Topichood and temporal interpretation of DPs guide clause-internal, causal coherence

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Faculty of Linguistics, Philology, and Phonetics, University of Oxford

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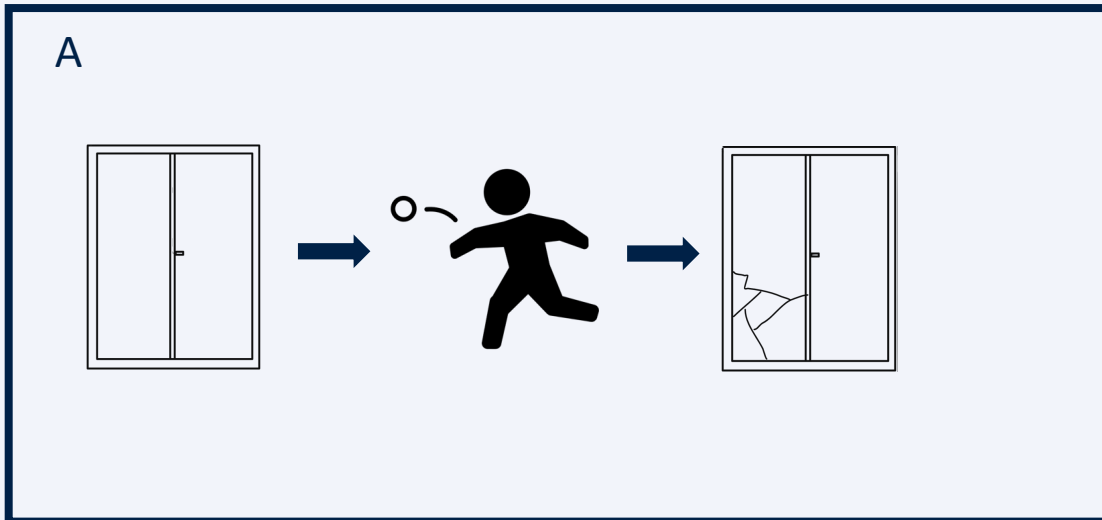Faculty of Linguistics, Philology, and Phonetics, University of Oxford

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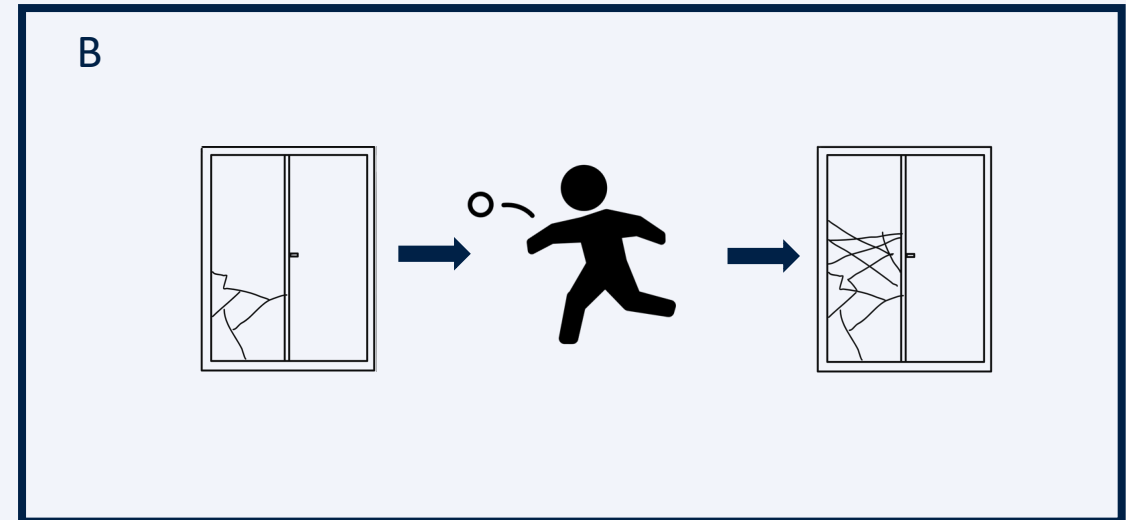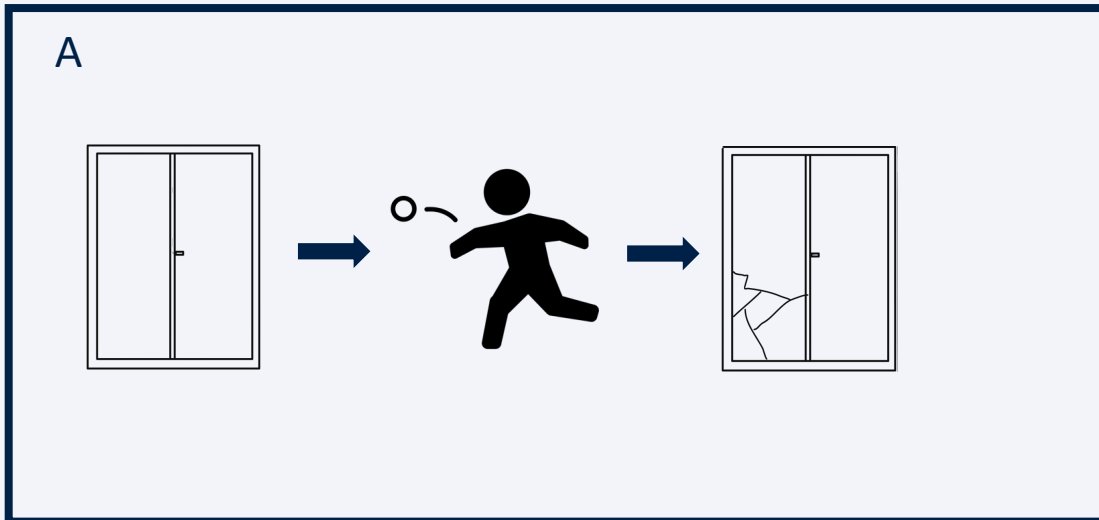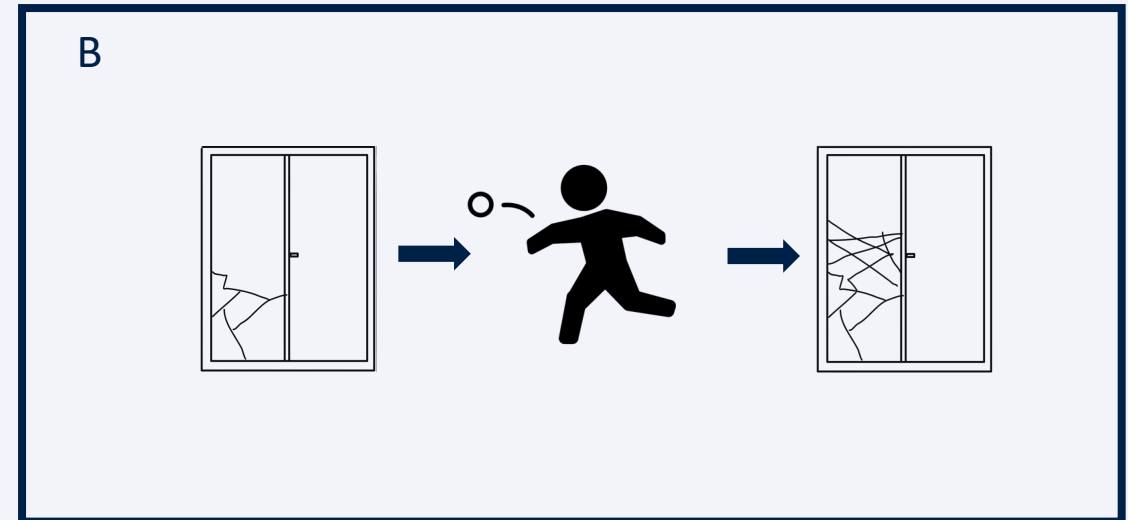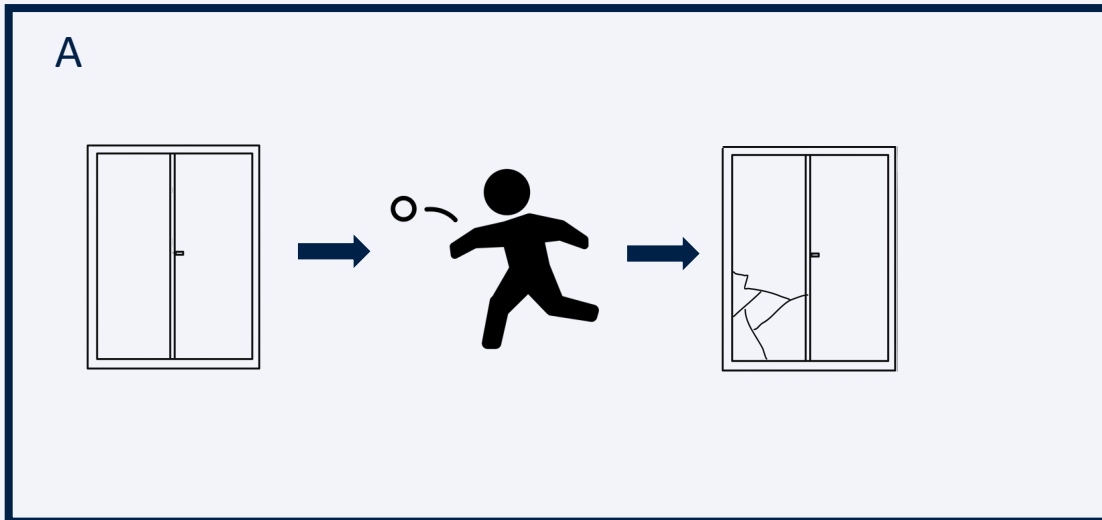(1) The broken window got struck with a stone.

(2) A broken window got struck with a stone.

(3) Bethany struck the broken window with a stone.

(4) Bethany struck a broken window with a stone.

To confirm our intuitions, we ran a **comprehension task** (N=64); see a sample:

(1) The broken window got struck with a stone from the sidewalk next to the building. *[Pass, Def]*

(2) A broken window got struck with a stone from the sidewalk next to the building. *[Pass, Indef]*

(3) Bethany struck the broken window with a stone from the sidewalk next to the building. *[Act, Def]*

(4) Bethany struck a broken window with a stone from the sidewalk next to the building. *[Act, Indef]*

Question: Do you think the window became broken because it was struck with a stone? (respond on a 7-point scale; 1 = 100% no, 7 = 100% yes)
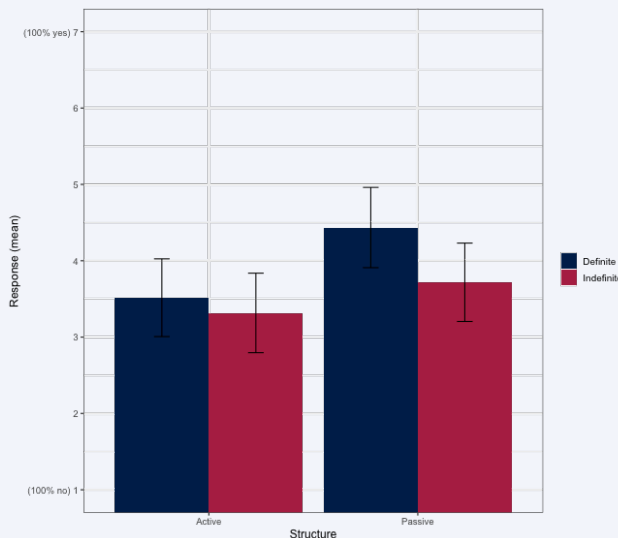
To confirm our intuitions, we ran a **comprehension task** (N=64); see a sample:

(1) The broken window got struck with a stone from the sidewalk next to the building. *[Pass, Def]*

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Results:

Fixed Effects in CLMM

	Est	SE	z	Pr (> |t|)
Structure	0.58	0.14	4.23	<.001***
Definiteness	0.40	0.10	3.81	<.001***
Interaction	0.44	0.21	2.15	.0032*

Pairwise Comparisons

Contrast: Definite - Indefinite

	Est	SE	z	Pr (> |t|)
Active	0.20	0.12	1.64	.1008
Passive	0.72	0.20	3.54	<.001***

These **confirmed** our intuitions:

- Native speakers can infer **causal relations** between **resultative adjectives** and instruments within clauses;

- And show sensitivity to **Structure** and **Definiteness**.

Analysis:

- Causal relations depend on **temporal relations**:

  ➢ *The broken window was struck with a stone.* ⤳ 'was broken when/#before it was struck' & 'broken because of the stone'

- Sentence **topics** are proposed to be temporally independent:

  ➢ Only **definite subjects** (e.g., *the broken window*) are preferentially taken to be sentence topics.

  ➢ While neither indefinite subjects nor objects are.

TOPICHOOD AND TEMPORAL INTERPRETATION OF DPS GUIDE CLAUSE-INTERNAL, CAUSAL COHERENCE

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A broken window got struck with a stone ...

(a) $\exists e$ [strike-with-a-stone(e) & $\exists x$ [Theme(e,x) & window(x) & $\exists s$[broken(s) & In(s,x)]]] $\vDash e_s < e$

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THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

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