

## Attribute framing as a discourse phenomenon



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## 'Attribute framing'

Psychologists investigate the persuasive effects of 'attribute framing':



This course has a 90% success rate  
*Versus:*

This course has a 10% failure rate

2

## Attribute framing = Effects of profile choice

'Framing effects' assume a choice between two descriptions of a situation, these descriptions differ in which *component* is being *profiled*

Students in course C	
P % pass	Q % fail

**"P% of the students passes course C"**

3

## Sher & McKenzie 2006:

The situation that is described may be the same, but this doesn't automatically imply communicative equivalence.

- The direction of the description 'leaks' information about the perspective of the speaker
- And the receiver makes inferences on this perspective

4

## Two contexts for profile-choice effects

- Processes which change an entity (*consume, produce, change shape, change place*);
  - The glass is half full / half empty
- Sets (S) that can be split into two parts with a 2-fold lexicalized term
  - Half of S is male / half is female
  - 30 % of S failed / 70 % succeeded
  - Half of S is better than / worse than X

5

## What are the inferences in the production and interpretation of profiles?

- Profile-choice leaks information about prior states
- Profile-choice leaks information about argumentative relevance

Sher & McKenzie 2006

## Inferences (1): profile = Increased Proportion (IP)

- The glass is half full
  - So somebody is halfway filling it
  - Prior state: glass was less full
- The glass is half empty
  - So somebody is halfway emptying it
  - Prior state: glass was less empty

7

## Inferences (1): profile = Increased Proportion (IP)

### Instruction



*In front of you is one cup of water and one empty cup. To start with, I'd like to ask you to pour water from one cup into the other, and subsequently put a **half full** / **half empty** cup in the right hand corner of the table.*

### Result

Subjects with the **half full**-instruction give the cup that was previously empty, subjects with the **half empty**-instruction give the cup that was previously full.

8

## Inferences (2): profile = argumentative orientation

*Sher & McKenzie (2006):*

'good things will be described in good terms'

### Reworded

The frame determines the argumentative orientation of the utterance (Ducrot 1980; Horn 1989):

*My glass is half empty (so I'm ready for a refill)*

*My glass is half full (so I'll skip this round)*

9

## Goals of our research

- Generalization
  - To Dutch
  - To other contexts for full / empty
  - To other 2-sided terms (win/lose, succeed/fail, survive/die)
- Test hypotheses on Increased Proportion and Argumentative Orientation
- Exploration of other (competing) principles, such as markedness

10

## Two types of items

- *Interpretation-items* ask the subject to draw a conclusion from an utterance with a given profile
- *Production-items* ask the subject to choose a profile for an utterance in such a way it fits best in the context given

11

## Example: *Tennis player Herman (IP)*

(An interpretation-item testing IP)

Herman just finished his third tennis season. Asked by another player how he did this season, Herman tells he **won** / **lost** 8 out of 16 matches.

Taken the way Herman described his results of this year, which of the utterances about his previous year is most likely?

- A. Last year he did better than this year: last year he won more than 8 out of 16 matches
- B. Last year he did worse than this year: last year he won less than 8 out of 16 matches.

12

## Results Herman

Given profile:	Positive (win)	Negative (lose)
Chosen previous situation:		
Better last year than this year	9	42
Worse last year than this year	41	7

13

## Example: *the diary* (AO)

**Interpretation-item** (profile given, chose conclusion)  
Pick the sentence that fits best:

My diary is half full / half empty.

- A. So I've got a lot of time to come help you renovate.
- B. So I've got little time to come help you renovate.

**Production-item** (conclusion given, chose profile)

Pick the sentence that fits best:

Next week I've got a lot of / little time to come help you renovate.

- A. My diary is half full
- B. My diary is half empty

14

## Results *diary 1*

Interpretation item:

Given profile:	Positive (half full)	Negative (half empty)
Chosen conclusion:		
Lot of time	36	48
Little time	12	0

$\chi^2 = 13.71$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$

15

## Results *diary 2*

Production item:

Given conclusion:	Lot of time	Little time	Total profiles
Chosen profile:			
Half full	9	29	38
Half empty	19	1	20

$\chi^2 = 26.69$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$

$\chi^2$  row totals = 5.59,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .018$  (half full > half empty)

16

## Explanations (1)

- Largest Component explanation



- *Increasing Component*:  
general biological principle...



it's evolutionary important to focus on the future?

17

## Explanations (2)

- *Be argumentatively relevant*  
Cf. cooperative principle (Grice)

18

## An effect of unmarkedness?

The *diary*-results:

Given profile:	Positive (half full)	Negative (half empty)
Chosen conclusion:		
Much time	36	48
Little time	12	0

19

## Competing principle: semantic (un)markedness

(Eg. *dog – bitch*)

- unmarked pole is used more often
- unmarked pole has more meanings

## Which pole is unmarked?

- *Perceptive saliency* (Givón 1995) **full vs empty**  
That what can be experienced or sensed better, is unmarked
- *Cultural saliency* (Givón 1995) **man vs woman**  
The cultural norm is unmarked
- *Goal saliency* **succeed vs fail**  
The preferred/projected outcome is unmarked

21

## Markedness analysis

- Analysis of our scenarios: which is the (un)marked profile?
- Two hypotheses, on top of AO we'll find:
  - a Marked Skewness Effect
  - a Preference for the Unmarked Profile (PUP) (only in production items)

22

## Why the asymmetry between half full and half empty ?

- *Half empty* produced and interpreted based on Argumentative Relevance
- *Half full* produced and interpreted based on Argumentative Relevance + Saliency

23

## Conclusions

- Profiling choices communicate important information
- Principles such as IP and AO guide production AND interpretation of profiling choices
- Besides, 'markedness' seems to play a role
- More research is needed:
  - Which types of word pairs and contexts are 'suitable' for profiling-choice effects?
  - How do different guiding principles interact?

24

## Some literature

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