Processing conjunctive entailment of disjunction

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In a sentence where the disjunction *huo* ‘or’ appears under the negation *mei* ‘no’ (e.g.: *Ta mei chi qingjiao huo qiezi*. ‘He did not eat green peppers or eggplants.’), the sentence is globally ambiguous between the conjunctive interpretation and the disjunctive interpretation. The primary goal of this study is to investigate if there is a default meaning for simple negative statements containing *huo* ‘or’. Data collected from the self-paced region-by-region reading experiment indicated that the participants consistently preferred the conjunctive interpretation. Additionally, in the conjunction-biased condition where the sentences turned out to favor the disjunctive interpretations at the end, there was reading time penalty at the last region of the sentences and participants spent significantly longer time judging the appropriateness of those sentences. Contrary to Jing’s (2008) assertion that both disjunction and conjunction readings are equally prominent in an out-of-the-blue context, the results from the quantitative data revealed that the conjunction reading is the default meaning for simple negative statements containing *huo* ‘or’. The findings of the current experiment provide essential implications to the study of child language acquisition. Specifically, we argue that understanding the adults’ linguistic patterns is a prerequisite to the study of children’s language acquisition patterns.

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