

## **We don't coerce**

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In linguistics, psycholinguistics, and cognitive neuroscience, it is almost a consensus that understanding a putatively indeterminate sentence such as “The man began a book” entails a process by which the nominal complement is “coerced” into an activity performed with the book. Most studies have suggested that this coercion process relies to a large extent on the information contained in the lexical representation for “book”. In this talk I will argue against this view. I will show that psycholinguistic evidence for coercion is slim; that coercion effects stemming from psycholinguistic studies (e.g., longer reading times for “coerced” constructions) do not constitute evidence for lexical-semantic coercion; and that linguistic analysis of “coerced” sentences can account for much of the coercion effects in terms of structurally-determined positions for pragmatic enrichment. I will also discuss two sets of experiments suggesting that coercion effects might be due to pragmatic processes, not lexical-semantic decomposition of complement nouns. The first shows that the interpretation of indeterminate sentences can be modulated by context and that context creates enriched (but false) memories for these sentences over time. The second shows that in both MEG and fMRI experiments alike neural mechanisms involved in higher-level pragmatic processes are also involved in processing indeterminate sentences—more so than in fully determined control sentences. These two lines of empirical work suggest that indeterminate sentences are first processed minimally as denotations and are enriched by possibly abductive pragmatic processes.