3. Our Experiment

Distinguishing Thematic Role and Event Structure Biases

Stimuli
Hold thematic roles constant, but alter event structure
- **Perfective**: John handed a book to Bob. He...  (2)
  - completed event
  - compatible with end-state focus
- **Imperfective**: John was handing a book to Bob. He...  (3)
  - ongoing event
  - incompatible with end-state focus

Predictions
- Thematic Role Preference → Goal preference for (2) and (3)
- Event Structure Hypothesis → More Source interpretations for (3)

Methodology
- 21 stimuli: transfer-of-possession Source-Goal context sentence followed by ambiguous pronoun prompt
- For each verb, 48 participants saw perfection or imperfective
- 2 trained judges assessed intended pronoun interpretation
- 29 distractors

Results Show Effect of Coherence

Discourse Semantics
Kehler (2002): pronoun interpretation is a side effect of the inference processes used to establish coherence
(4) Miriam sent a fruitcake to Rachel. She didn’t want to eat it.

Coherence Definitions
- **Explanation Relation**: infer P from the assertion of S and Q from the assertion of S_i, where normally Q=S
- **Parallell**: infer a common or contrasting relation between S_i, S, and Q from sentence S_i, for entities a and infer p(b_i, b), for sentence S, for all i.
- **Occasion**: infer a change of state for a system of entities in sentence S_i, establishing the initial state for this system from the final state of sentence S_i.

5. More Results

Results: Goal ~ Occasion

Post-hoc judges evaluated coherence

6. Conclusions

Importance of Event Structure and Discourse Coherence

- Thematic-role-level Goal bias is a side effect of deeper event structure biases.
- Event structure bias is associated with only certain types of coherence relations.
- We argue that pronoun interpretation must be addressed within a broader theory of event structure and discourse comprehension rather than by appeal to superficial heuristics.

References

Contact: hannah@ling.ucsd.edu