
The role of connectives in L1 and L2 discourse illusions

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Linguistic illusions take place when violations (e.g. on the grammatical or semantic level) are frequently overlooked. Illusions at the level of discourse have not yet been investigated, but could potentially arise when discourse relations (DR) are not fully processed. The aim of this contribution is to establish: whether discourse illusions arise in a systematic manner; whether they arise more frequently in L2 compared to L1 processing; and the contribution of the connective type to discourse illusions. The discourse connective “on the one hand...on the other hand” sets up an expectation of contrast (Scholman et al., 2017). In (1), arguments in favour of Laura going out have been presented with “on the one hand”. Contrasting arguments should thus be presented with “on the other hand”. However, in (1), a further argument in favour is presented instead, constituting a violation at the level of DR.

- (1) Laura is thinking about going out tonight. On the one hand, she feels like dancing, because a great DJ will be playing. On the other hand, she can sleep in tomorrow. She is finding it difficult to decide.

Using an acceptability judgment paradigm (1–7 scale), we tested whether discourse violations like (1) are overlooked by L1-German–L2-English speakers (n=184). Judgments for violations were expected to be highly variable in comparison to control conditions. Two factors (Violation: violation; control, and Language: German; English) were manipulated to create four conditions for each experimental item (n=24). Each participant was tested in both their L1 (German) and their L2 (English), providing a within-participant comparison. Three types of discourse connective were tested: *contrast*, *similarity* and *denial of expectation*. Data was analysed using Bayesian ordinal models (effects expressed as SD units). Overall, discourse violations behaved like other linguistic violations that give rise to illusions in that control items were rated higher than violation items (0.26 [0.13, 0.38]) but bad fillers were rated lower than violations (-0.48 [-0.73, -0.22]). Participants were more susceptible to illusions in their L2 compared to their L1, with German violations eliciting lower ratings than English violations (-0.42, [-0.51, -0.33]). Regarding connectives, denial of expectation causes more illusions than contrast but not similarity, though this interacts with language. The appearance of discourse violations suggests that DR are not always fully processed, in particular in the L2, and that certain types of discourse connectives (and the DR that they signal) may be more susceptible to incomplete processing.

Reference: • Scholman, M., Rohde, H., & Demberg, V. (2017). “On the one hand” as a cue to anticipate upcoming discourse structure. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 97, 47-60.