Plain language: A psycholinguistic approach (no forest for the trees yet)

Stefano Rastelli | LLEGS Lab: University of Pavia, Italy

Despite much discussion of plain language, only a handful of experimental studies so far (≈7–8) provide empirical evidence. I proposed *language usability* as a better notion than "easy" or "readable," defined as the extent to which sentence meaning can be not only *understood* but also *acted upon* in daily life. Using eye-tracking and self-paced reading, in my Lab we examine which linguistic features slow or facilitate the move from comprehension to action. Preliminary results show that passives are easily understood but slower to act out, gerunds always obscure argument structure, and nominalizations can help clarify who-does-what — yet such findings are still not enough to see the forest for the trees.