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Investigating representations of time in light verb constructions during verb comprehension

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Abstract

Light verb constructions (LVCs) are grammatical structures where a verb lacking semantic content combines with another structure (a noun phrase) to provide semantic value (e.g., take a photo). Previous cross-linguistic research shows LVCs are distinct from other verb types (Butt 2010), and that distinct representations are activated during verb comprehension (Richardson et al., 2003), but it remains unclear what representations, particularly of time, are activated during comprehension of LVCs. The present study manipulates the specific verb comprising the LVC (e.g., 'turn attention to' versus 'dedicate attention to') to probe whether one's perception of the duration of that action is affected. We test different LVCs cross-linguistically, and in both bilingual second-language speakers and monolingual speakers of English. Preliminary findings indicate that the specific verb used in the LVC influences one's perception of the duration of that action, with specific verbs generating interpretations of shorter durations while others much longer.

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