Processing ellipsis: New insights and new challenges

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Ellipsis has received much attention in the formal literature, leading to a number of competing proposals about the representation of the ellipsis site and its antecedent. However, relatively little is known about how speakers resolve antecedent-ellipsis dependencies during real-time language processing. In this talk, I present two case studies that combine experimental and computational methods to investigate the processing of VP-ellipsis. In the first case study, I use similarity-based interference effects to diagnose how we encode and access an antecedent for VP-ellipsis, revealing a surprising contrast between active and passive ellipsis (Parker, 2022). In the second study, I revisit the use of complexity effects as a test for structure at the ellipsis site (e.g., Frazier & Clifton, 2001, 2005; Martin & McElree, 2008) and argue that we need an explicit theory about the link between the underlying cognitive architecture and real-time structure-building operations to appropriately diagnose the content of the ellipsis site. Together, the findings from these studies provide a more nuanced understanding of how speakers build and interpret antecedent-ellipsis dependencies during moment-by-moment processing.

References

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