

VARIATIONS IN ATTENTION TO SPEECH: NEW EVIDENCE

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According to the standard model of speech perception, processing activity is initially geared to the recovery of deep structure from the surface form of sentences. A related claim is that processing activity is concentrated at the ends of clauses as earlier-generated hypotheses are finally resolved.. Evidence for the latter consists of the finding that response latency to a non-linguistic stimulus (a "click") is longer when the click occurs at the end of the first clause than when it occurs at the beginning of the second clause. According to the "on-line interactive" model, in contrast, processing proceeds at all linguistic levels from the first word of the sentence, and the results of earlier processing constrain subsequent processing.

Following this latter model it is claimed that (a) processing activity should not be concentrated at the ends of clauses and (b) processing activity should gradually decrease from the beginning of the sentence as the interpretation of the material becomes more established. Both models lead to the same prediction about differences in latency immediately before and after the clause boundary - the shorter latency is expected at the latter position. In the present study, however, data was collected at all word positions in the sentence and supports both predictions derived from the 'on-line interactive' model. A second question concerned the level(s) of analysis, syntactic/semantic or lexical, which make demands on active attention as measured by click monitoring latency. A comparison of results from the 'click' experiment and results from two earlier experiments (same set of sentences, different linguistic monitoring tasks) provides preliminary answers.