
Negative islands do not block active gap filling

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Abstract

Comprehenders respect strong wh-island constraints when actively positing gaps for displaced phrases, rapidly using syntactic constraints to avoid positing illicit dependencies in real-time. Negative islands also constrain certain wh-dependencies that violate Dayal's (1996) maximal informativity presupposition on questions, i.e., answer sets contain a true answer entailing all other true answers. Three studies (offline acceptability, self-paced reading, eyetracking-while-reading) investigated whether negative islands are as effective as wh-islands at blocking illicit gaps. Comprehenders were sensitive to negative island constraints offline, but unable to use them to block real-time active dependency formation, suggesting that, unlike wh-islands, negative island constraints take time to emerge.

Keywords: negative islands, presuppositional constraint, self paced reading, eye tracking

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