Mapping Prosody to Reference in L2

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How does CONTRASTIVE INTONATION/PROSODY affect native and non-native speakers’ interpretation of ambiguous pronouns?

Background & Motivation

• Contrastive intonation/prosody affects native-speaker processing, although its precise role in the interpretation of pronouns has received limited attention.

(1) ...noticed a paramedic/PÄRÄMEDIC calling the CAPTAIN/captain... Later Wendy bumped into him. (Balogh, 2003)

(2) John hit Bill and then George hit HIM. (Kehler et al., 2008)

• Pronoun interpretation is challenging in L2.

This has been attributed to the need to integrate information from multiple domains.

(e.g., Roberts et al., 2008; Sorace, 2011)

Previous work has shown a reduced effect of event structure, marked by grammatical aspect, on L2 speakers’ reference choices. (See below)

The role of prosody in L2 pronoun resolution has not been investigated.

Our goals:

• Test how contrastive intonation on potential antecedents (Exp1) and pronouns (Exp2) affects L1 and L2 speakers’ reference choices.

• Compare effects of contrastive intonation and grammatical aspect.

Predictions:

IF prosody is generally challenging in L2, we expect L1-L2 differences in both Exp1 and Exp2. (NB: same L+H* L-H% contour in both experiments)

IF integrating information from multiple domains is generally challenging in L2, we expect L1-L2 differences in both Exp1 and Exp2.

IF L2 speakers’ ability to use prosodic information depends on the complexity of the mappings (L1 -> L2; prosody -> reference), we expect greater L1-L2 differences in Exp2 compared to Exp1.

Event structure and pronoun interpretation in L1 & L2

(3) Emily_brought was bringing a drink to Melissa_oat She _____.

L1 speakers of English write more continuations with ‘she’ -> Sources following imperfective vs perfective aspect (Kehler et al., 2008). This is not the case for L1-Japanese/Korean learners of English (Grüter et al., 2014), in press, even though (i) they reliably associate perfective/imperfective with completed/incomplete events in an independent task, (ii) aspect affects their choice of coherence relation in the continuation, and (iii) Japanese and Korean speakers show the same effect of aspect in their L1s (Ueno & Kehler, 2010; Kim et al., 2013).

Conclusions

• L2ers’ show significant use of contrastive intonation on antecedents (Exp1), but not pronouns (Exp2) to determine pronoun reference.

• L2ers’ success in using prosody may depend on the number, complexity and timing of steps required to make the relevant mappings:

Exp1: L+H* on reference -> referent is salient -> select as antecedent
Exp2: L+H* on pronoun -> establish set of potential antecedents -> identify most salient member of set -> select other member of set as antecedent

Acknowledgments: Many thanks to Amanda Blake, Amber Camp, Bonnie Fox, Victoria Lee, Ivane Matison, Eric Stangel, and Anna Tovar for assistance with data collection, annotation, and preparation of this poster. This research is supported by the National Science Foundation (BCS-1251545 to T G Scherer A Schafer).