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Demanding an Explanation: Implicit Causality Biases in Discourse Interpretation

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Abstract

Problem: Previous passage-completion studies report strong biases regarding who will be mentioned next following implicit causality (IC) verbs with a ‘because’ prompt. However, these biases are reduced/eliminated with a full-stop prompt.

(1) a. John scolded Mary because __________________ . [strong bias to Mary]
   b. John scolded Mary. __________________________ . [mixed biases]

Proposal: In light of recent results showing two types of coherence-driven expectations in previous interpretation, we compare responses to contexts like (1a-b). We predict that IC biases depend both on expectations about upcoming continuation types (P(Coherence)) and on biases for which event participant will be mentioned again conditioned on continuation type (P(Referent | Coherence)).

Results: By categorizing responses by coherence relation, we localize the previously reported IC bias to Explanation relations. We find an additional IC bias concerning P(Explanation). This bias has gone unnoticed because previous work has not categorized responses by coherence.

Materials: 40 IC verbs (20 IC-1, 20 IC-2) and 40 Non-IC verbs

Method: judges annotated for next mention & coherence relation

Findings: IC-1: IC verbs yield more Explanation continuations than do Non-IC verbs (F(1,19)=1.2235; p<0.2825.)

IC-2: IC verbs create an expectation regarding the direction the discourse is likely to take – specifically a bias towards an upcoming Explanation

Conclusions: Like Rohde et al.'s results, overall statistics conceal a consistent system of stronger biases once coherence relations are conditioned on. In contrast to previous results:

- Connective alone does not affect referent salience – mediated by coherence
- There are actually two strong biases that differentiate IC and Non-IC verbs: P(CR = Explanation) is high for IC-1 and IC-2

References


References

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