



Recency preference in the human sentence processing mechanism

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Introduction

- Relative Clause

A subordinate clause that modifies a noun

Example

The woman, *who had a thick French accent*, was very pretty.

Introduction (Cont'd)

- Different places to attach the relative clause

Example

- The lamps near the paintings of the *house* *that was damaged in the flood*
- The lamps near the *painting* of the houses *that was damaged in the flood*
- The *lamp* near the paintings of the houses *that was damaged in the flood*

Late Closure

- Attach incoming lexical items into currently processed clause

Example

John said *Bill died yesterday*

Early attachment – John

Late attachment – Bill (Recency Preference)

John told us that *Mary left yesterday*

Early attachment – John

Late attachment – Mary (Recency Preference)

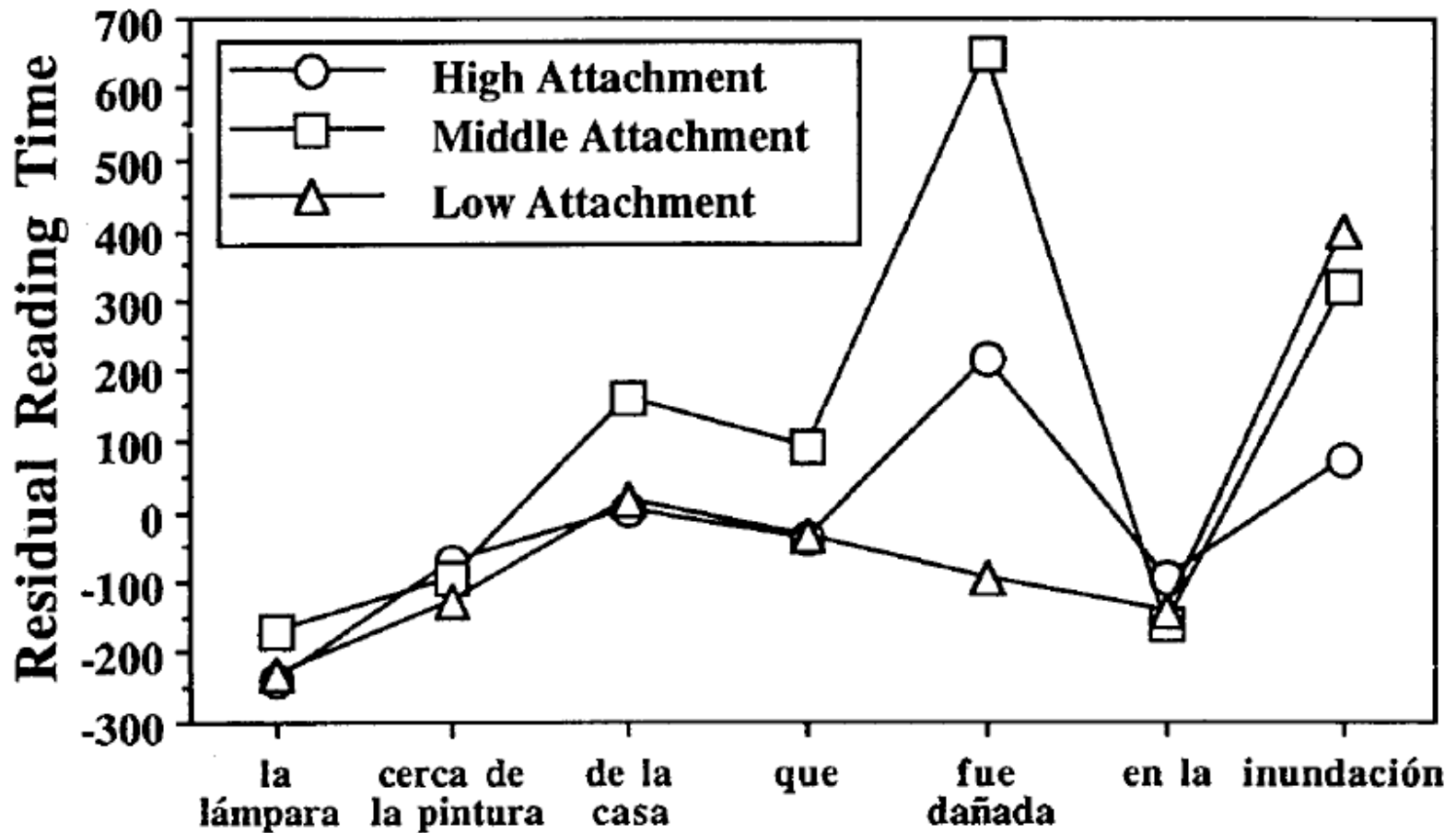
Cuetos and Mitchell Hypothesis

- Preference for early attachment in Spanish
- Example
NPI Prep(VP) NP2 Prep(VP) NP3 Prep(VP)
Monotonic Ordering: (NPI, NP2, NP3)
- Preference for late attachment in English
- Example
NPI Prep(VP) NP2 Prep(VP) NP3 Prep(VP)
Monotonic Ordering: (NP3, NP2, NPI)
- Does late closure apply to Spanish?

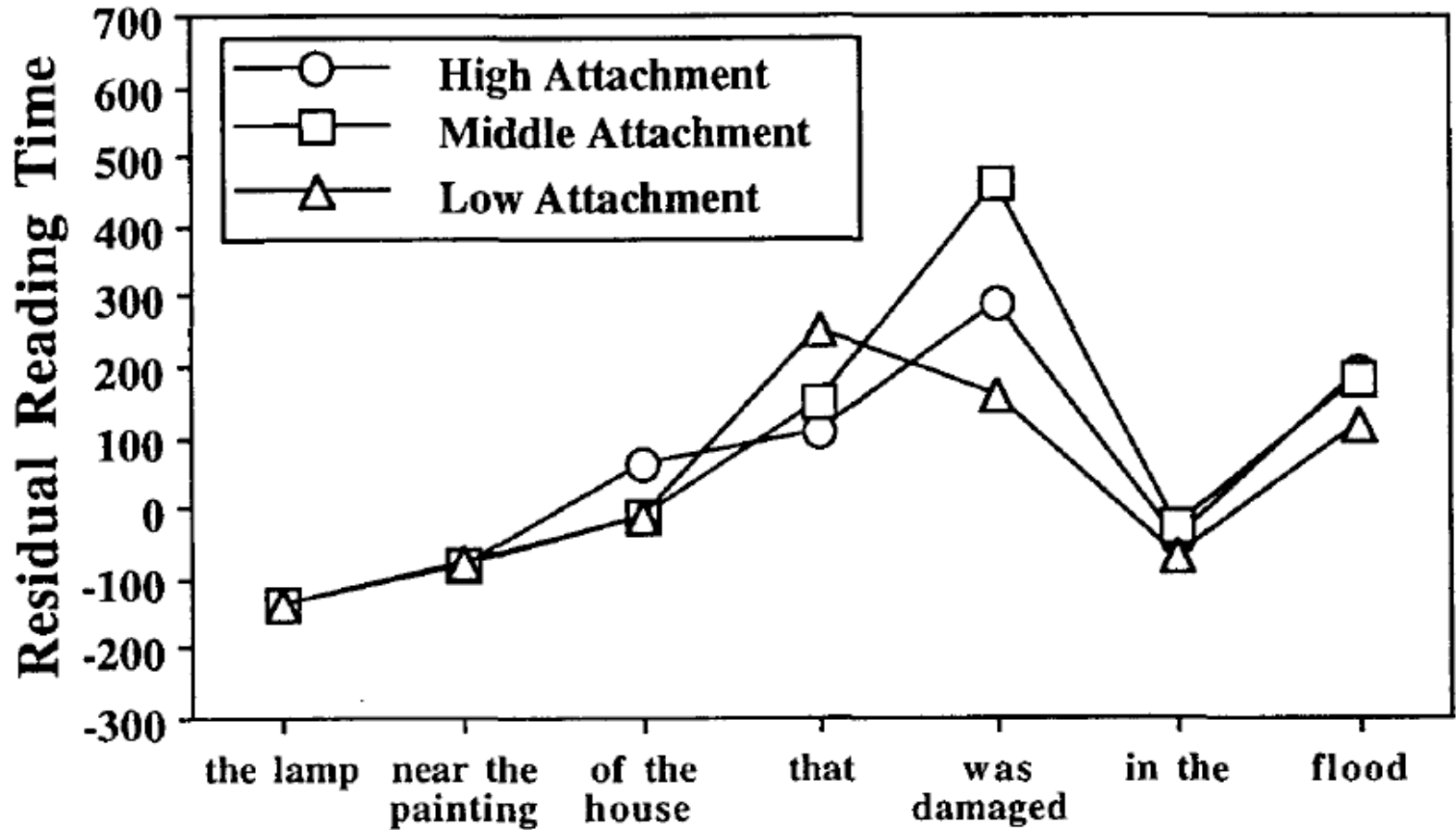
Experiments

- Experiment 1
Testing the hypothesis for Spanish -
Is a single factor responsible for attachment preferences in Spanish?
- Experiment 2
Testing the hypothesis for English -
Is a single factor responsible for attachment preferences in Spanish?

Experiment I (Spanish)



Experiment 2 (English)



New Hypothesis

- Late closure does apply to Spanish
- Effect of late closure impacted by a second factor
- Non-monotonicity of relative clause attachments

New Hypothesis (cont'd)

- Factors involved

Recency Preference – Late Closure

Predicate Proximity – Attach as close as possible to the head of a predicate clause

Results

NPI Prep(VP) NP2 Prep(VP) NP3 Prep(VP)

- Recency Preference dominates when Predicate Proximity does not differentiate between multiple VPs
=>low attachments
- Predicate Proximity dominates when RC attachments are ambiguous
=>high attachments

Predicate Proximity Example

- I read the *letter* on the *table that I had written*

RC attachment ambiguity – letter or table?

- I was proud of the *letter* on the *table that I had written*

RC attachment ambiguity – letter or table?

Conclusion

- Do not abandon Late closure (Recency Preference) for sentence processing
- Second factor exists -
Predicate Proximity?



Thank You

Questions?