Rapid Online Effects of Verb Argument Structure on Pronoun Resolution
Joshua K. Hartshorne & Jesse Snedeker

Introduction
Nonreflexive pronoun reference is underdetermined by syntax and semantics and must be fixed by context.

Experiment 1
Question: does the above analysis generalize?
Task
Sally fears Mary because she is a dax.
Who is the dax?: Sally Mary

Stimuli
12 SS ("frighten") & 12 SO ("fear") verbs per subject
220 SS verbs & 44 SO verbs total (Levin, 1993)

Results (N=573)

Off-line Results
Subject-Biased Verbs
Object-Biased Verbs
SS ("frighten") 182 38
SS ("fear") 0 4

Discussion
Question: Does argument structure rapidly constrain pronoun resolution?

Conflicting literature (Koomen & Van Berkum, 2006; Stewart, Pickering & Sanford, 2000).
- SS & SO verbs not reported separately (But see McDonald & MacWhinney, 1995).
- Pronoun reference measured indirectly.

Experiment 2
Visual world paradigm (Tanenhaus et al., 1995).

Active Condition (N=28)
Dora likes D.W. very much, because she is such a nice girl. Can you point to her?

Passive Condition (N=28)
D.W. is liked by Dora very much, because she is such a nice girl. Can you point to her?

Off-line Results
Active Passive
SS 79% (4%)* 27% (6%)*
SO 38% (5%)* 76% (5%)*

Discussion
Potential Account 1:
- Discourse structure or salience focus pronoun on STIMULUS.
- Argument structure rapidly recovered for SS but not SO verbs.
- Recent evidence that SO verbs are difficult to learn.

Potential Account 2:
- Discourse structure of salience focus pronoun on CAUSE.
- SS but not SO verbs have a CAUSE argument.
- SO verbal bias not due to argument structure.

References