The more, the merrier.
Words with multiple meanings in Spanish

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- Thesis dissertation: sept-oct 2021
- Research group: Psylex (@psylex_lab)
- Member of AJL

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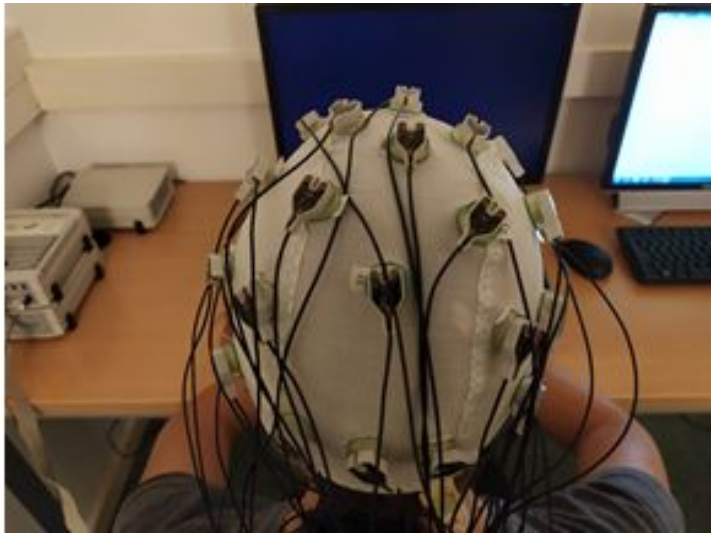
@natalialopc



Natalia López Cortés @natalialopc · Nov 3

Words normally have more than one meaning. So, how can speakers deal with this on a daily basis? How do we store in our memory the different meanings? How do we choose the one we need? These are some of the questions I try to answer, by conducting experimental tasks 🔬

> **StuTS 68 @ Berlin & in the cloud** @StuTS_official · Nov 2
>
> Your research in a nutshell (in one tweet): How would you describe your research in linguistics to a stranger?

1 12

1. Lexical ambiguity: definition, types, viewpoints.
2. My research: three approaches to lexical ambiguity.
3. Other (interesting) questions

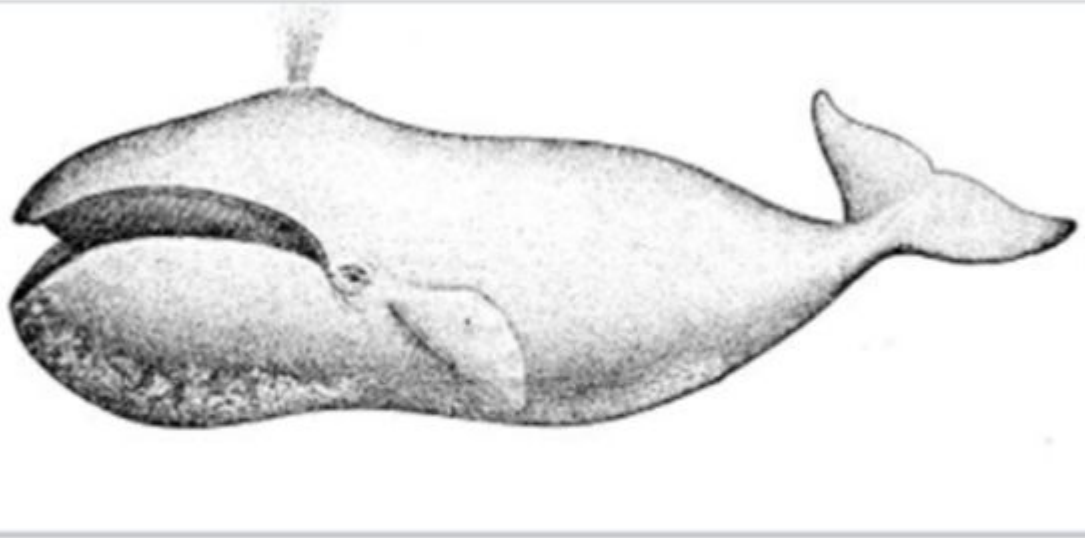
One single linguistic expression

Multiple meanings

You Retweeted

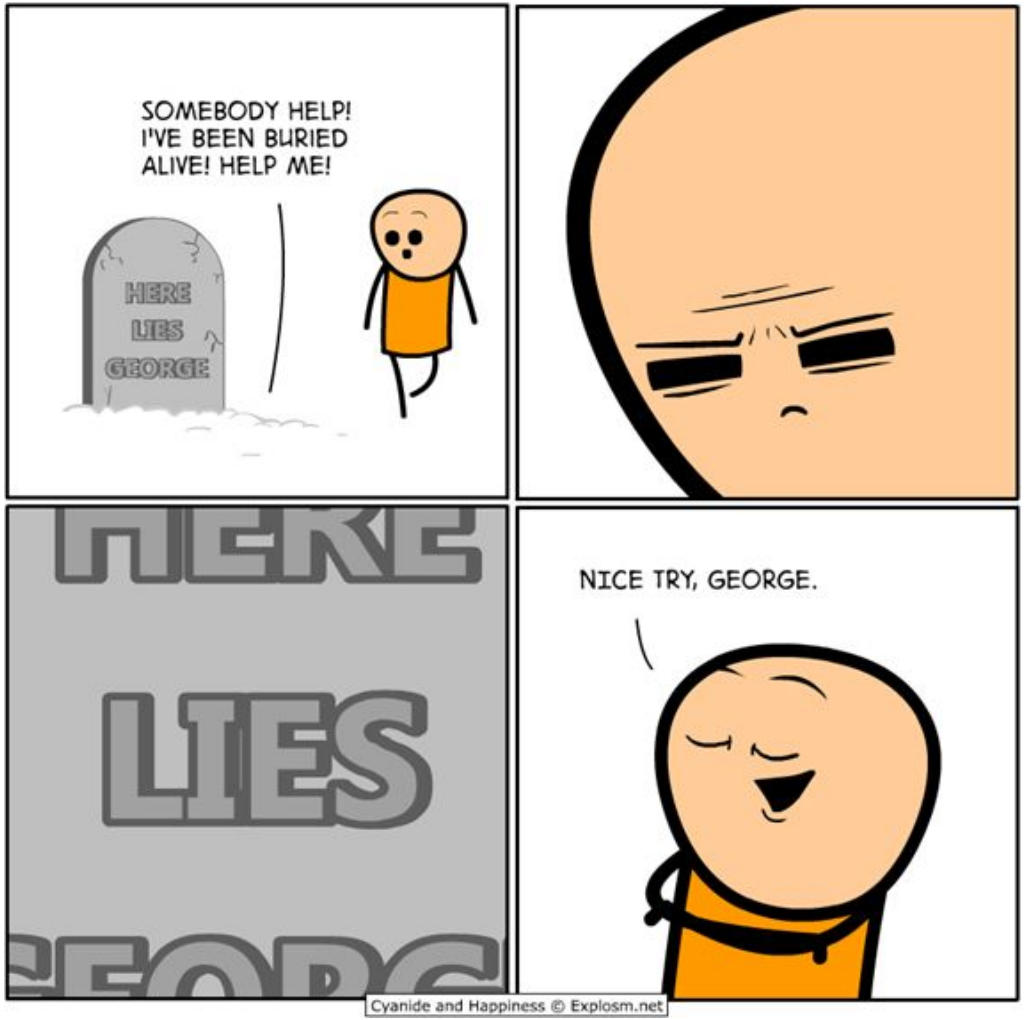
log :) @yzplz · Apr 29

this is what adults looked like 1884



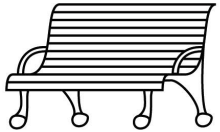
Drawing of an adult in 1884

212 13.9K 85.9K


SOMEBODY HELP! I'VE BEEN BURIED ALIVE! HELP ME!
HERE LIES GEORGE
NICE TRY, GEORGE.
Cyanide and Happiness © Explosm.net

1. Lexical ambiguity
   1.1. Definition
   1.2. Types
   1.3. Viewpoints

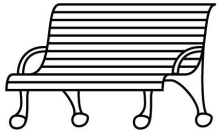
Banco



1. Lexical ambiguity

- 1.1. Definition
- 1.2. Types
- 1.3. Viewpoints

Banco

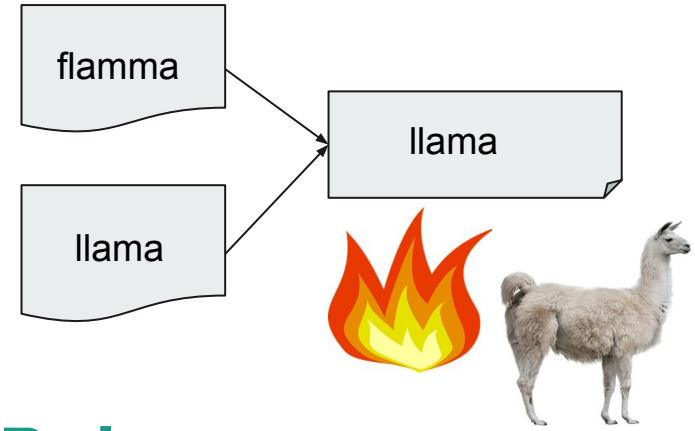


* **Bank:** ***institution / of a river***

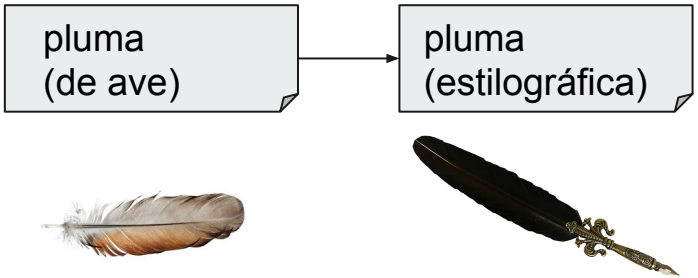
1. Lexical ambiguity

- 1.1. Definition
- 1.2. Types
- 1.3. Viewpoints

Homonymy



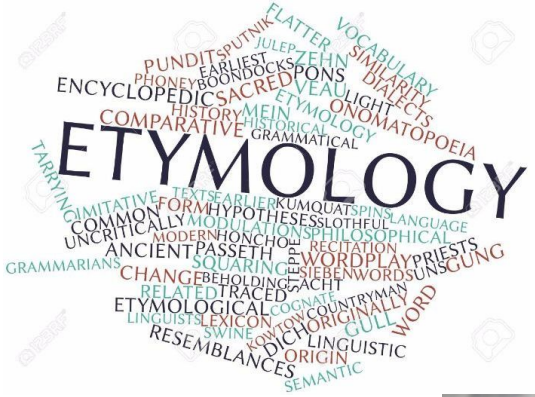
Polysemy

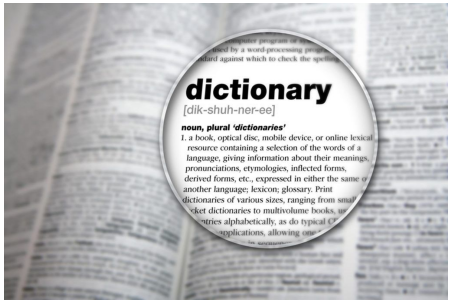


1. Lexical ambiguity

- 1.1. Definition
- 1.2. Types
- 1.3. Viewpoints

1. Diachronic approach

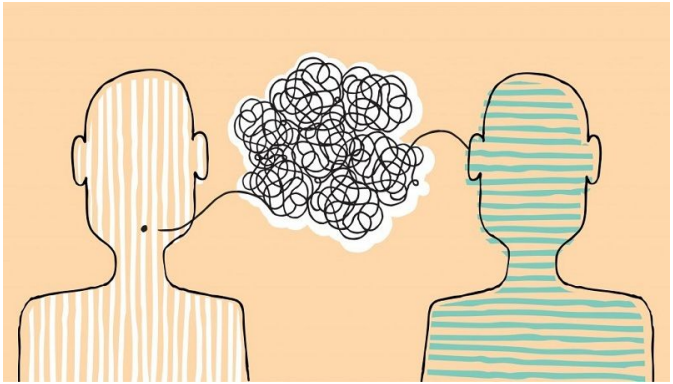




1. Lexical ambiguity

- 1.1. Definition
- 1.2. Types
- 1.3. Viewpoints

2. Synchronic approach



Why I choose **synchrony**:

- I am interested in what speakers think and the interpretation they make of ambiguity, not in what the dictionary says.
- As speakers, when communicating, we access to our own information about words, not to dictionary knowledge.
- Speakers are normally ignorant of the etymology: it is therefore irrelevant when studying the language processing.

1. Lexical ambiguity

- 1.1. Definition
- 1.2. Types
- 1.3. Viewpoints

Homonymy

llama

llama

not related meanings

Polysemy

pluma → pluma

related meanings/senses

My research

2. Approaches to lexical ambiguity

1.1. Theoretical

1.2. Experimental

-What is the linguistic difference between homonymy and polysemy?

- What is the limit between homonymy and polysemy?

2. Approaches to lexical ambiguity

1.1. Theoretical

1.2. Experimental

Palabra	Porcentaje	Cuestionario	Pareja
Banco	95,3	Cue01_43	Silla
Bote	90,5	Cue01_43	
Lata	91,5	Cue01_43	
Canto	84,6	Cue01_43	
Borde	83,7	Cue01_43	
Cardenal	77,5	Cue01_43	Obispo
Cura	86	Cue01_43	
Heroína	97,4	Cue01_43	Fármaco
Taco	84,3	Cue01_43	Ofensa
Puesto	60	Cue01_43	
Cabo	85	Cue01_43	Jefe
	80	Cue03_25	
Caña	71,1	Cue01_43	Zumo
Cola	71,5	Cue01_43	Fila
	60	Cue03_25	
	71,3	Cue04_95	

CORPUS

- Data classified according to the psychological interpretation of ambiguity
- Basis for a theoretical and an experimental study.
- **300 words**

2. Approaches to lexical ambiguity

1.1. Theoretical

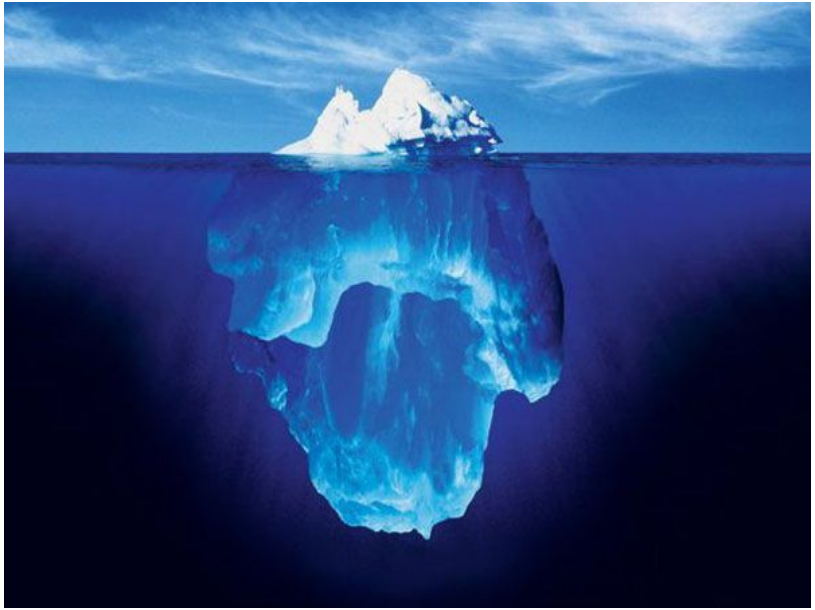
1.2. Experimental

Psycholinguistics is the discipline that investigates and describes the psychological processes that make it possible for humans to master and use language. Psycholinguists conduct research on speech development and language development and how individuals of all ages comprehend and produce language. (Ratner & Gleason, 2004)

2. Approaches to lexical ambiguity

1.1. Theoretical

1.2. Experimental



2. Approaches to lexical ambiguity

1.1. Theoretical

1.2. Experimental

conscious

unconscious

2. Approaches to lexical ambiguity

1.1. Theoretical

1.2. Experimental

questionnaires

-information about the interpretation of ambiguous words

conscious

A

≠

Pluma: polysemy

≠

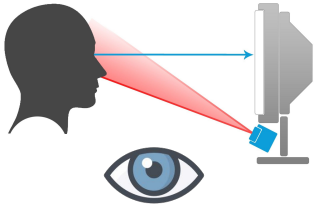
Pluma: homonymy

2. Approaches to lexical ambiguity

1.1. Theoretical

1.2. Experimental

unconscious



experimental tasks

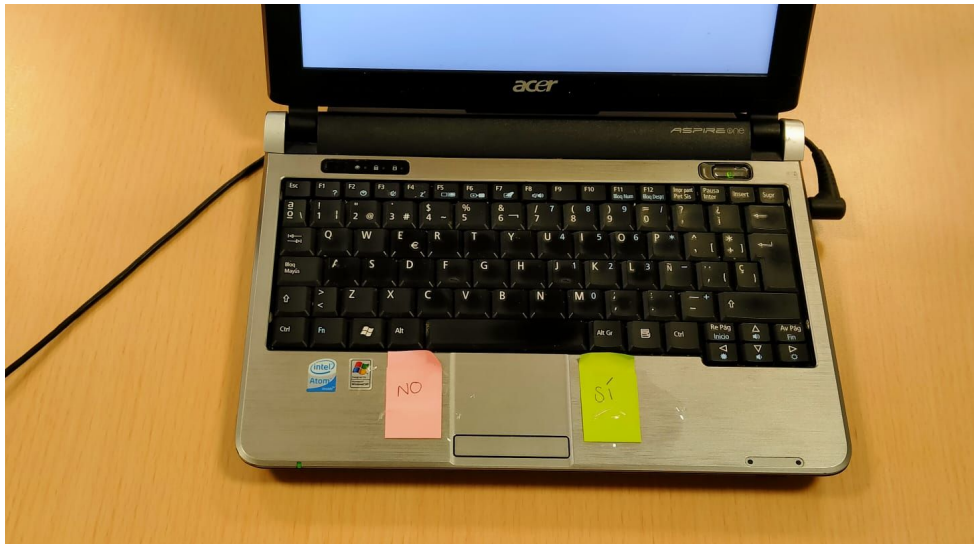
-information about the processing of ambiguous words

Lexical decision tasks

TALSO

SILLA

Does this word exist in Spanish?

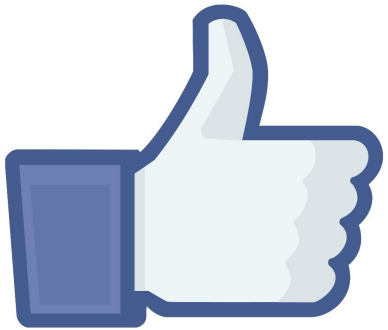


Lexical decision tasks

The time it takes to recognise the word and press YES → The time it takes to access lexical information in the mental lexicon

Lexical decision tasks and ambiguity

Words with multiple meanings are accessed faster than words with one single meaning



Ambiguity advantage

Lexical decision tasks and ambiguity

Polysemous words were accessed faster, but homonymous word were accessed slower

ELSEVIER

Journal of Memory and Language

Volume 46, Issue 2, February 2002, Pages 245-266

Regular Article

Making Sense of Semantic Ambiguity: Semantic Competition in Lexical Access ☆

Jennifer Rodd [a, f2], Gareth Gaskell [b], William Marslen-Wilson [c]

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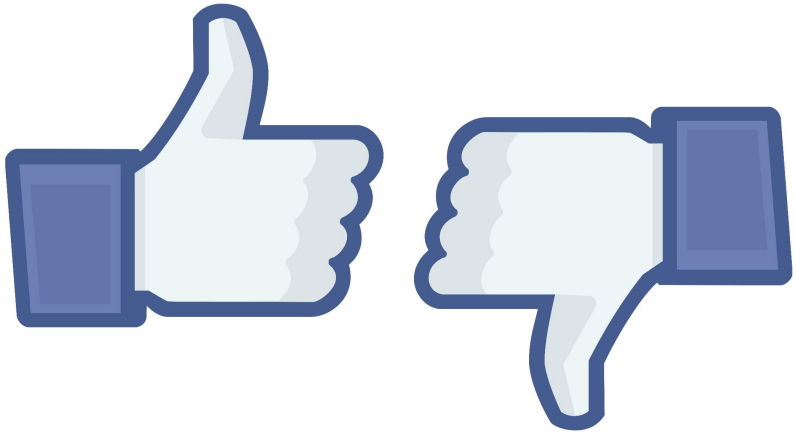
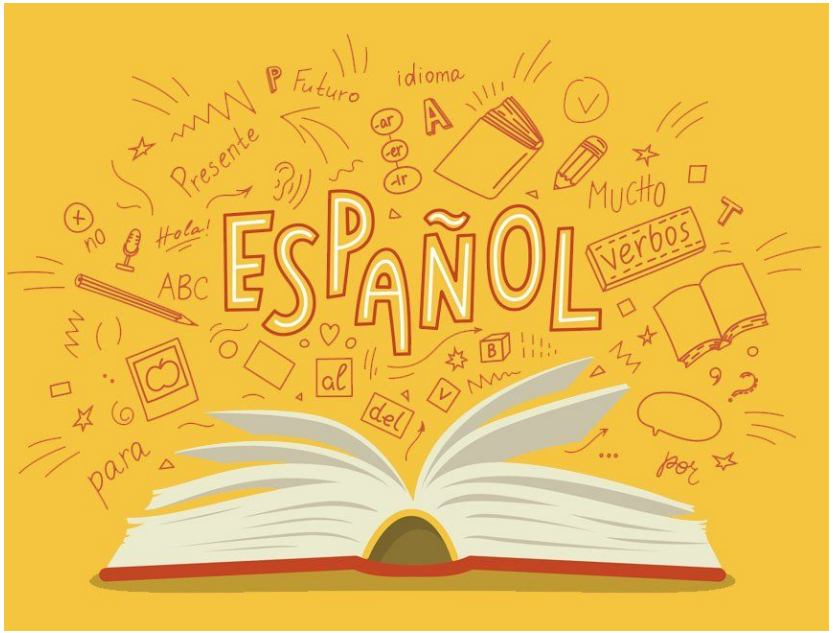
Lexical decision tasks and ambiguity

Polysemy advantage



Homonymy disadvantage

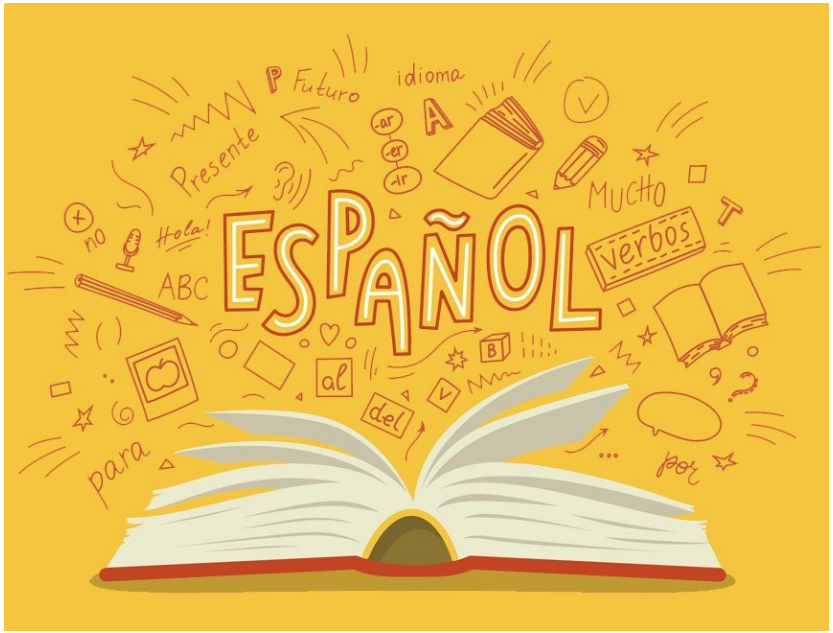
Lexical decision tasks and ambiguity



Ambiguity advantage

No effects of the relatedness of meanings

Lexical decision tasks and ambiguity

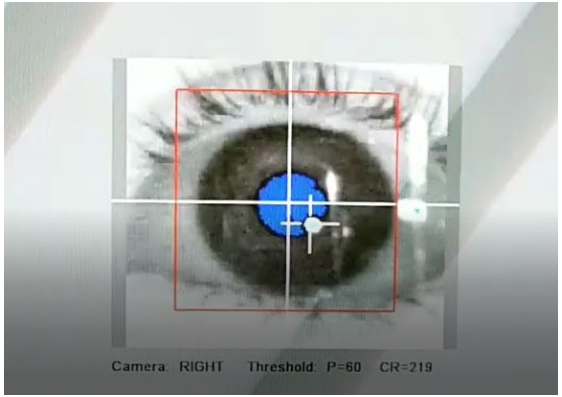


Ambiguity advantage

No effects of the relatedness of meanings

Eye-tracking

Reading tasks



Eye-tracking

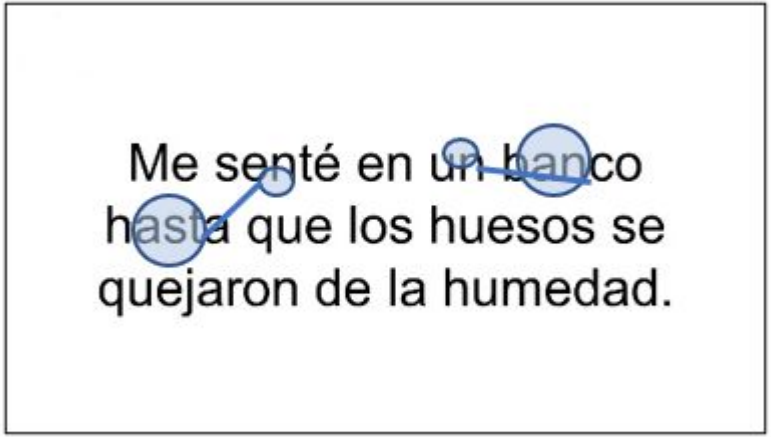
The more movements and fixations you make

The harder it is to process linguistic information

The bigger your pupil gets

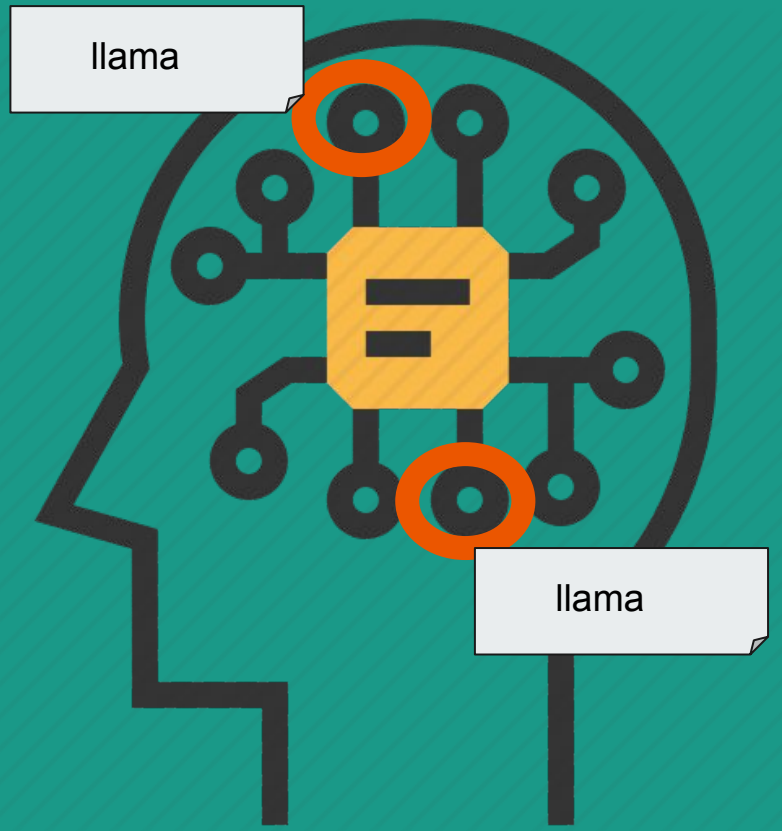
Eye-tracking and ambiguity

When an ambiguous word is inserted in a context, is it still easier to process?



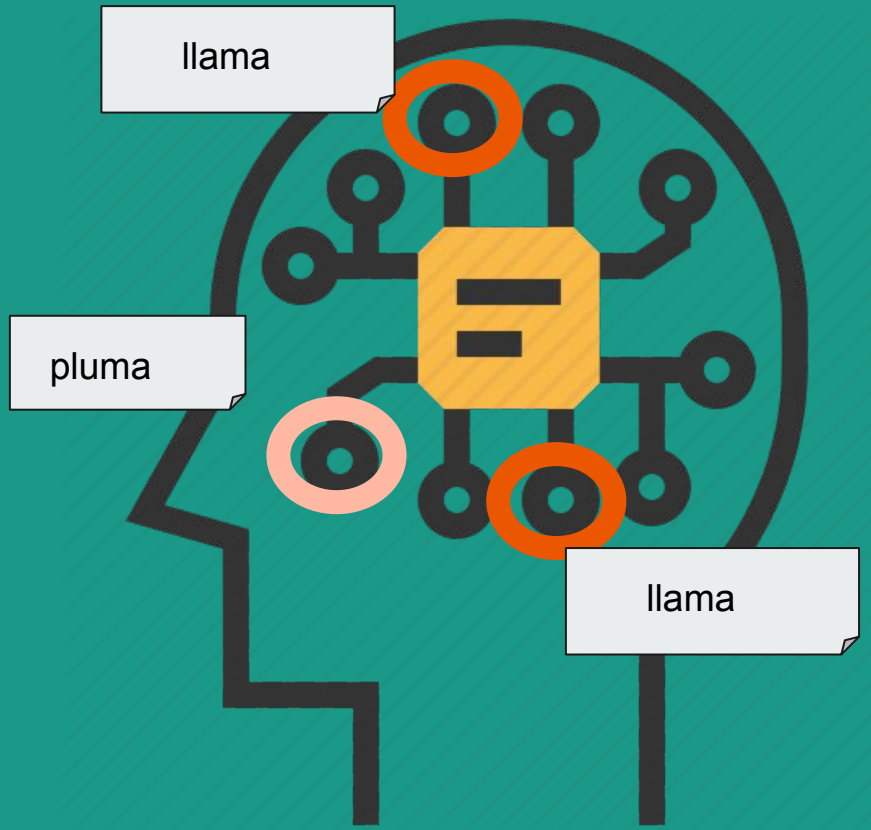
How are ambiguous words stored in the mental lexicon?

Homonymy: different entries



Homonymy: different entries

Polysemy: single entry



3. Other (interesting) questions

- How and why words started to have more than one meaning?
- Why is language ambiguous? Does ambiguity have any cognitive advantages?

3. Other (interesting) questions

- PNL & Computational Linguistics
- Design of dictionaries
- Language teaching

Thank you for your attention!

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