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# Animacy-based predictions show delayed effects in non-competitive environments

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In sentence comprehension, verb semantics and the animacy of verb arguments are major sources of predictions about the assignment of thematic roles. Previous studies found immediate effects of animacy on eye movements, but only tested the influence of animacy in transitive environments that promote competition for agenthood (Traxler et al. 2002, Mak et al. 2006). Here, we present a reading study investigating the strength of animacy as a predictive cue in simple intransitive clauses without argument competition. 84 participants read 36 German sentences derived from a 2x2x3 design, with verb type as between-subjects factor. We fully crossed animacy of the subject, verb preference for animate vs. inanimate subjects (A tourist/freighter swims/drifts across the lake), and word order. Subjects occurred preverbally or in one of two different postverbal word orders. This allowed us to test whether animacy cue strength varies contingent upon the preceding context. ANOVAs revealed spatio-temporally delayed effects. Animacy mismatches did not affect immediate processing of subject or verb in any word order, and instead prolonged reading times only for clause-final prepositional phrases. This effect was more pronounced for verbs preferring animate subjects. Thus, in non-competitive environments animacy has a reduced impact on eye movements in reading.

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