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Author

Burte, Heather

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The Role of Task Characteristics and Individual Differences in Pointing to Unseen Locations

Heather Burte

University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, United States

Abstract

Pointing tasks have been used for decades to investigate peoples understanding of environmental-scale spaces. Most of this research has used the variability of pointing estimates to provide insights into peoples cognitive maps. In pointing experiments, experimenters need to identify a signal within the trial-by-trial and participant-by-participant variability. However, it is not well understood how characteristics of the task and differences between individuals contribute to pointing variability. In this paper, I investigated characteristics of pointing tasks and individual differences (i.e., gender, sense-of-direction, familiarity, and strategy use) to provide insights into the factors that influence pointing accuracy and its variability. Using the findings of this study, I make recommendations for best-practices in pointing task methods and analyses.