
Selecting contextually relevant alternatives during comprehension

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Abstract

Prior research connecting alternative semantics and language processing has proposed a two-stage model under which the alternative set is derived from the set of semantic associates primed by processing an element in focus. This neglects the empirical fact that the semantic associates of foci are not always a superset of the contextually relevant alternatives. We test contextually relevant non-associate alternatives in an online cross-modal probe recognition task and find that both associate and non-associate alternatives receive an advantage in recognition speed over non-associate non-alternatives present in the discourse. This shared advantage appears to be incompatible with the popular two-stage model.

Keywords: focus, alternatives, discourse processing, probe recognition

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