

Successes and Failures of Prediction

Colin Phillips

University of Maryland

In early work that focused on syntactic processes we were impressed by the speed and success of linguistic prediction in comprehension. Comprehenders could figure out a lot about what they were about to encounter ahead of time, and this held a great deal of promise. In more recent work we have focused more on expectations at the lexical and semantic levels, and we have found various cases where expectations are a poor match to what is likely to happen in the world. These failures are highly informative, as they provide clues to the mechanisms underlying linguistic prediction. We have been probing these mechanisms using a combination of experimental and computational approaches. In this talk I will discuss what we have learned about the mechanisms, what we need to know, and whether the limitations of linguistic prediction that we find in the lab are relevant to the utility of prediction in the real world.