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Drawing on Perspective Cues in Pronoun Resolution

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Abstract

Psycholinguistic accounts of pronoun resolution have emphasized the influence of discourse-level and lexical cues (e.g., order-of-mention/coherence relations/implicit causality). Less work has considered situation-specific pragmatic reasoning effects, which we explore here using communicative perspective-taking. Expts1-2 used sentences like "Molly [asked Ana if]/[told Ana that] she remembers when lecture starts" to assess readers' judgments for antecedents of ambiguous pronouns. We predicted that characters ASKING about the subordinate clause information should entail readers interpreting the pronoun as co-referring with the main-clause object, whereas TELLING should entail main-clause subject interpretations. This is because we do not tell people what they already know nor ask people something that we should know that they do not. The results corroborated our predictions: Participants picked the "perspectively-congruent" antecedent 99.8% of the time, with no order-of-mention effect (which would predict stronger effects for TELL, where the antecedent is the first-mentioned character). Expts3-6 corroborated the results through self-paced reading and stops-making-sense tasks.