

Mental Spaces, Conceptual Distance, and Simulation: Looks/Seems/Sounds Like Constructions in English

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This talk aims to see whether conceptual distancing involved in the construal of inferential evidential constructions is cognitively real.

Inferential Evidentiality and Conceptual Distancing

“[I]inguistic devices that mark and specify type of the evidence on which a statement is based—whether the speaker saw it, or heard it, or inferred it from indirect evidence, or learnt it from someone else” (Aikhenvald 2003:1).

Definition

- (1) It is raining.
- (2) **Seems like** it is raining.
- (3) *pi-ka* *o-n-ta*
rain-Nom come-Non.past.Impf-Decl
'It is raining.'
- (4) *pi-ka* *o-napo-ta*
rain-Nom come-**Ev.Infr**-DE
'seems like, it is raining.'

Examples: Inferential Evidentiality



“English ... marks evidentiality lexically for example by an adverb such as *clearly, apparently* or in a clause introduced by *it seems that*.” (Aijmer 2009:63)

“... *seem* straddles the boundary between perception (an evidential category) and epistemic modality” (Aijmer 2009:64).

***Seems like* as an Evidential Element**



The construal of inferential constructions necessarily involves conceptual distancing concerning epistemic grounding of the speaker's viewpoint with relation to the protagonist's (grammatical subject) viewpoint (Kwon 2012a).

For instance, because of the covert interaction, a first person subject is normally not licensed

(5)? **Seems/looks like** I'm washing dishes

(6)? *nay-ka* *selkeciha-napo-a*
 I-Nom dishwash-Inf.EV-Indic
 '(seems like) I'm washing dishes.'

Conceptual Distancing





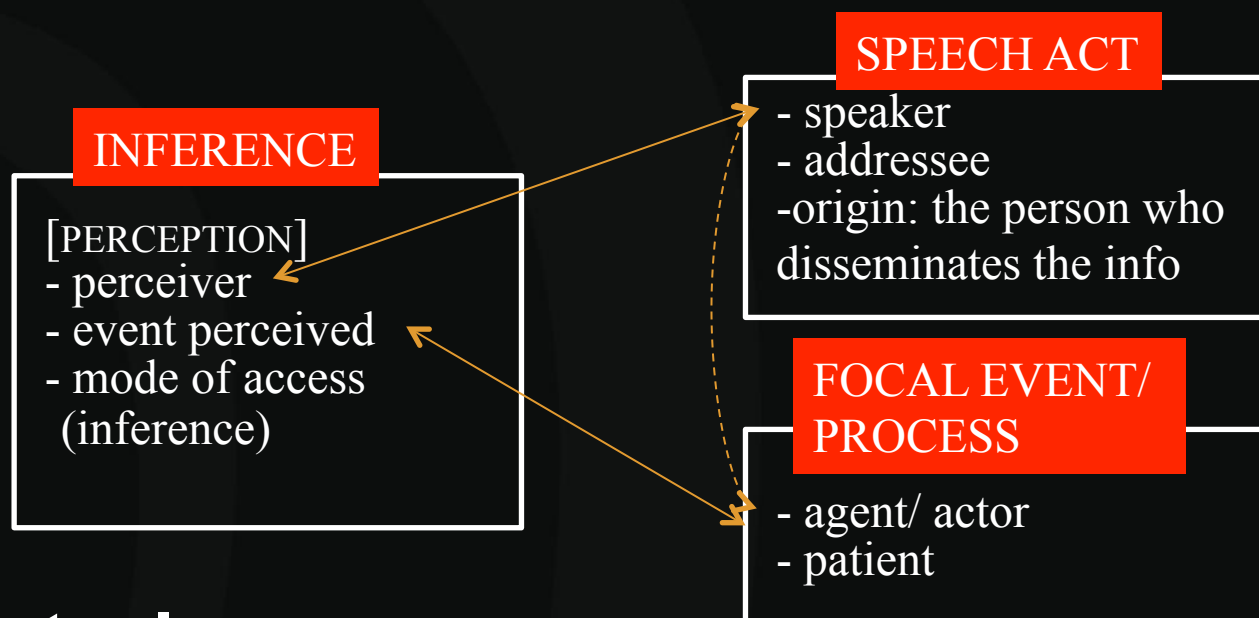
... unless there is the interlocutor's extra effort to create **conceptual distance** between the speaker and the observed event (for more discussion, see Kwon 2012b, 2012c).

(7) “Hm... I **seem to be rained** into the cafeteria. Good thing I have an hour of laptop battery left.” (ME, Sep 01, 2012 on Facebook)

(8) *cinan-pam-ey* *nay-ka* *selkeciha-ss-napo-a*
 last-night-Loc I-Nom dishwash-Ant-**Inf.EV**-Indic
 [The speaker, who drank much, does not remember what she did last night; she finds that all the dishes are clean]
 ‘(seems like) I washed dishes last night.’

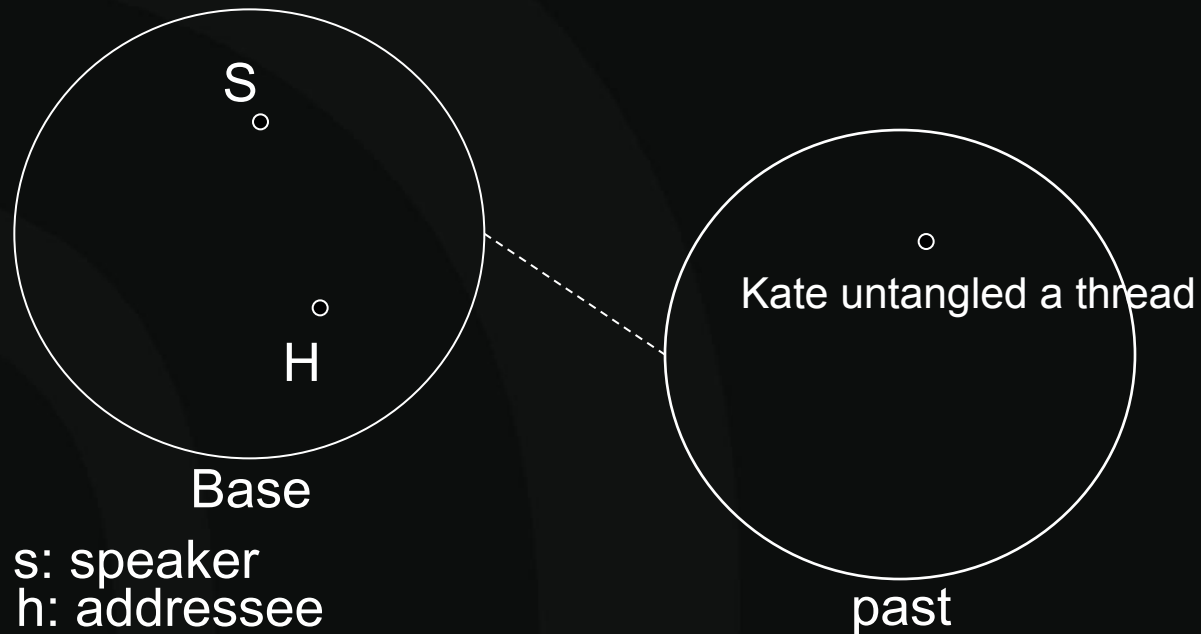
Conceptual Distancing

To better grasp the inferential evidential constructions, we need look into the created conceptual distance resulting from interaction between **a speech-act event, a perception event, and an event that is observed.**



Conceptual Distancing

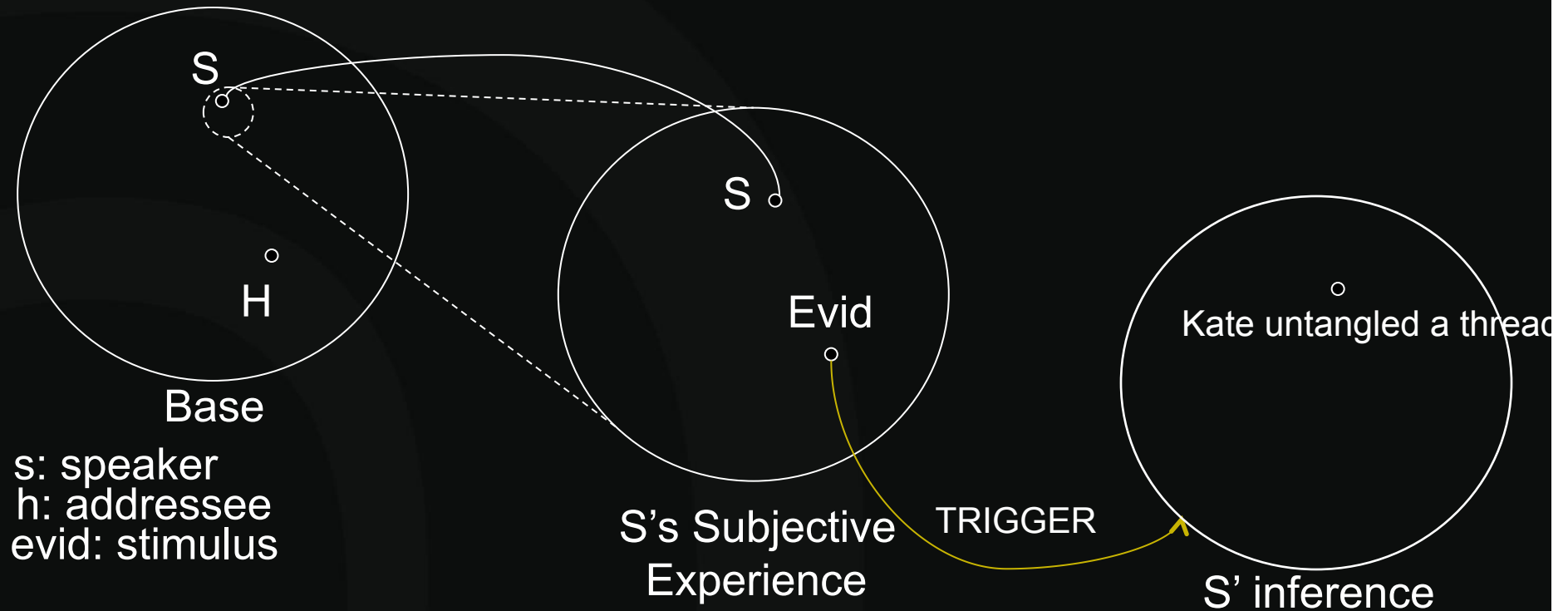
(9) Kate untangled the thread.



Distancing in English: *Seem*



(10) Seems like Kate untangled the thread.



Distancing in English: *Seem*

Simulation

Aspect in English

Marked grammatically

Imperfective

Past progressive

David **was** hiking
was VERB+ing

Perfective

Simple Past

David hiked
VERB +ed

Experiments show that aspect can constrain the way we conceptualize events (Matlock 2012)

Simulation: Aspect (Matlock 2012)





(11) Mark Johnson is a Senator in the United States Senate. He is up for re-election. He graduated from the University of Texas, Austin with a degree in political science. Mark's first term as a United States Senator is almost complete. Last year, Mark **had an affair** with his assistant and **took hush money** from a prominent constituent. (n=92)

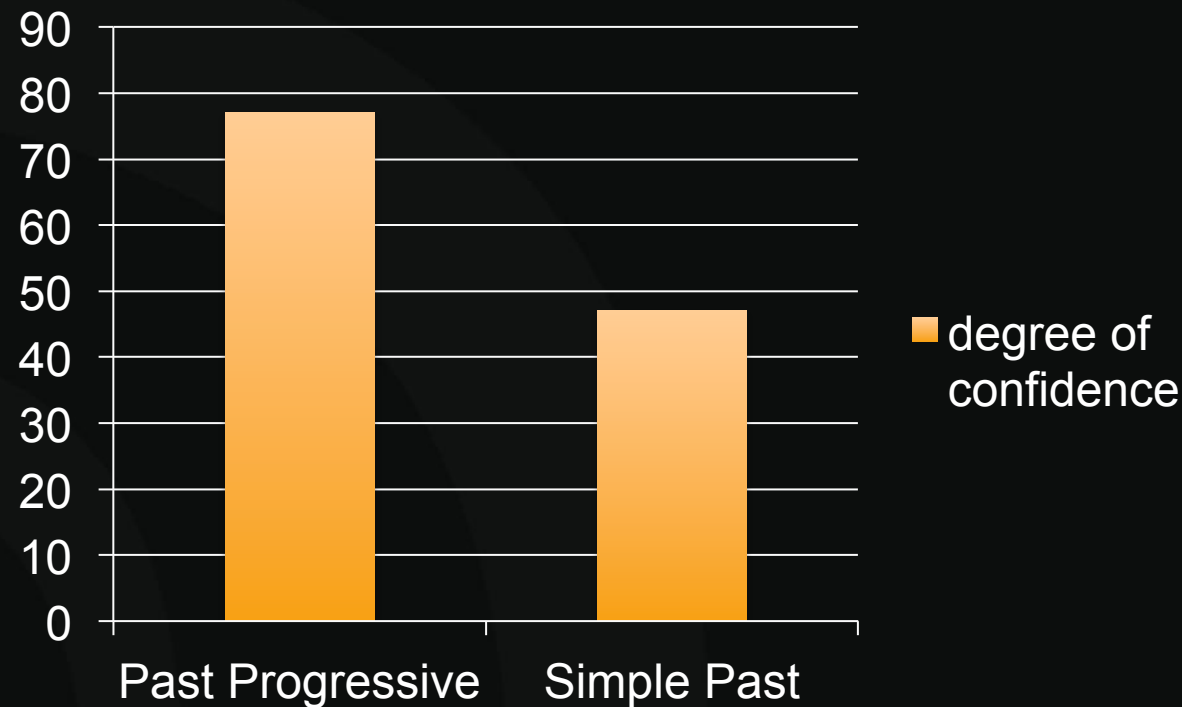
(12) Mark Johnson is a Senator in the United States Senate. He is up for re-election. He graduated from the University of Texas, Austin with a degree in political science. Mark's first term as a United States Senator is almost complete. Last year, Mark **was having an affair** with his assistant and **was taking hush money** from a prominent constituent. (n=98)

1. Will this candidate be re-elected? (yes, no)
2. How confident are you about your decision regarding re-election

Simulation: Aspect (Matlock 2012)



Results



More people were highly confident about “no” decisions when actions were described with past progressive (77%) vs. those in the simple past condition (47%)

Simulation: Aspect (Matlock 2012)

looks/seems/sounds like constructions

Hypothesis:

In these constructions, conceptual distance is encoded because the speaker poses his/her epistemic stance such as positively weak epistemic stance and conjecture, toward an event at Issue. Simulation of the conceptual distance thus affects people's measuring of physical distance.

Simulation: Distancing in Evidentiality



Sample



(13') Kate untangled a thread. (14') Seems like Kate untangled a thread.

How long? (inch)

How long? (inch)

NN₁

ND₁

If there is a consistent difference between the two groups, the priming of the conceptual distance encoded by the *seems like* construction affects the subject's measurement of physical distance.

Simulation: Distancing in Evidentiality



Settings

Two groups of linguistic stimuli (17 sets, including 3 control sets) are exposed to two groups of subjects (35 people each; undergrad students at UNM), respectively.

Assumption:

In English, the expressions *seems/ looks/ sounds like* mark inferentiality or inferential evidentiality based on the origo's indirect experience.

Simulation: Distancing in Evidentiality



Settings

- (15) Tony kicked the soccer ball last night.
- (16) There are still people in front of us.
- (17) The intervals between street trees are the same.
- (18) Kevin swam at a pool this morning.
- (19) Kate untangled a thread.
- (20) Mary jogged in the morning.
- (21) John drew a line on the floor.
- (22) I untangled the thread last night.
- (23) I kicked the soccer ball last night.
- (24) A train passes by us.

Seems like
Looks like
Looks like
Seems like
Looks like
Seems like
Looks like
Looks like
Seems like
Sounds like

Simulation: Distancing in Evidentiality



Settings

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| (15) Tony kicked the soccer ball last night. | How far? (yard) |
| (16) There are still people in front of us. | How many? |
| (17) The intervals between street trees are the same. | How far? (feet) |
| (18) Kevin swam at a pool this morning. | How far? (yard) |
| (19) Kate untangled a thread. | How long? (inch) |
| (20) Mary jogged in the morning. | How far? (mile) |
| (21) John drew a line on the floor. | How long? (inch) |
| (22) I untangled the thread last night. | How long? (inch) |
| (23) I kicked the soccer ball last night. | How far? (yard) |
| (24) A train passes by us. | How many couches? |

Simulation: Distancing in Evidentiality



Settings

Removing outliers

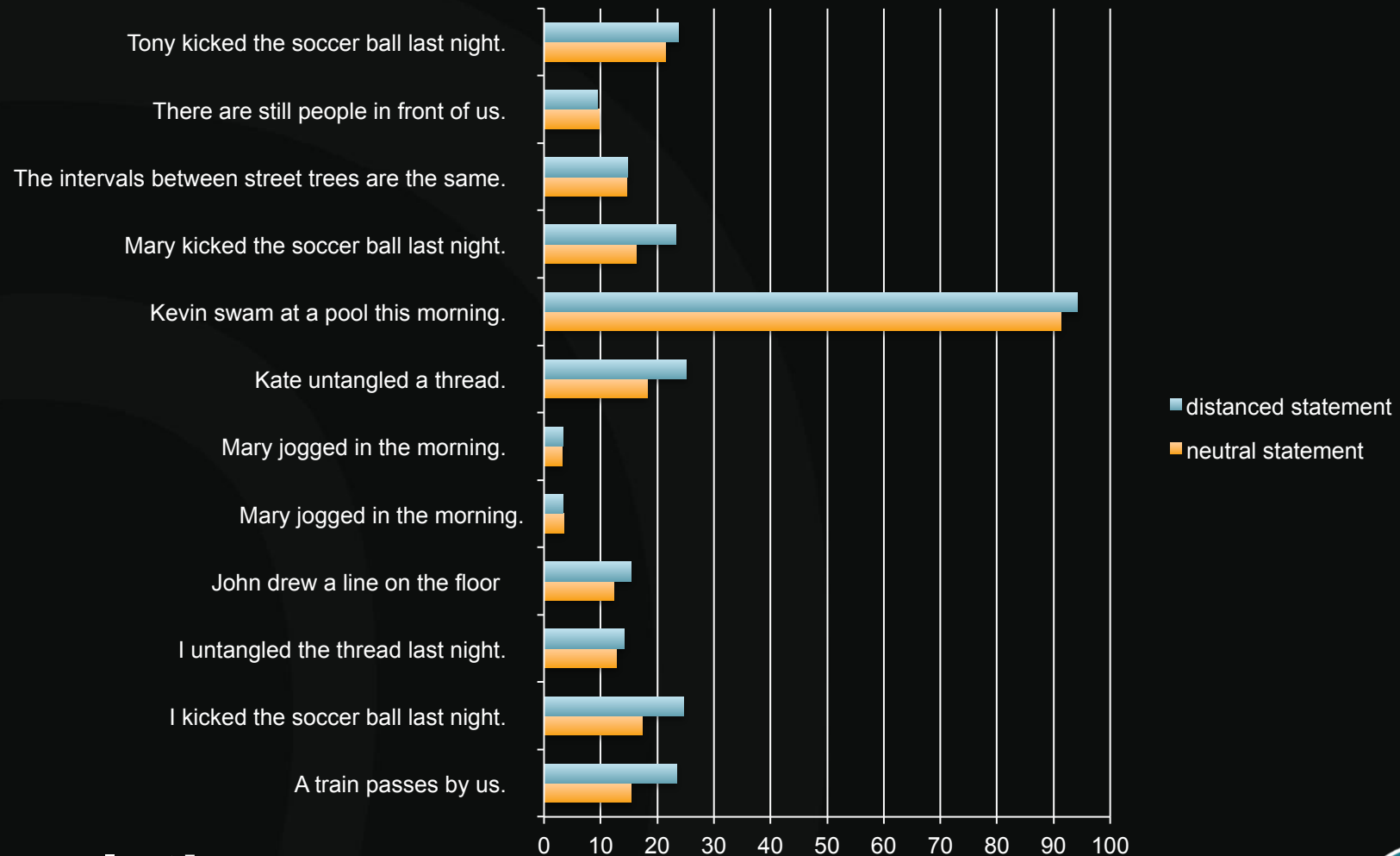
	G	H	I	J	K	
1	Seems like I kicked the soccer ball last night.←	Looks like I untangled the thread last night.←	Looks like Jane was untangling the thread.←	Looks like John drew a line on the floor.←	Seems like John drove last weekend.←	Seems
2	70	5	6	6	4	
3	45	56	6	12	2	
4	50	18	18	20	10	
5	3	2	2	1	4	
6	40	24	24	36	1	
7	7	6	5	5	12	
8	76	98	99	1	7	
9	15	15	13	17	4	
10	7	7	9	6	7	
11	20	7	8	2	2	
12	3	3	2	6	6	
13	3	5	5	2	4	
14	50	12	15	6	9	
15	8	5	4	4	0.5	
16	1,000	1,000.00	1,000.00	129	12	
17	50	11	11	12	1	
18	3	2	8	7.5	4	
19	12	8	16	19	6	
20	3	12	12	14	6	
21	20	12	15	24	8	
22	20	12	12	12	8	
23	10	1	1	6	3	
24	25	26	12	16	5	
25	24	32	8	15	45	
26	50	30	30	24	2	
27	12	6	12	6	7	
28	1	1	1	1	7	
29	15	3	8	5	15	
30	45	1	5	4	20	
31	19	8	7	8	8	
32		25	25	78	60	
33	1	1	1	1	3	
34	58	1	9	0.0001	89	
35	1765	1455	1409	505.5001	381.5	
36	53.181818	11.888889	13.555556	15.318182	11.555556	

Simulation:

Distancing in Evidentiality



Results: average of the numbers



Simulation: Distancing in Evidentiality

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Results

#1. There are still people in front of us (9.76) vs. Looks like there are still people in front of us (9.41)

→ Shows the reversed pattern: the semantics encoded in this pair is related to quantity, not distance necessarily

#2. Uses of the first person subject and the third person subject

(15) Tony kicked the soccer ball last night. (21.49)

(15a) Seems like Tony kicked the soccer ball last night . (23.79)

(23) I kicked the soccer ball last night. (17.4)

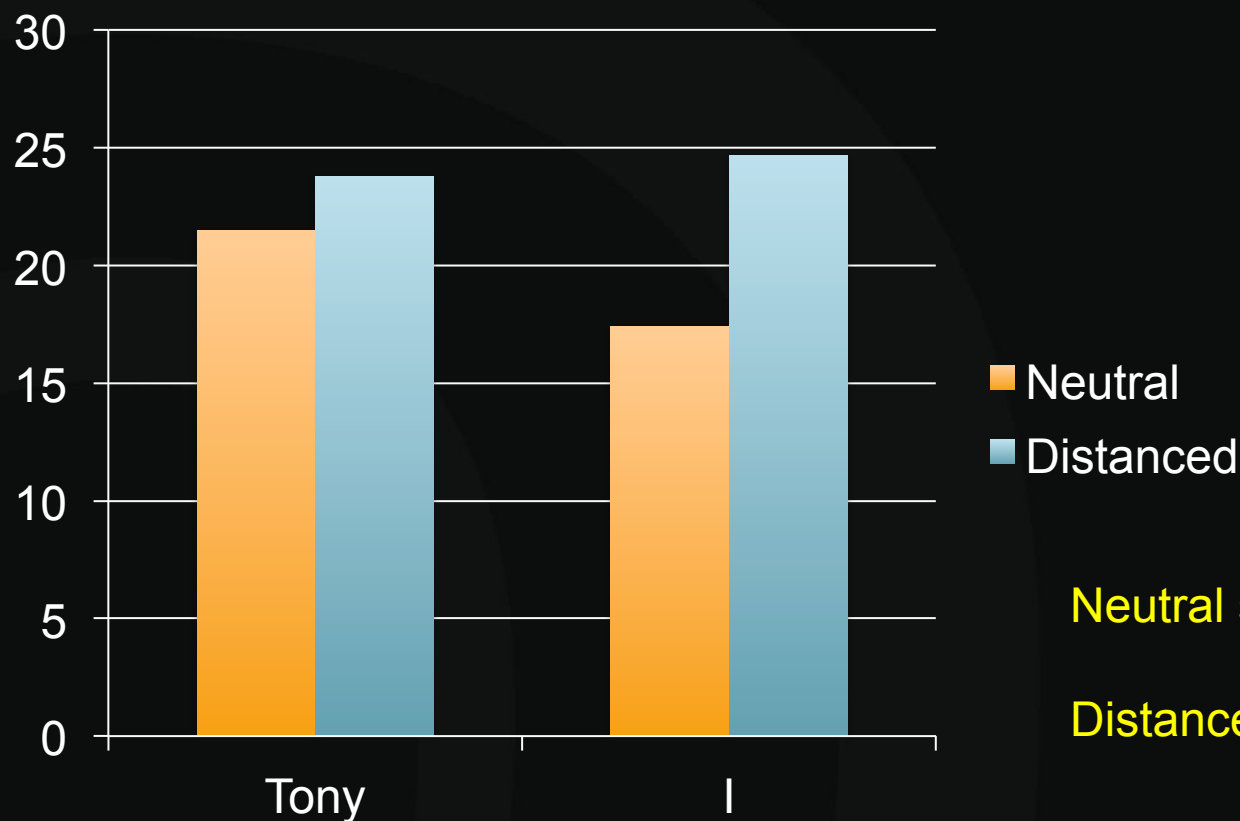
(23a) Seems like I kicked the soccer ball last night. (24.68)

Discussions



Results

#2. Uses of the first person subject and the third person subject



Neutral stimuli with *Tony* and *I*:
 $21.49 > 17.4$

Distanced stimuli with *Tony* and *I*:
 $23.79 < 24.68$

Additional effort to pose a distanced stance toward the speaker herself?

Discussions



Results

The subjects exposed to the target sentences with *seems/looks/sounds like* answered higher numbers than those to the neutral ones.

It is noted, however, that magnitude of the responses from the ND1 condition were **not significantly greater** than (that of the responses from) NN1 condition.

However, binominal test showed that the probability of observing greater numbers from ND1 condition out of 17 is only 0.003%, suggesting that **the ND1 condition consistently showed greater responses.**

Discussion



Concluding Remarks

The subjects exposed to the target sentence with *seems/looks/sounds like* answered higher number than those to the neutral ones. This pattern is accounted for consistently in most of the sets, which suggests that **the conceptual distance created by the added-up layer of a mental space in inferential evidential constructions is related to the cognitive ability to measure physical distance.**

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Thank you

Settings

Two groups of linguistic stimuli (10 sets, including 1 control set) are exposed to two groups of subjects (12 people and 34 people; undergrad students at HUFS, respectively).

**Comparison: the Korean
Inferential EV
(Kwon In preparation)**



-Napo- Construction

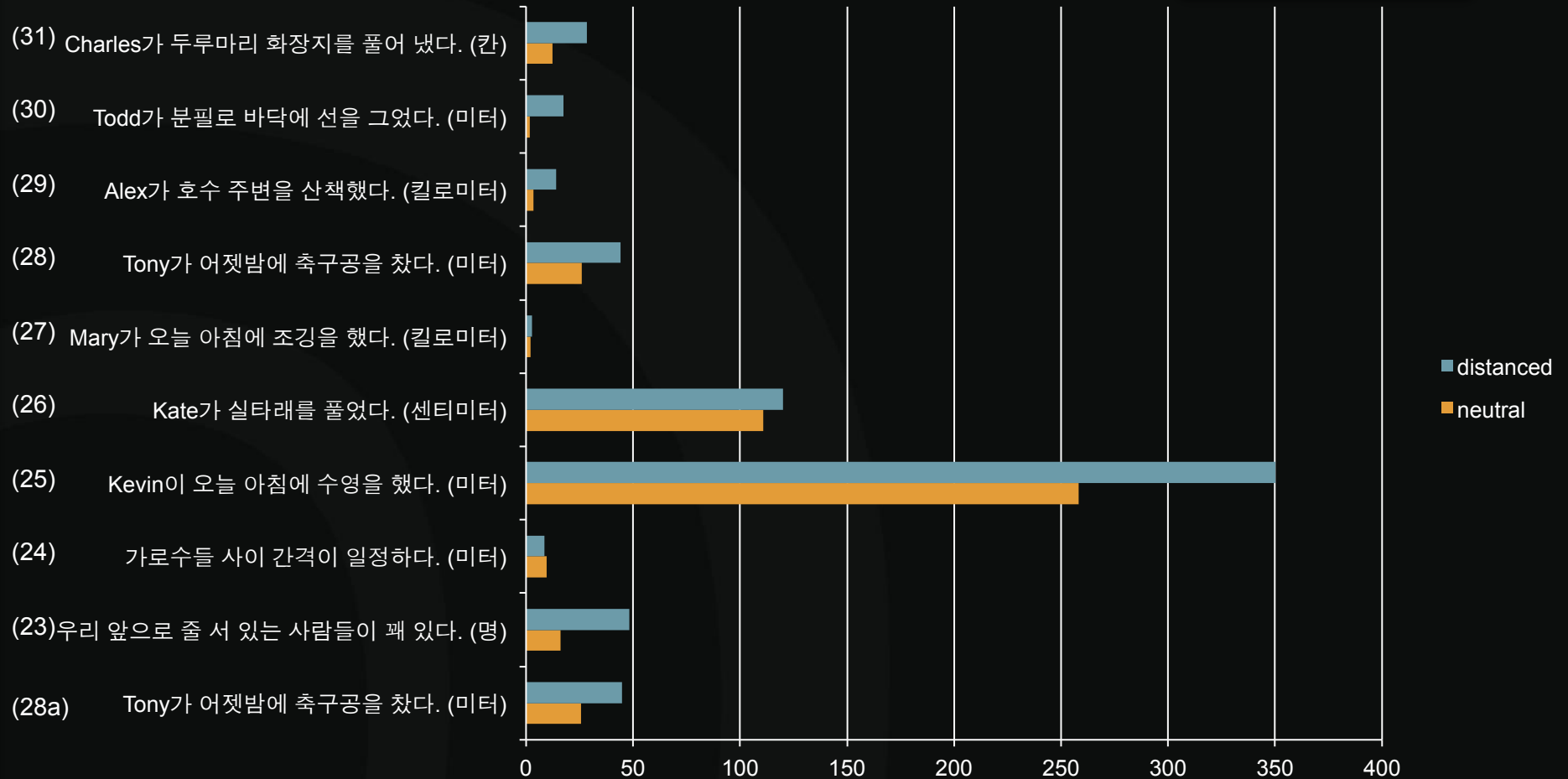
[In Korean]

- (23) Tony kicked a soccer ball last night (*/-napo-*). (meter)
- (24) There are still people in front of us (*/-napo-*). (person)
- (25) The intervals between street trees are the same (*/-napo-*). (meter)
- (26) Kevin swam at a pool this morning (*/-napo-*) (meter)
- (27) Kate untangled a thread (*/-napo-*). (centimeter)
- (28) Mary jogged in the morning. (kilometer)
- (29) Alex walked around the lake. (kilometer)
- (30) Todd drew a line on the floor. (meter)
- (31) Charles unfolded a toilet tissue roll. (*khan* 'unit')

**Extension: Distancing of the
Korean Inferential EV**
(Kwon In preparation)



Results



Extension: Distancing of the Korean Inferential EV (Kwon In preparation)



Results

The similar result: the subjects exposed to the target sentence with *-napo-* answered higher number than those to the neutral ones.

Discussion

