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Thematic Roles Assigned along the Garden Path Linger â⁻†

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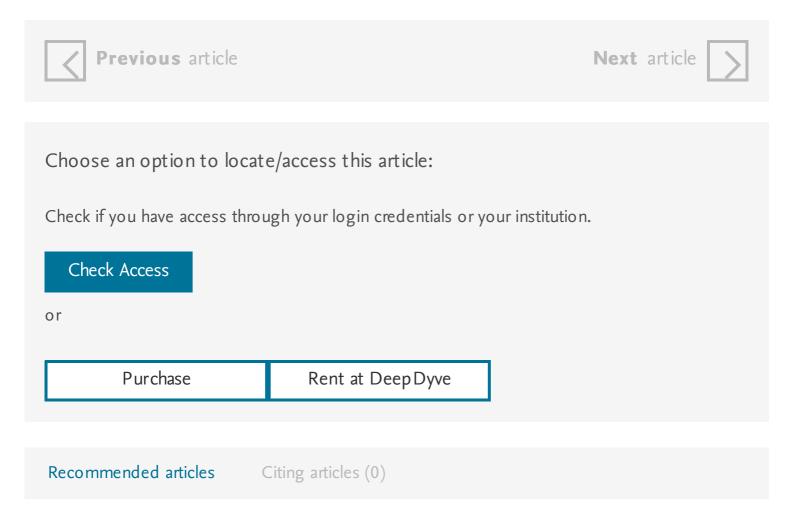
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Abstract

In the literature dealing with the reanalysis of garden path sentences such as *While the man hunted the deer ran into the woods*, it is generally assumed either that people completely repair their initial incorrect syntactic representations to yield a final interpretation whose syntactic structure is fully consistent with the input string or that the parse fails. In a series of five experiments, we explored the possibility that partial reanalyses take place. Specifically, we examined the conditions under which part of the initial incorrect analysis persists at the same time that part of the correct final analysis is constructed. In Experiments 1a and 1b, we found that both the length of the ambiguous region and the plausibility of the ultimate interpretation affected the likelihood that such sentences would be fully reanalyzed. In Experiment 2, we compared garden path sentences with non-garden path sentences and compared performance on two different types of comprehension questions. In Experiments 3a and 3b, we constructed garden

path sentences using a small class of syntactically unique verbs to provide converging evidence against the position that people employ some sort of "general reasoning†or pragmatic inference when faced with syntactically difficult garden paths. The results from these experiments indicate that reanalysis of such sentences is not always complete, so that comprehenders often derive an interpretation for the full sentence in which part of the initial misanalysis persists. We conclude that the goal of language processing is not always to create an idealized structure, but rather to create a representation that is "good enough†to satisfy the comprehender that an appropriate interpretation has been obtained.



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