Not so great expectations

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Human speaking and understanding are generally robust and successful, but selective vulnerabilities provide clues to the mechanisms that ensure success. We have examined a number of "linguistic illusions" as model systems for understanding comprehension and production mechanisms, using a combination of cognitive, neural, and computational approaches. A routine finding from our human experimentation is that illusions are even more selective than we expected. They depend on rather specific linguistic and temporal properties. This talk explores a series of situations where words are more expected than they ought to be, and the shared mechanisms that could be responsible for these unwarranted expectations. Specific cases include syntactic context effects, negative polarity illusions, role reversals, and Moses illusions.