

Facts about referents as conversational precedents

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Previous studies have shown that if a speaker sets a conversational precedent with one referring label then breaks this precedent by using another, comprehension is delayed for their partner (see Metzging & Brennan, 2003). If a new speaker uses a new label, however, there is no disruption in comprehension, lending support to the notion of 'conceptual pacts' between interlocutors. Kronmüller & Barr's (2007) 'recovery from pre-emption' hypothesis suggests that this is predicated on the same mechanism underpinning the mutual exclusivity bias in child language learners; speakers expect partners to use old labels to refer to old referents, and new labels to refer to new referents. This was shown by Kronmüller & Barr to operate at the conversational level using word labels as conversational precedents. I present results from a reaction-time study of conversational precedent comprehension, using speaker-specific facts about referents as referring expressions. Precedents were either maintained or broken by old or new speakers. Latency measures show an interaction of Precedent and Speaker with a main effect of Precedent, offering support to the 'recovery from pre-emption' hypothesis despite failing to fully replicate Kronmüller & Barr's (2007) finding. Additionally, a referent selection measure indicates that further investigation is required.

References

Kronmüller, E. & Barr, D.J. (2007) Perspective-free pragmatics: Broken precedents and the recovery-from-preemption hypothesis. *Journal of Memory and Language* 56, 436-455

Metzging, C. & Brennan, S. E. (2003) When conceptual pacts are broken: Partner-specific effects in the comprehension of referring expressions. *Journal of Memory and Language* 49, 201-213.