
Expectation management in interaction: Discourse particles signal surprisal of upcoming referents

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This study focuses on expectation management in conversation via high-level discourse cues, namely the Dutch common-ground managing discourse particles (DPs) *eigenlijk* ('actually', 'in fact') and *inderdaad* ('indeed'). In a visual world eye-tracking experiment, I investigate whether and when listeners integrate the complex interpersonal information encoded in expectation-managing DPs during incremental language understanding. It is hypothesized that *inderdaad* signals upcoming low surprisal, whereas *eigenlijk* signals upcoming high surprisal. As such, DPs are expected to modulate the listener's predictions about upcoming referents.

Dutch participants were exposed to short conversations, consisting of a constraining context followed by a question and an answer in which a critical word was replaced by a beep. They were instructed to click on the picture that best fit the answer. Displays included a Target (low surprisal given the context), a Competitor (high surprisal but related to the context) and two Distractors (unrelated to the context); answers contained a discourse particle (*inderdaad* vs. *eigenlijk*) or a control word.

Targets were clicked more often and faster in the *inderdaad*-condition compared to the control condition; in the *eigenlijk*-condition, Target clicks were less frequent and responses were slower. Gaze patterns show that immediately upon encountering the discourse particle, Target fixations significantly increased in the *inderdaad*-condition and decreased in the *eigenlijk*-condition compared to the control condition. Findings suggest that expectation-managing DPs can modulate context-based linguistic expectations during incremental language understanding, and hence improve communicative efficiency. From a methodological perspective, DPs provide a useful means to further investigate the nature of discourse-based expectations.

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