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Animacy effects on objects in German

In some languages, there is a phenomenon called 'differential object marking', which means that objects are marked differently when they belong to a specific grammatical category. This can be explained with the so called Silverstein scales (Silverstein (1976)). One of these scales is the animacy hierarchy which looks like this: human-animate-inanimate. Subjects are more prototypical when they are on the left, whereas objects when they are more to the right. This does not apply to German, where the objects only differ in their case-marking, determined by the verb. However, we think that the animacy hierarchy might still hold true for German, as verbs do differ in what kind of objects they govern. We assume three types of preferences: animate, inanimate and none. Our hypothesis is as follows: Inanimate objects are processed faster than animate ones. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a self-paced reading experiment in which the participants had to read sentences with transitive verbs and objects which either matched the verbs preference or not. The results of this experiment will be discussed in the talk.

References:

Silverstein, Michael. 1976. Hierarchy of features and ergativity. In Robert Dixon (ed.), *Grammatical categories in australian languages*, 112-171. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.