

Memory Retrieval and Implicit Prosody during Reading: Anaphora Resolution by L1 and L2 Speakers of English

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Abstract : The present study examined structural and prosodic factors on the computation of antecedent-reflexive relationships and sentence comprehension in native English (L1) and Vietnamese-English bilinguals (L2). Participants read sentences presented on the computer screen in one of three presentation formats aimed at manipulating prosodic parsing: word-by-word (RSVP), phrase-segment (self-paced), or whole-sentence (self-paced), then completed a grammaticality rating and a comprehension task (following Pratt & Fernandez, 2016). The design crossed three factors: syntactic structure (simple; complex), grammaticality (target-match; target-mismatch) and presentation format. An example item is provided in (1): (1) The actress that (Mary/John) interviewed at the awards ceremony (about two years ago/organized outside the theater) described (herself/himself) as an extreme workaholic). Results showed that overall, both L1 and L2 speakers made use of a good-enough processing strategy at the expense of more detailed syntactic analyses. L1 and L2 speakers' comprehension and grammaticality judgements were negatively affected by the most prosodically disrupting condition (word-by-word). However, the two groups demonstrated differences in their performance in the other two reading conditions. For L1 speakers, the whole-sentence and the phrase-segment formats were both facilitative in the grammaticality rating and comprehension tasks; for L2, compared with the whole-sentence condition, the phrase-segment paradigm did not significantly improve accuracy or comprehension. These findings are consistent with the findings of Pratt & Fernandez (2016), who found a similar pattern of results in the processing of subject-verb agreement relations using the same experimental paradigm and prosodic manipulation with English L1 and L2 English-Spanish speakers. The results provide further support for a Good-Enough cue model of sentence processing that integrates cue-based retrieval and implicit prosodic parsing (Pratt & Fernandez, 2016) and highlights similarities and differences between L1 and L2 sentence processing and comprehension.

Keywords : anaphora resolution, bilingualism, implicit prosody, sentence processing

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