

# **Presuppositions and their impact on linking a spatial relational sentence to the extralinguistic context**

Robin Hörnig

SFB 632 "Information Structure"  
Potsdam University

If a spatial relational sentence like 'The rabbit is above the cow' is used as an instruction how to place a picture of a rabbit and a picture of a cow relative to each other on a computer display, participants need to link the input sentence to the extralinguistic context. Previous research has shown that it is, for instance, easier to place the located object (e.g., the rabbit) relative to the reference object (e.g., the cow) than vice versa. This finding is explained by the application of the Standard Procedure in linking the sentence to context: a reference frame is imposed on the reference object and the target place of the located object is determined with respect to that reference frame. Three different placement tasks were employed: displacing one of two misarranged pictures, placing two not yet placed pictures, and placing a not yet placed picture relative to a picture already placed. Our experiments investigated the impact of presuppositions related to topichood by varying the constituent order of the placement instruction. We assumed that the referent of the first noun phrase is the sentence topic and presupposed to be part of the extralinguistic context. We found clear evidence for an impact of presuppositions. Most strikingly, the difficulty to place a reference object relative to a located object even disappears if the unmarked constituent order of the sentence can be used as a cue to anticipate the located object as the one provided by the context.