

# Why Punishment Requires Permission: Differential Verb Valence Effects on the Projective Behavior of Agent-Evocator Verbs in Sentence Completion Tasks

Simone Gerle, Johanna Klages, Thomas Weskott, & Anke Holler

Courant Research Centre "Text Structures", University of Goettingen/XPrag.de, Project ProProCon

Recent accounts of the re-mention bias exerted by implicit causality verbs revolve around the question whether the bias is due to non-linguistic higher-order cognition, or whether it is rooted in linguistic knowledge (Hartshorne, 2014). The discourse-semantic account by Bott & Solstad (2014) sides with the latter, arguing specifically that agent-evocator verbs (AgEvo-Vs) carry a presupposition driving the NP2-bias. Since presuppositions show the survival property in the scope of operators, we tested for survival in two sentence completion experiments: under negation in Exp.1 ("[It's not true that] Stefan punished Marvin because he ..."; test language: German), and deontic modals in Exp.2 (baseline condition/universal/existential: "Paul [baseline/must/can] punish[ed] Jörg because he ..."). In both experiments, we found that NP2-bias and hence the presupposition of the AgEvo-V was affected by the operators: NP2 references dropped significantly in the presence of operators. Moreover, in Exp.2 this effect was limited to the existential (*can*) combined with negatively valenced verbs (*punish*): NP2 references dropped by 40% compared to the baseline. These results (1) cast doubt on the assumption of a presuppositional component in the semantics of AgEvo-Vs, and (2) calls for a more complex semantic structure providing the basis for the differential interaction of linguistic and higher-order factors.

## References

- Bott, O. & Solstad, T. (2014). From verbs to discourse: A novel account of implicit causality. In *Psycholinguistic approaches to meaning and understanding across languages* (S. 213-251). Springer.
- Hartshorne, J. K. (2014). What is implicit causality? *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience*, 29 (7), 804-824.