

The role of early linguistic cues in the recent event preference

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Recently-seen events have an intriguing influence on gaze patterns during spoken sentence comprehension: When participants see an action event and then listen to a related sentence (NP1-Verb-Adv-NP2), they systematically prefer to inspect targets of recent events over a plausible future-event targets, regardless of tense information. In these studies (conducted in German), future tense was expressed via a present-tense verb and a future-oriented adverb.

The current experiment ($N=32$) assessed whether the recent-event preference occurs in similarly-structured English sentences containing more localized tense markers (auxiliary verbs: will/has). Question/Statement syntax was also varied to assess the effect of having sentence-initial tense cues (Aux-NP1...). The frequency of referring to recent/future events and the occurrence of future/past tense was counterbalanced.

Consistent with earlier findings, listeners preferred to inspect recent-event targets in the Statement sentences occur until the middle of the NP2, irrespective of tense. Strikingly, although there was a measurable decrease in attention towards recent-event targets at the end of adverb region in Question sentences (showing an effect of the earlier linguistic cues) the overall recent event preference was still found. The results are discussed in relation to robustness of the recent event preference.