Locality & Discourse Constraints in Reflexive Resolution

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Relexive Resolution

- The extent to which the locality constraint on reflexives is violated during processing is debated (e.g. Dillon et al., 2013; Patul 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; Patul et al., 2016; Sturgell & Dillon, AMLAP 2016).

- One factor that may influence processing is point of view (Kaiser et al., 2009; Kuno, 1987; Sturgell & 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.

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.