

Weak Cross-over and Informativity

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Wasow's (1972) dissertation introduced the distinction between weak and strong cross-over, and argued that both could be reduced to independently necessary conditions on binding. That analysis entailed that weak cross-over (WCO) examples should exhibit a range of acceptability, with judgments mirroring the variability of cataphoric pronouns. This prediction had never been systematically tested, despite the considerable literature on WCO in the intervening decades.

Recent experimental work by Sag, Hofmeister, Clausen, and others has shown that some island phenomena can be explained in terms of independently demonstrable processing constraints. In particular, they have shown that the informativity of the filler in filler-gap dependencies significantly affects judgments of acceptability. The notion of informativity relevant to this work is reminiscent of the factor Wasow had proposed as influencing the acceptability of WCO and cataphora.

Adapting the methods used in the island studies, we tested whether WCO and cataphora are similarly sensitive to informativity. The answer is a qualified "yes": some types of WCO examples are substantially improved when the antecedent is more informative, and informativity also affects judgments of cataphora. We present the results of three studies on the effects of informativity on judgments of examples exhibiting WCO and cataphora. Although more work needs to be done to explain why WCO examples are judged as bad as they are, we conclude that Wasow's original suggestions about cross-over phenomena appear to have been on the right track.

References

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