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Two measures for complement coercion interpretation: Interpretation vs production for complement coercion

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Abstract

Complement coercion interpretation is typically operationalized in terms of verb paraphrases (she finished the book > she finished reading the book), reflecting the construal of a specific event triggered by the direct object (cf. Pustejovsky & Bouillon). However, when given the option, participants frequently, and selectively, refrain from providing verb paraphrases for naturally occurring sentences.

We present a corpus study of the pragmatic factors that affect the rate of refraining from giving a verb paraphrases, followed by two experiments. First, a fill-in-the-blank experiment shows that minimally different clause types containing complement coercion yield different rates of verb paraphrase. Second, we pair complement coercion sentences with possible verb paraphrases and obtain semantic (entailment) judgements from participants. Taken together, the results present a puzzle; participants' likelihood to produce a verbal coercion interpretation is modulated by contextual factors, while their semantic comprehension of potential verb paraphrases for the same sentences is not.