Investigating linguistic representations in the structural priming paradigm: The case of adjuncts

Introduction

Structural priming

Branigan and Pickering (2017) claim that structural priming (Bock, 1986) may become a source of evidence about linguistic representations, thereby replacing introspective judgments.

... of adjuncts

The representation of adjuncts is controversial (Hole 2015). Attested priming effects might be due to form similarity (PPs) and/or to proto-role similarity (proto-recipient):

- Beneficiary PPs (vs. NPs) prime recipient PPs (vs. NPs) (Bock 1989; Pappert & Pechmann 2013).
- Inanimate goal PPs prime animate recipient PPs (vs. NPs) (Pappert, Baumann, & Pechmann, 2012).

Method

Samples per experiment

48 native speakers of German responded to 24 items.

Sentence generation paradigm (Pappert & Pechmann, 2013) ... allowed us to control lexical materials.

Exp. 1: Temporal vs. beneficiary PPs

Materials

4 prime conditions, with/out PP vs. dative adjunct:

- Temporal Der Zirkusdirektor öffnet den Vorhang für zehn Sekunden.
- Beneficiary Der Zirkusdirektor öffnet den Vorhang für den Clown.
- Beneficiary Der Zirkusdirektor öffnet dem Clown den Vorhang.
- Native theNom mechaniker hilft dem Lehrling dem ganzen Sommer.
- Control Der Zirkusdirektor öffnet den Vorhang.

Results (% beneficiary PP vs. den dat responses)

Targets with benefilterive alternating between PP and dative

Results (% theme MF-final vs. MF-initial responses)

Targets with theme and non-alternating dative recipient

Discussion

Role dissimilarity (temporal vs. beneficiary) hinders priming. Parallels in phrase structure (PPs) are not sufficient to elicit priming.

General discussion

The outcome of Experiment 1 favours the proto-role approach. In Experiment 2, form similarity (case) turns out to be crucial (even though it does not seem to be a necessary condition of structural persistence, cf. Pappert & Pechmann, 2014).

Conclusions

Does this pattern of results justify the conclusion that there are differences in semantic or syntactic representations?

The identification of linguistic representations involved in structural persistence is not easy.

References


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