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The Effects of Grammatical Aspect and Visual Perspective on Imagining Accomplishments

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Abstract: We examined how grammatical aspect and visual perspective taking (first- or third-person) influence the ability to imagine accomplishments. Our main prediction was that it would be easier to imagine completed (I had built the fence.) than ongoing events (I was building the fence.) because accomplishments include natural temporal end points. Slow cortical brain potentials were examined as an index of the difficulty associated with imagining. Our results showed that participants had more difficulty imagining ongoing than completed accomplishments, and that it was easier to imagine from the third- versus first-person perspective. The ability of participants to imagine from different visual perspectives was not influenced by grammatical aspect. Participants indicated that the people in their imagined events were more vivid when they imagined ongoing versus completed accomplishments, as well as when they imagined from a third- versus first-person perspective. As expected, grammatical aspect influenced which temporal components of events were imagined.