Argument Linearization in Dutch: a multifactorial phenomenon
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For all verb types: SO > OS

Investigating the influence of structural subject-first and conceptual animate-first preferences on the one hand, and differences in thematic role assignment on the other hand on argument realization in Dutch sentence comprehension and production.

Goal

Three types of verbs: different thematic roles

Different verb characteristics are given in Table 1. Selectional restrictions and the possibility to passivize are given in the first column; theta roles and example sentences in the second column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb type (selectional restrictions)</th>
<th>Proto-Agent before Proto-Patient</th>
<th>Subject First</th>
<th>Animate First</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agentive (animate S)</td>
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<td>Causative psych (animate O)</td>
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<td>Unaccusative psych (animate O)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
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Table 1: Different verb characteristics

Conclusions

Argument linearization in Dutch is determined by the interplay of three linear preferences:
- Subject-first: all studies show that SO-sentences are most frequently produced for all verb types, and the preferred structure for all verb types in comprehension.
- Animate-first: More passives and OS structures for verbs requiring an animate object (production study). Producing and interpreting OS-sentences becomes easier if the initial argument is animate (psych verbs) in comparison with SO-sentences starting with an inanimate argument (agentive verbs).
- Proto-agent before proto-patient: if a proto-patient precedes a proto-agent, processing becomes more difficult (comprehension study 1,2,3).

Sentences in which all three preferences are fulfilled are most frequently produced and easiest to process; structures in which they are violated are less preferred and more marked, although corpus data suggest that immediate context plays a role as well.

References
