
The role of world knowledge for interpreting aspect ambiguity

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Abstract

We investigate utterances with aspect ambiguity, such as Bill was cleaning the street for weeks, which may receive an episodic interpretation (describing one potentially ongoing event) or a habitual interpretation (describing multiple culminated events). We predict that prior knowledge about typical event durations, in conjunction with the total timeframe described by the adverbial, affect interpretations. To test this prediction, we gather interpretations given different timeframes (e.g., "for hours" vs. "for years") and event durations (e.g., "cleaning the brush" vs. "painting the cathedral"). In the larger picture, we investigate how linguistic interpretations depend in part on our knowledge of the world.

Keywords: aspect ambiguity, event cognition, computational modeling

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