

Pragmatic versus Form-based Accounts of Referential Contrast: Evidence for Effects of Informativity Expectations

Julie C. Sedivy

March 08 2006

- model-theoretic approaches to linguistic meaning, which attempt to formally characterize the relationship between structural aspects of language and a representation of its meaning in terms of information conveyed about properties and relations of entities instantiated in an abstract model of the world (for an extensive introduction, see Dowty et al., 1981).
- discourse context typically focused on information that is linguistically instantiated in a discourse context preceding some target sentence and have measured the impact of this contextual information on the reading time of sentences that are syntactically ambiguous at some point in the sentence.
- highly incremental interpretation occurs in a highly incremental fashion in time and that on-line language processing is highly sensitive to specific properties of the model against which the linguistic input is being interpreted.
- mapping before offset mapping of referential expressions to a visual model is initiated on the basis of extremely partial information, beginning well before the offset of the referring word,
- information effects are seen from lexical frequency (Dahan et al., 2001), prosodic information (Dahan et al., 2000; Sedivy et al., 1995), verb-based semantic constraints
- Presupposition a varied set of linguistic expressions which signal that certain information is assumed to be taken for granted and backgrounded in a discourse

model. presuppositions can be lexical (know vs believe) or constructional (clefts) Presuppositions are typically not cancellable; though they can be accommodated into a context in which the presupposition has not previously been entered into the discourse, the discourse sounds anomalous if accommodation of the presuppositional material is inconsistent with the previous discourse.

1 Temporaly ambiguous sentences with modified noun phrases

2 Postnominal Modifiers

Some researchers claim modifier phrases are used to distinguish when there are multiple entities denoted by the head noun.

3 Focus Operators

The semantic effect of focus in the sentence above is to ensure that beyond simply asserting that John smokes cigars, the sentence also establishes a distinction between John and an implicit, contrasting set of individuals and asserts that none of these individuals smokes cigars.

The presence of a focus operator dramatically reduced the difficulty normally associated with temporarily ambiguous reduced relative clauses.

difficulty reemerged when subjects were presented with a prenominal modifier such as 'wealthy' in Only wealthy businessmen loaned money at low interest were told to record their expenses, Suggesting that when the prenominal modifier offered an opportunity for setting up a contrast set

- (1)
 - a. All of the secretaries and accountants were made to take a tough computing course.
 - b. All of the secretaries in the company were made to take a tough computing course.
- (2) Target sentence:
- (3) Only the secretaries prepared for the exam and earned significant pay raises.

- (4) Only the secretaries prepared for the exam passed and earned pay raises.

similar manipulations of contrast involving sentences that were not marked for focus did not show any contextually based effects.

4 Intonational Focus

contrastive focus can appear in a sentence in the absence of an explicit focus operator. Typically, contrastive focus is marked intonationally by a L+H* accent

while a contrast set may be evoked, the relationship between the focused and contrasting entities is not explicit and may be determined by context. For instance, uttering the sentence JOHN smokes cigars may convey a correction of someones mistaken assertion that someone else smokes cigars, call attention to Johns smoking habits relative to other entities, or express a contrast in knowledge pertaining to other individuals versus John (e.g., as in I dont know whether anyone else likes cigars, but JOHN smokes cigars)

5 Adjectival Modifiers

6 A linguistically mediated versus pragmatically inferential account of referential contrast

7 Conclusions and Further Questions