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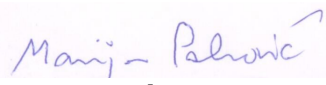67080 Strasbourg Cedex
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Scientific Report

From December 5 to 6 2010 I participated to the initial xPrag project meeting "The preference for Approximation" with the two other project participants, dr. Stephanie Solt from the Centrum für allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft in Berlin and dr. Chris Cummins from the Cambridge University.

The purpose of the initial meeting was to define the pilot studies that we would execute in the first months of the project, the literature and the theoretical standpoints.

We concluded that the best course for examining the preference for approximation would be the preference for rounding numbers. Namely, people round up numbers even if the exact values are available in order to make a relevant contribution to the information exchange (e.g. it is relevant that something is 100 meters away on a scale of 10 meters, i.e. it is relevant that something is between 90 and 110 m away, therefore, a speaker would rather say that something is 100 meters away, than to say that it is 103 meters away (which would mean the introduction of a more precise, but not relevant 1 m scale)).

We decided to program a reaction time experiment with a modified Sternberg paradigm (for short term memory) in which rounded and exact times would have to be remembered by the participants. This way we would be able to control both the roundness of the numbers (10, 20, 30,...) and different granularity scales (in 5', 10', 15'...). We decided to make the final programming at the next meeting in Cambridge.

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