DE GRUYTER

EFFECTS OF ANIMACY IN GRAMMAR AND COGNITION

GUEST EDITORS

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DESCRIPTION

Most, if not all, of the world's languages exhibit "animacy effects", whereby grammatical structures interact with the relative animacy of noun referents, as represented on hierarchies or scales of varying degrees of granularity, with human discourse participants at one end and inanimate objects at the other (Silverstein 1976; Dixon 1979; Corbett 1991, 2012; Lockwood & Macaulay 2012). Ample cross-linguistic evidence demonstrates that animacy conditions a wide range of linguistic phenomena, and we witness complex effects of animacy that require (a) subtler distinctions than would be expected from a binary contrast [± animate] and (b) more sophisticated analyses than e.g. a simple mapping of higher animacy to higher grammatical role.

In this Special Issue, we align the linguistic interest in the grammatical effects of animacy with broader questions concerning animacy in cognition, including the origins of animacy as a central linguistic element, the biases which shape how we attend to animacy distinctions and the ways in which animacy affects discourse structure and narrative. Recent work in cognitive science and adjacent fields has contributed much to the understanding of why animacy plays such a central role across linguistic domains. Yet, while there is a general understanding that sensitivity to animacy is a property central to human cognition, its role in the grammars of the world's languages is extremely diverse, and there is no clear consensus on how to incorporate animacy within linguistic theories.

The papers in this SI provide an updated look at the state of the field today through a cross-theoretical, interdisciplinary approach. This SI focusses on the cognitive status and construal of animacy in order to extend our understanding of its role in grammar(s), discourse and theoretical approaches.

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