
Animacy and topichood as joint determinants of referential choice

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Abstract

Our study investigates the choice of referential expressions in German. We conducted picture description experiments in context, allowing us to disentangle the role of two central factors in pronominalization rates; animacy and topichood. Results show that both factors influence pronominalization, but they do so to different degrees for different expressions. In animacy mismatches, the main factor behind pronoun use is the referent's animacy. Demonstratives, on the other hand, are mainly influenced by the topic status of the antecedent. With two animate referents, topichood is the decisive factor in choosing referential expressions.

Keywords: referential expressions, pronominalization, accessibility, topic status, animacy

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