



Agents' goals affect placement of event endpoints

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Introduction

- An event is “a segment of time at a given location that is conceived by an observer as having a beginning and an end” (Zacks & Tversky, 2001).
- Prior work (Zacks et al., 2007) suggests that both perceptual (i.e., movement) and conceptual (i.e., goal) changes signal an event boundary.
- However, role of conceptual (goal) factors has not been explicitly tested separately from visual input.

Do goals affect placement of event boundaries?

Experiment 1

- Test stimuli: Partly Complete event outcomes (in pre-test norming, mean percent of event completion was assessed at 27.02%)
- Participants (N = 43) read one of 3 texts:

Low-Goal: Jasmine wants to use an orange to garnish the dessert.

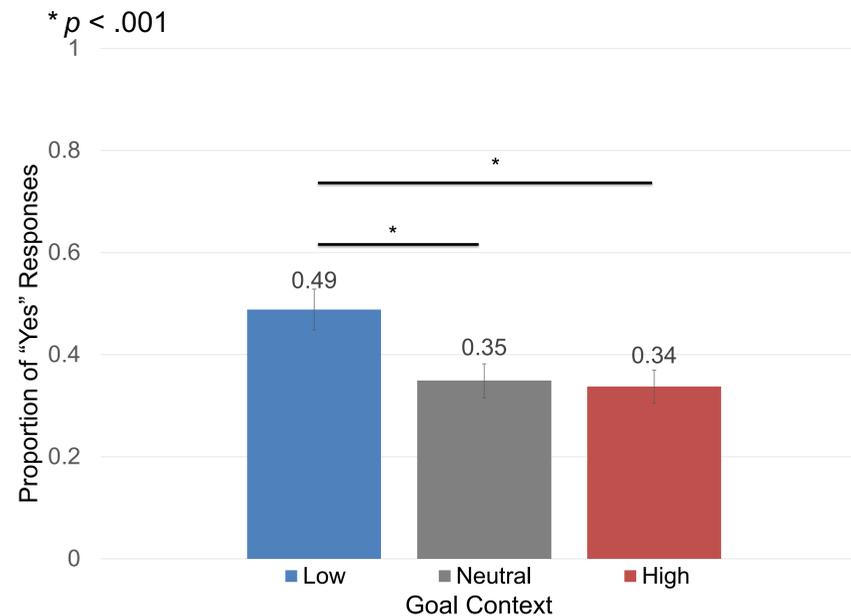
Neutral Goal: Jasmine wants to peel the orange.

High-Goal: Jasmine wants to eat an orange with her breakfast.



Test Question: Did she peel the orange? (Yes or No)

People were more likely to say “yes” for partly complete outcomes if agent’s goal had been reached.



Experiment 2

- Test Stimuli: Mostly Complete outcomes (in pre-test norming, mean percent of event completion $M = 69.84\%$)
- Participants (N = 40) read one of 3 texts:

Low-Goal: Jasmine wants to use an orange to garnish the dessert.

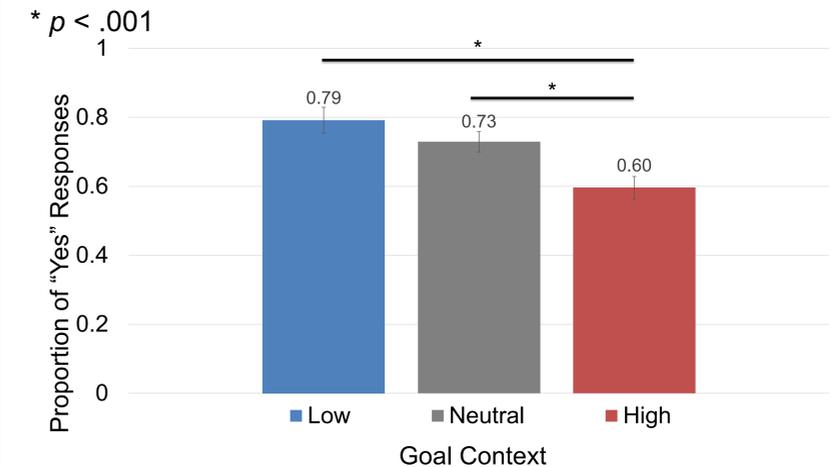
Neutral Goal: Jasmine wants to peel the orange.

High-Goal: Jasmine wants to eat the orange but is allergic to the skin.



Test Question: Did she peel the orange? (Yes or No)

People were more likely to say “no” for mostly complete outcomes if agent’s goal had not been reached.



Conclusions

Goals affect how we view the end of an event.

- Viewers are more likely to say that an event occurred if the agent’s goal has been reached.
- One of the first direct demonstrations of the role of goals on event conceptualization: event endpoints do not rely only on direct observation (cf. Zacks et al., 2007; Ji & Papafragou, in press).
- Pragmatic factors (contextually known goals) influence perfective aspect interpretation (cf. test questions; Filip, 2017).

References

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- Zacks, J. M., Speer, N. K., Swallow, K. M., Braver, T. S., & Reynolds, J. R. (2007). Event perception: a mind-brain perspective. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(2), 273.
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