Extraction from Complex NP islands
An experimental perspective • Jake W. Vincent • LASC 2018

Main questions:
1. Does the parser form filler–gap dependencies across Complex NP island boundaries claimed to be more transparent?
2. What properties affect Complex NP island transparency?

1. Background

• Complex NP islands are claimed to be more transparent in certain contexts in both English [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] and other languages [6, 7]

More acceptable
(1) Isn’t she the woman who I’ve heard [a rumor Amerst wants to hire]?
(2) This is the highway that I actually know [someone who’s had an accident on it].

Less acceptable
(3) What did she discuss the [claim that he stole]?
(4) Mary bought the house that I work with the [person who rented last year].

• Properties associated with increased Complex NP island transparency:
  - Definiteness of containing DP
  - Indefinite DPs claimed to be more transparent [8, 9]
  - Presuppositionality of containing DP
  - DPs that are not existentially presupposed claimed to be more transparent [10, 7]
  - Information structural properties of extracted phrase
  - Extracted phrase = topic; Complex NP = comment [6]
  - Matrix clause content
  - Semantically minimal (e.g. copular) matrix clause content claimed to increase Complex NP island transparency [4, 7]

2. Experiment 1

Does definiteness alone modulate Complex NP transparency?

• Design: 2×2×2 acceptability judgment task, following [11]
  - Extraction length (SHORT, LONG)
  - Embedded clause (EC) type (NON-ISLAND, ISLAND)
  - Intervening DP definiteness (DEFINITE, INDEFINITE)

• Predictions: Indefinite embedding DPs will be rated higher than their definite counterparts (after considering cross–condition differences); conditions involving extraction from islands will be rated lowest (island constraint violation)

3. Experiment 2

Does DP position or presuppositionality modulate Complex NP transparency?

• Design: 3×2 acceptability judgment task
  - Intermediate subject type (THERE, INDEFINITE DP, DEFINITE DP)
  - Dependency type (MOVEMENT, ANAPHORIC)

• Predictions: In situ, non–existentially–presupposed DPs (there–insertion sentences) will be most transparent (and receive highest ratings after considering cross–condition differences)

Main findings:
1. Comprehenders have limited willingness to form movement dependencies across Complex NP island boundaries; 2. Either DP position, DP presuppositionality, or both increase island transparency; 3. (In)definiteness does not affect island transparency

References: