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What You Are Getting and What You Will Be Getting: Testing Whether Verb Tense Affects Intertemporal Choices

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Abstract

We investigate the effect of manipulating verb tense (e.g, getting $5 vs. will get $5) within a single language on intertemporal tradeoffs presented as written stimuli. Verb tense can significantly affect choices between options, with people preferring present-tense options, due to inferences about timing. However, this occurs only in the complete absence of other timing cues and is eliminated by introducing even vague or non-diagnostic time cues. Gricean maxims of conversational implicature say that people maximize relevance and minimize quantity in conversations. Our results suggest that that decision makers search across cues for the most relevant information. Tense is deemed to be such a cue in the absence of other temporal information.