

Coming in, or going out? Measuring the effect of discourse factors on perspective prominence

In many discourse contexts, there are multiple available perspectives, leading to optionality over perspectival expressions. For instance, in 1, either *came* or *went* can felicitously fill the blank. Since *come*, unlike *go*, requires a perspective-holder at the destination of motion (Fillmore 1966, Barlew 2017), this reflects a choice between perspectives on the event: Ann's or Lucy's.

1. Ann was working at Starbucks. She sold Lucy a latte and a biscotti, but she forgot the bag with the biscotti. She ____ over to the table and explained the mistake.

Although there has been much experimental work on the pragmatic factors that influence pronominalization (Givón 1983, Grosz 1995, Ferretti et al. 2009, Kehler & Rohde 2019), comparatively little experimental evidence is available for perspectival expressions. This paper investigates the impact of three pragmatic factors on spatial perspective: whether the perspective-holder is named; whether they are the first-mentioned individual in the discourse; and whether they are the subject of the preceding sentence.

Although the pragmatic conditions affecting spatial perspective are understudied, previous work on discourse prominence suggests these as likely candidates. Hinterwimmer (2019) provides evidence that subjecthood in the preceding sentence and topicality determine who can serve as the protagonist of Free Indirect Discourse, a pragmatic environment in which context-sensitive expressions, including perspectival motion verbs, report the perspective of a protagonist, rather than the narrator. In this study, both namedness and discourse-firstness are used to control topicality.

We evaluated the impact of these three factors on the rate of *come* and *go* use in a sentence completion task. Participants (n=64) were asked to read 3 sentence narratives and choose whether *come* or *go* was a better fit in the last sentence.

Participants saw 4 items in each of 8 conditions, created by manipulating (1) whether Person A, the discourse-first individual, was named; (2) whether Person B was the subject or object of the second sentence; and (3) whether the subject of the motion verb was Person A or B. This last manipulation provides a way of disambiguating who the perspective-holder for the motion verb is, since the subject of *come* cannot be its perspectival anchor (Barlew 2017). Participants also saw 24 fillers in four conditions, for a total of 56 items.

Figure 1: Example stimuli

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|----|-----------------------|---|
| S1 | A unnamed: | One of the stage managers purchased a sofa for the set of the new play. |
| | A named: | Dave purchased a sofa for the set of the new play. |
| S2 | B subject: | A salesclerk gave him a 10% discount on it. |
| | B object: | He got a 10% discount on it from a salesclerk. |
| S3 | B perspective: | When he ____ to pick it up, he gave him free tickets for the show. |
| | A perspective: | When he ____ to deliver it, he got free tickets for the show. |

All three factors (being named, being the discourse-first individual, and being the subject of a preceding sentence) were predicted to increase the prominence of a perspective-holder, resulting in higher rates of *come* selection.

The results support the finding that these discourse factors influence the selection of the perspective-holder, but to differing degrees. The results show a strong effect of being the first

individual in the discourse, with significantly more *come* responses when the third sentence has Person B as the subject compared with Person A (paired t-test; $t(255)=-13.8$; $p < 0.0001$). They also indicate a weaker, non-significant effect of subjecthood. When Person B was the subject of the second sentence, *come* responses increased in the A subject condition and fell in the B subject condition (paired t-test; $t(255)=-1.9$; $p=0.055$). The effect of namedness was not significant (paired t-test; $t(255)=-0.74$; $p=0.46$), though the expected difference was observed in the Person B Subject condition.

Figure 2: Participant means by condition

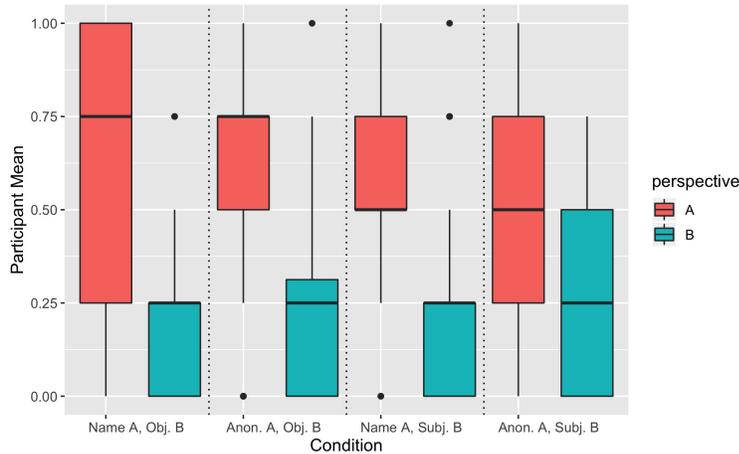


Figure 3: Mean selection of *come*

A	B	Pers.	% [95% CI]
Name	Ob	A	62 [53;71]
Anon	Ob	A	63 [55;71]
Name	Sub	A	56 [49;62]
Anon	Sub	A	50 [41;58]
Name	Ob	B	21 [16;26]
Anon	Ob	B	23 [17;30]
Name	Sub	B	26 [20;32]
Anon	Sub	B	23 [17;30]

As Figure 2 shows, the differences in rate of *come* selections between the Person A and Person B perspective narrows as the discourse conditions shift from favoring Person A to Person B.

This work suggests that similar discourse factors govern both the selection of spatial perspective-holders and Free Indirect Discourse protagonists: topicality and subjecthood. More broadly, this experiment provides quantitative data on the pragmatics of perspectival phenomena to aid the extension of existing models of discourse coherence and prominence to perspectival phenomena.

References

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