Abstract

In this study, we investigated the psychological processes in spontaneous discourse comprehension through a network theory of discourse representation. Existing models of narrative comprehension describe the importance of causality processing for forming a representation of a text, but usually in the context of deliberately composed texts rather than in spontaneous, unplanned discourse. Our aim was to determine whether spontaneous discourse components with many causal connections are represented more strongly than components with few connections similar to the findings in text comprehension literature and whether any such effects depend on the medium in which the spontaneous discourse is presented (oral vs. written). Participants either listened to or read a transcription of a section of a radio transmission. They then recalled the spontaneous discourse material and answered comprehension questions. Results indicate that the processing of causal connections plays an important role in the comprehension of spontaneous spoken discourse, and do not indicate that their effects on recall are weaker in the comprehension of oral discourse than in the comprehension of written discourse.