The role of discourse-level expectations in non-native speakers’ referential choices
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We know (from the L2 literature)
- Pronoun interpretation and choice is a domain of persistent differences between native and non-native speakers (e.g., Sagae, 2011; Roberts et al., 2008).
- A popular account—the Interface Hypothesis—attributes these differences to (1) pronouns being a linguistic property at the syntax-discourse interface, and (2) bilingual processing being less efficient (Sagae, 2011).

We aim to
- identify the specific processing decisions responsible for these differences;
- provide an explicit account of which processes are less successfully employed by bilinguals.

We know (from the psycholinguistics literature)
- Native language processing, in children and adults, involves not only information integration, but also anticipation/prediction/expectation (e.g., Ahrens & Kornil, 1999; Brooks et al., 2012; De Long et al., 2006).
- Non-native speakers engage in predictive processing less strongly—at the lexical, morphosyntactic, and syntactic level (e.g., Grütter et al., 2012; Kwon et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2013).

We expect the same to be true at the discourse level.
- If so, pronoun interpretation and choice will be affected.

We propose
- Non-native speakers have reduced ability to generate expectations.
- RAGE is a critical contributor to native-nonnative differences in reference processing.

The RAGE hypothesis is supported by recent studies of lexical, morphosyntactic and syntactic L2 processing. Here we present evidence from discourse-level processing.

I. Knowledge-of-Aspect Task

Participants read descriptions of complete vs. incomplete events, and then gave truth-value judgments on sentences like (1) adapted from Grütter, 2009.

(1) Patrick is giving a towel to Ron.

\[ \text{FALSE after Ron has received the towel.} \]

II. Written Story Continuations

Participants read descriptions of complete vs. incomplete events, and then gave truth-value judgments on sentences like (1) adapted from Grütter, 2009.

(1) Patrick gave/ was giving a towel to Ron. He __ (pronoun prompt) __ (free prompt)

We did not provide any feedback at this point.

The towel was still warm from the drying machine.

Participants answered multiple-choice questions like (1) after reading a complete event with a gap.

(1) John really wanted Bob to have it.

\[ \text{He really wanted Bob to have it.} \]

We did not provide any feedback at this point.

The towel was still warm from the drying machine.

Conclusions

- The RAGE hypothesis is supported for discourse-level processing.
- L2ers made appropriate form (pronoun/name) choices (Fig. 3), and showed native-like sensitivity to the prompt manipulation (pronoun/free, Fig. 2), however, their referent choices were less affected by event-structure cues in the previous sentence than those of L1ers (Fig. 2).
- L2ers refer reflexively updated expectations about where a discourse is going (e.g., Aronoff, 2009), while form-related choices are made at the point the forms are used.
- A critical difference between L1 and L2 processing may thus lie in the point at which referential choices are made: native speakers’ choices are influenced by proactive expectations about next mention, while non-native speakers’ choices reflect reactive decisions at the point they are forced to make them, strongly guided by the most recently received information.

References