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Propositional versus Associative Views of Sentence Memory

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Abstract

Propositional accounts assume sentences are encoded in terms of a set of arguments bound to role-fillers in a predicate, but they never specify how the role representations form in the first place. Dennis (2005) shows an alternative way to capture role-information based on simple associations derived directly from experience in the Syntagmatic-Paradigmatic (SP) model. We argue that the evidence for the propositional view is not well-founded and explore the possibility for a pure associative encoding of proposition-like information. We differentially manipulate overlap in target and distractor sentences, embedded in narratives, and directly place the propositional account against the SP view. Our first experiment provides some evidence for an SP account, however the second experiment supports the propositional view. Our final experiment provides results that are difficult to explain with either account. Overall, our results support the propositional view and show mixed evidence for the SP account.