

On real and fake things

Hanna Weiland-Breckle & Petra Schumacher (University of Cologne)

We investigate the connection between vagueness and other types of context dependence arising from adjective-noun combinatorics. In particular, we contrast so-called privative adjectives (*fake*) and redundant adjectives (*real*). These relatively underspecified adjectives may trigger distinct pragmatic operations. Using event-related brain potentials (ERPs), the online correlates of these adjective-noun combinations will be investigated and discussed in the context of previous findings from meaning alternations (cf. Schumacher 2014).

Redundant adjectives such as *real* serve to highlight prototypical properties of the entity denoted by the head noun. They require the instantiation of a prototype or a contrast set but are not inherently linked to the concept associated with the head noun (cf. Austin 1963). Pragmatic theory predicts inferential processing to set up a comparison class and arrive at the added value interpretation. Using ERPs during reading comprehension, we compared over-informativeness using a vague adjective (1a) with an informative (positive) adjective (1b). If specific meaning aspects have to be determined in the over-informative condition, extra computational demands should be observed relative to the onset of the head noun *diamond* for (1a) compared to (1b).

There is another class of adjectives (sometimes referred to as privative adjectives, but see Partee 2010) which entail the negation of the noun property or require expansion of the denotation of the head noun (2a) (cf. Kamp & Partee 1995). This operation is also predicted to require inferential processing compared to the combination with a basic (negative) adjective (2a vs. 2b). In addition to these two contrast sets, an anomalous adjective-noun combination (3) served as a baseline for semantic anomaly detection.

The ERP data reveal that over-informative and privative adjectives are processed differently. Over-informative adjectives do not engender processing costs, while privative adjectives exert extra demands reflected by a late positive deflection. In light of previous findings from context-dependent referential processing, this suggests that privative adjectives trigger a referent shift and that the required reconceptualization (*a fake diamond is not a diamond*) exerts costs.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| (1a) Over-informative adjective: | <i>The woman put a real diamond on the table.</i> |
| (1b) Basic (positive) adjective: | <i>The woman put a white diamond on the table.</i> |
| (2a) Privative adjective: | <i>The woman put a fake diamond on the table.</i> |
| (2b) Basic (negative) adjective: | <i>The woman put a flawed diamond on the table.</i> |
| (3) Anomalous combination: | <i>The woman put a liquid diamond on the table.</i> |