent a trouvé un stage dans une agence de publicité.’

P1 : ‘Selon Francine, l’agence de publicité de Vincent a trouvé un stage pour les étudiants.’

Hypothesis

The Speaker in introduction ➔ Same results in Expt. 1

The Subject in introduction ➔ In the Preposed Position, shorter Reading time for Subject Gender Pronoun than for Speaker Gender Pronoun

RESULTS

Main effect: Shorter Reading time for Target sentence for Subject Gender Pronoun (F1,188)=7.6, p<0.007

Interaction: Longer Reading for Inserted Position x Speaker Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F1,188)=4.3, p=0.04

No longer any Position x Pronoun Interaction

RESULTS

Main effect: Shuter Reading time for Target sentence for Subject Gender Pronoun (F1,23)=7, p=0.01

Interaction: Shorter Reading time for Inserted Position x Subject’s Gender Pronoun condition than for others (F1,23)=4.45, p=0.046

Interpretation

In Preposed Position ➔ no Reading time difference of Target sentence whatever the Pronoun

No other Test stimuli are replaced

P1: ‘Elle apprécie le fait que la curriculum inclut un stage d’expérience...’

(He/She appreciates the fact that the curriculum includes a work experience....)

EXPERIMENT 3

Subject sentences of Expt. 2 stimuli are replaced

P1 : ‘Selon Francine, Vincent a trouvé un stage dans une agence de publicité.’

P2 : ‘L’agence de publicité de Vincent a trouvé un stage pour les étudiants.’

Hypothesis

The Speaker in introduction ➔ Same results in Expt. 1

The Subject in introduction ➔ In the Preposed Position, shorter Reading time for Subject Gender Pronoun than for Speaker Gender Pronoun

RESULTS

Main effect: As previously (F1,174)=16, p=0.001

No longer any Position x Pronoun Interaction (F1,188)=0.65, p=0.43

Prominence x Pronoun Interaction

Longer Reading for Subject in introduction x Speaker Gender Pronoun condition (F1,188)=6.96, p<0.01

No other Test stimuli are replaced

P2: ‘Elle apprécie le fait que la curriculum inclut un stage d’expérience...’

(He/She appreciates the fact that the curriculum includes a work experience....)

Bibliographie


Gernsbacher et al. (1989) presented at AMLaP 2011, Paris, France

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