Rethinking overinformativeness: redundant use of modifiers in referring expressions

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Abstract

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1 Introduction

Referring is one of the most basic and prevalent uses of language, so we're probably pretty good at it. What does 'being good at it' mean? Generally, trying to abide by Gricean maxims, including: be as informative as possible but not more informative than necessary. For the past 40 years, researchers have been noticing that speakers don't seem to abide by the second part of that in their production of referring expressions: they often include modifiers that aren't necessary for uniquely determining reference. This has posed a challenge for rational accounts of language use (including the Gricean one): what accounts for this extra expenditure of useless effort on the speaker's part? Is it just that speakers aren't economical after all? Or is there some utility in being redundant?

introduce the general issue: content selection, grice, the term 'overinformativeness'

1.1 Asymmetry in redundant use of color and size adjectives

1.2 Number of distractors

1.3 Scene variation

1.4 Color typicality

1.5 Summary

insert table here

2 Modeling speakers' choice of referring expression

introduce the basic model and show why it doesn't get overinformative

Effect	Description	Reported by
Color/size asymmetry	More redundant use of color adjectives than size adjectives	Pechmann (1989); Engelhardt, Bailey, and Ferreira (2006); Gatt, van Gompel, Krahmer, and van Deemter (2011) others
Number of distractors	More redundant use of color with increasing number of distractors	?? deutsch
Scene variation	More redundant use of color with increasing scene variation	Davies and Katsos (2009); Koolen, Goudbeek, and Krahmer (2013)
Color typicality	More redundant use of color with decreasing color typicality	Sedivy (2003); Westerbeek, Koolen, and Maes (2014)

2.1 Extending the basic model with noisy truth functions

show the model extension and the predictions it makes for the basic color/size asymmetry. report our replication of gatt?

2.2 Number of distractors

show the model's predictions for varying number of distractors. show how those predictions vary as a function of the type of distractors – novel! report experiment! (to be done)

2.3 Scene variation

show model predictions for koolen et al scenes – qualitative effect

2.4 Color typicality

set up model extension to get color typicality effect (or will you end up reporting this model from the start?)

3 General Discussion

References

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