

Understanding temporal descriptions

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Spatial language has served well as domain for studying the interplay between a speaker's perception of and interaction with an environment and the formulation of dialogue about that environment. Consider, for example, spatial descriptions of the form "*The coffee mug is below the coffee pot.*" Typical models of the apprehension of these descriptions include processes that link language and the underlying spatial representation, including mapping the linguistic elements "mug" and "pot" to their corresponding entities (target and reference object, respectively), assigning a reference frame to define the spatial term "below" and verifying that the description accurately locates the target. My lab has done extensive work examining how context (broadly defined as information about the objects being related, assumptions about the common ground shared between speakers and listeners, and the purpose of the communication) impact these processes. In this talk I will extend this work to the understanding of temporal descriptions of the form "She ran a 5k before she watched the movie." This work capitalizes on the idea that space is foundationally used to understand time, and that the mechanism of a reference frame similarly underlies the mapping of language and perception within the domain of temporal language. We focus on the assignment of a temporal reference frame, and the ways in which context has an impact on the setting of the parameters of such a reference frame.