An ERP Study of Chinese Pseudo-Object Structures

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Abstract : Verb-argument relation is a very important aspect of syntax-semantics interaction in sentence processing. Previous ERP (event related potentials) studies in this field mainly concentrated on the relation between the verb and its core arguments. The present study aims to reveal the ERP pattern of Chinese pseudo-object structures (SOSs), in which a peripheral argument is promoted to occupy the position of the patient object, as compared with the patient object structures (POSs). The ERP data were collected when participants were asked to perform acceptability judgments about Chinese phrases. Our result shows that, similar to the previous studies of number-of-argument violations, Chinese SOSs show a bilaterally distributed N400 effect. But different from all the previous studies of verb-argument relations, Chinese SOSs demonstrate a sustained anterior positivity (SAP). This SAP, which is the first report related to complexity of argument structure operation, reflects the integration difficulty of the newly promoted arguments and the progressive nature of well-formedness checking in the processing of Chinese SOSs.

Keywords : Chinese pseudo-object structures, ERP, sustained anterior positivity, verb-argument relation
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