

Grammatical structure and Discourse topics

Eva Klingvall & Fredrik Heinat

Lund University & Linnaeus University

eva.klingvall@englund.lu.se & fredrik.heinat@lnu.se

We discuss how grammatical structure affects discourse salience patterns. In three sentence completion experiments, we investigated what discourse referent participants selected as discourse topic when they wrote a continuation of a sentence involving a negative, quantified expression (e.g. *inte många*, *inte alla* ‘not many’, ‘not all’). For negative quantifying expressions, both the set of entities for which some property is true, the REFERENCE SET, and the set of entities for which the property is *not* true, the complement set, are available for anaphoric reference. However, at least in English, speakers prefer to refer back to the COMPLEMENT SET (e.g. Moxey and Sanford, 1987; Sanford et al., 2007):

- (1) Not many kids were outside in the morning.
- a. They were building a snow castle. REFSET
 - b. They stayed inside instead. COMPSET

In Experiments 1-2, participants read the sentence in (2a), prompting them to write a continuation with a noun-phrase subject, while in Experiment 3, participants read the sentence in (2b), prompting them to write a continuation with a clausal subject.

- (2) a. QE föräldrar var på klassmötet igår **och de ...**
‘QE parents were in the school meeting yesterday and they/the/those ...’
- b. QE föräldrar var på klassmötet igår **och att de ...**
‘QE parents were in the class meeting yesterday and that they/the/those ...’

We assumed that referent salience would play a role, such that (i) the discourse referent that was most salient from a speaker perspective would be selected as discourse topic in the continuation, and (ii) the linguistic form of the anaphoric expression would reflect the salience of the referent from the hearer perspective (e.g. Ariel, 1990; Gundel et al., 1993). Hearer and speaker salience have been argued to rely on different information structural properties (e.g. Chiarcos, 2010; Molnár and Vinckel-Roisin, 2019).

In Experiments 1-2, the form of the anaphor indicated that the complement set was the most hearer salient set but it was the referent set that was selected in the continuation, hence most speaker-salient. In Experiment 3, the complement set was the most salient set from both perspectives. Thus, speaker salience patterns are also dependent on whether the subject of the continuation is an entity or a proposition. We conclude that anaphoric reference to quantified expressions is more complex than previously shown: the syntactic context of the anaphoric expression plays a major role in determining the anaphor’s antecedent.

References:

- Ariel, Mira. 1990. *Accessing noun-phrase antecedents*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Chiarcos, Christian. 2010. Mental salience and grammatical form. Toward a framework for salience in natural language generation. Ph.d. thesis, University of Potsdam, Potsdam.
- Gundel, Jeanette K., Nancy Hedberg, and Ron Zacharski. 1993. Cognitive status and the form of referring expressions in discourse. *Language* 69:274–307.

- Molnár, Valéria, and Hélène Vinckel-Roisin. 2019. Discourse topic vs. sentence topic. Exploiting the right periphery of German verb-second sentences. In *Architecture of topic*, ed. Valéria Molnár, Verner Egerland, and Susanne Winkler, 293–333. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Moxey, Linda M., and Anthony J. Sanford. 1987. Quantifiers and focus. *Journal of Semantics* 5:189–206.
- Sanford, Anthony J., Eugene J. Dawydiak, and Linda M. Moxey. 2007. A unified account of quantifier perspective effects in discourse. *Discourse Processes* 44:1–32.