

Psych verbs as a perspectivization phenomenon

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Psych verbs have attracted a lot of investigation in theoretical syntax for their peculiarities with respect to word order and binding (see, e.g., Pesetsky, 1990; Landau, 2010). A different strand of research in psycholinguistics has concentrated on the so-called “implicit causality” (IC) effect demonstrated in (1):

- (1) a. Peter fears Paul because he ...
- b. Peter frightens Paul because he ...

In the typical IC experiment, participants are presented with fragments of the form in (1) and asked to complete them; their completions show a strong preference to resolve the anaphor *he* to the stimulus argument (*Paul* in (1a), *Peter* in (1b)). This IC effect (which, interestingly, was first reported in an LI squib in 1974 by Garvey and Caramazza) has set off a downright avalanche of experimental studies in psycholinguistics and social psychology in the last 40 years (see Hartshorne, 2014, for an overview). Strangely, the psycholinguistic strand of research almost completely ignored the syntactic one, and vice versa. To our knowledge, a linguistic explanation of the IC effect—at least one worth its salt—is still missing.

In this talk, we want to propose a semantic account of the scope-taking behavior of experiencer arguments of psych predicates, and of subjects of attitude verbs in general, and show that this not only follows quite naturally from the syntactic data, but also provides us with the ingredients for an explanatory account of the IC effect.

References:

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