

An ERP investigation of pronoun resolution

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The present study investigated the time course for the contribution of lexical features and pragmatic information to the resolution of pronominal anaphors. Event-related potentials (ERPs) were recorded while participants read two-sentence scenarios. The first sentence introduced an antecedent preceded by an indefinite article (a salad plate) or a definite article (the salad plate). The second sentence included a singular (it) or plural (them) pronoun to refer to the antecedent. Indefinite articles typically signal a general category of items (group of salad plates) whereas definite articles signal a specific entity (specific salad plate). Thus, although singular pronouns always matched the antecedent in number, pragmatic match was determined by the article preceding the antecedent. Plural pronouns matched antecedents preceded by indefinite articles and singular pronouns matched antecedents preceded by definite articles. Neural activity demonstrated that lexical features and pragmatic information are quickly used (within 400 msec following pronoun onset) to resolve pronouns.