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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 38(0)

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Publication Date

2016

Peer reviewed

In the nick of time: Using temporal cues to examine ongoing event representations

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Abstract: Time cues are ubiquitous in language and the ability to interpret them is essential for understanding events during discourse comprehension. Temporal markers that signal ongoing versus completed events, like the progressive and simple past tense, prompt distinct mental event representations. However, the detailed properties of ongoing event representations remain unexplored. Drawing from both the simulation and semantic association approaches to knowledge representation, this study examines the novel prediction that ongoing events engender incremental discourse representation updating processes. Experimental sentences cued either early or late phases of an ongoing event (e.g. Alice had recently started/almost finished baking a cake). Targets in a post-sentential lexical decision task were strongly associated with either early or late event phases (e.g. EGGS/AROMA). Facilitation priming was predicted for congruent sentence-target pairs. Implications of the results for models of knowledge representation, theories of semantic priming, and discourse model updating will be discussed.