Forward vs. Backward Processing of Subject-Verb Agreement in Comprehension

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One hundred tokens from each of 3-4 different locations counted in each corpus for each verb.

No head-local noun mismatch effect in whole-sentence reading times.


Counts obtained from text corpora to determine marking biases for modal verbs.

— Singular-marked verbs (e.g., must, may, could, will) are number-marked. (e.g., modals) might be associated with a lexically-represented probability of being singular versus plural, which would influence agreement-checking.

Mean 72 56 73 67
Must 53 39 50 47
Could 74 71 75 73
Will 72 62 70 68
Wald 74 71 75 73
Forward-checking: Features processed during parser’s forward movement through a sentence. How are number agreement features tracked during comprehension?

The author of the speech will be well rewarded.

Singular-biased modals: Singular subject NPs are more compatible than plural subject NPs, because singular verb features are more likely.

Equibiased modals: Singular and plural subject NPs are equally compatible, because singular and plural verb features are equally likely.

Singular marked verbs (e.g., modals) are more compatible than plural marked verbs, because singular verb features are more likely.

Effect of marking bias on non-overtly-marked verbs during normal comprehension is not compatible with backsliding theory.

REFERENCE:


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