Locality & Discourse Constraints in Reflexive Resolution

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Reflexive Resolution

• The extent to which the locality constraint on reflexives is violated during processing is debated (e.g. Dillon et al., 2013; Patiñ et al., 2016, Sturt, 2003)

1 John said that Bill hurt himself.

• The conditions under which nonlocal antecedents are considered are debated (Parker & Phillips, 2017; Patiñ et al., 2016; Sloggett & Dillon, AMLAP 2016)

• One factor that may influence processing is point of view (Kaiser et al., 2009; Kuno, 1987; Sloggett & Dillon, AMLAP 2016)

2a Mary told John about the picture of himself.

2b Mary heard from John about the picture of himself

Clause Structure and Reflexives

• Existing studies tested contexts where the local antecedent and reflexive are in the same clause (e.g. Cunnings & Sturt, 2014)

3a John said that [Bill hurt himself]

3b John said that [Bill had a picture of himself]

• How reflexives with no clausemate antecedent are processed has not been examined

4 John said that Bill heard that [there was a picture of himself]

The Current Study

• We investigated how locality and discourse interact when a reflexive has no clausemate antecedent

• In Experiment 1 (N = 32), the nonlocal antecedent was a source of information (‘John/Jane said…’)

• In Experiment 2 (n = 48), the local antecedent (‘David/Diane said…’) was the source

(1a) Local Match, Nonlocal Match

John said (heard) that David heard (said) that there was a picture of himself just over near the old fireplace.

(1b) Local Match, Nonlocal Mismatch

Jane said (heard) that David said (said) that there was a picture of himself just over near the old fireplace.

(2a) Local Mismatch, Nonlocal Match

John said (heard) that Diane heard (said) that there was a picture of himself just over near the old fireplace.

(2b) Local Mismatch, Nonlocal Mismatch

Jane said (heard) that Diane heard (said) that there was a picture of himself just over near the old fireplace.

Summary

• Results suggest both local and nonlocal antecedents were retrieved based on their gender match with the reflexive

• Some evidence of stronger local antecedent preference when it was a source of information (Exp. 2)

Conclusions

• Reflexives with no clausemate antecedent readily cue retrieval of both local and nonlocal antecedents

• At least when a reflexive has no clausemate, antecedent retrieval is guided by locality and discourse constraints

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