Title: The choice of *that* in sentence planning and what that means for long-distance wh-extraction possibilities

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Abstract:

This talk is focused on a production-based account of complementizer distribution that applies to long-distance subject and object wh-structures, as well as corresponding non-movement structures. Analyses of the *that*-trace effect often ignore findings on long-distance object extraction, where acceptability is also diminished (Cowart 1997). These analyses also tend not to consider comparisons between wh-structures and corresponding non-movement structures.

The account relies on the proposal that processing pressures, in particular sentence planning, play a role in shaping grammars (Hawkins, 2014; McDaniel et al. 2015). A suggestion by Ferreira & Dell (2000) about the complementizer *that* in declaratives is also adopted. Their proposal is that the choice of *that* in sentence production is symptomatic of a certain approach to planning the structure: The use of *that* indicates that the upper- and lower-clause material are planned separately, whereas the lack of *that* indicates joint planning. This proposal can be extended to explain the findings on the complementizer in long-distance wh-structures. Planning the upper- and lower-clause material separately is incompatible with the connection between the initial wh-phrase and the lower-clause material. The subject/object asymmetry is attributed to the additional challenge in long-distance subject extraction of starting a new planning unit with an empty category that syntactically connects to earlier material.

Evidence supporting the account comes from findings showing that *that* is used more in declaratives with less connection between the clauses or with more upper-clause complexity (Ferreira & Dell 2000, Rohdenburg 1996), that it is used more and judged as more acceptable in declaratives than in object wh-questions (Cowart & McDaniel 2021, Schippers 2019), and that it is used more by children – who are less proficient at advance planning – than by adults (McDaniel et al. 2010). Recent production data on English-speaking children and adults, and eyetracking/production data on English-speaking adults will also be presented.

References:

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