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Am I a Robot? How Verb Agency and Agent Description Influence Perspective-Taking in Visual Scenes

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Abstract: People often take an egocentric perspective when describing space. However, they occasionally take an alternative perspective. When and why? In a series of experiments that followed work on perspective, we explored this question. In one experiment, participants were given photographs of two objects on a table. Objectively, the scene could be described from either the perspective of the person viewing the picture or from the opposite perspective (i.e., facing the viewer). To test which viewpoint would be elicited, we asked participants to describe where an object was relative to another. In one experiment, a toy humanoid robot (facing the participant) was included in the scene to determine whether people would take its vantage point when referring to object locations, and how this inclination might vary according to changes in linguistic context. Results indicate that people can spontaneously take the perspective of an agent-like toy when describing object locations.