

Composing Indeterminate Event Information In Context: Evidence from an Eye-Tracking Memory Paradigm

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Abstract

A sentence such as "We finished the paper" is indeterminate regarding what we finished doing with the paper. These sentences constitute a test case for two major issues regarding the nature of language comprehension: (1) whether or not semantic composition is simple (classical) or enriched with intended or implicit constituents; and (2) the nature of the linguistic and cognitive resources that help us interpret the event the sentence conveys. We conducted an eye-tracking study to investigate whether indeterminate sentences embedded within biasing contexts would trigger event interpretations, using a long-term memory paradigm. In each trial, participants were presented with one of three recognition probe types for reading while having their eyes monitored. Recognition probes were presented 0 seconds (s) after having read the indeterminate sentence, or following an additional 25s of neutral discourse. Results suggest that abductive processes, relying on the propositional content of supporting context, drive indeterminate sentence interpretation.