Lecture 23

Context in Language Processing

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ENLP | 27 April 2023

Be aware she can move in any direction

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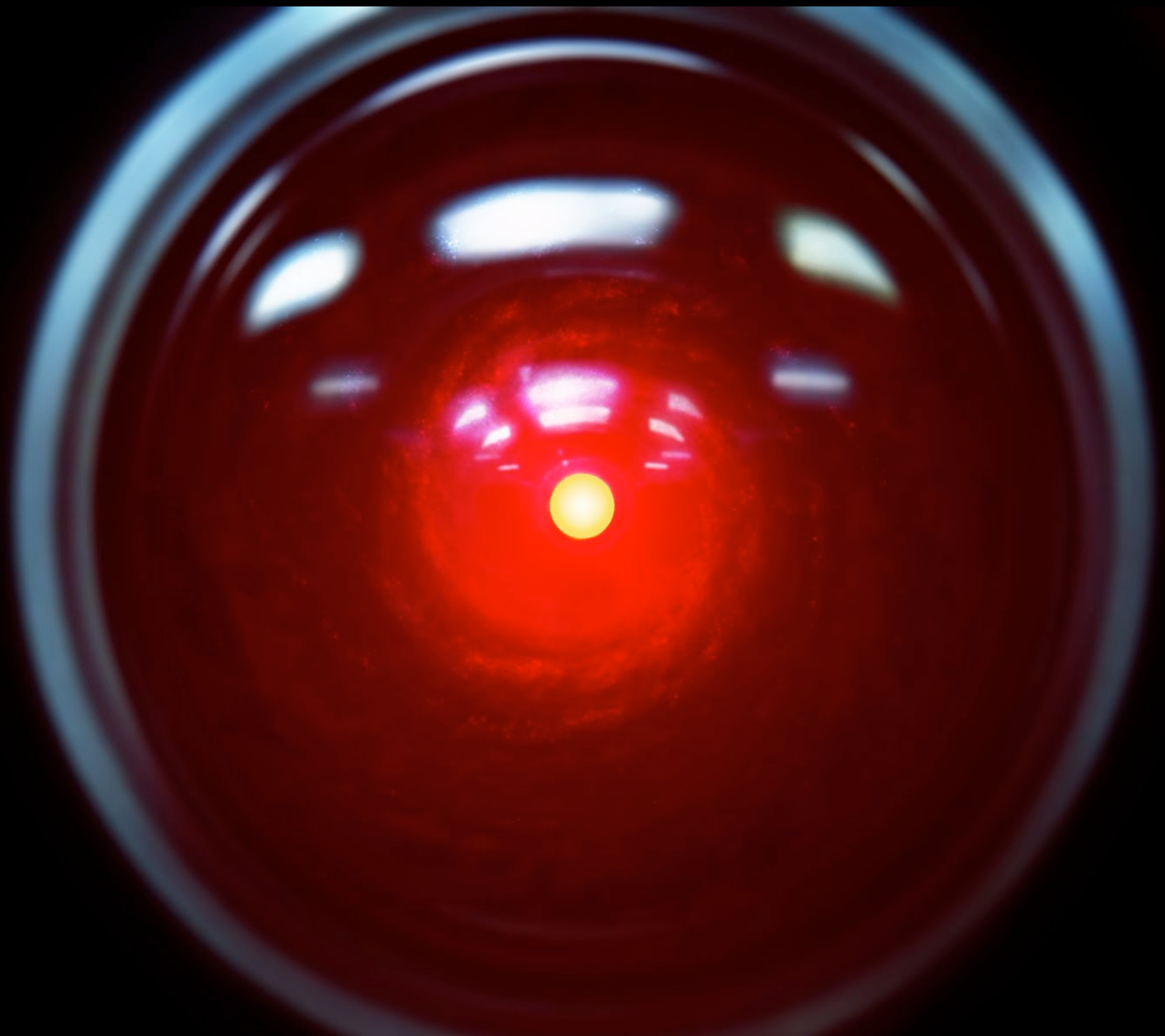
AI Ambitions

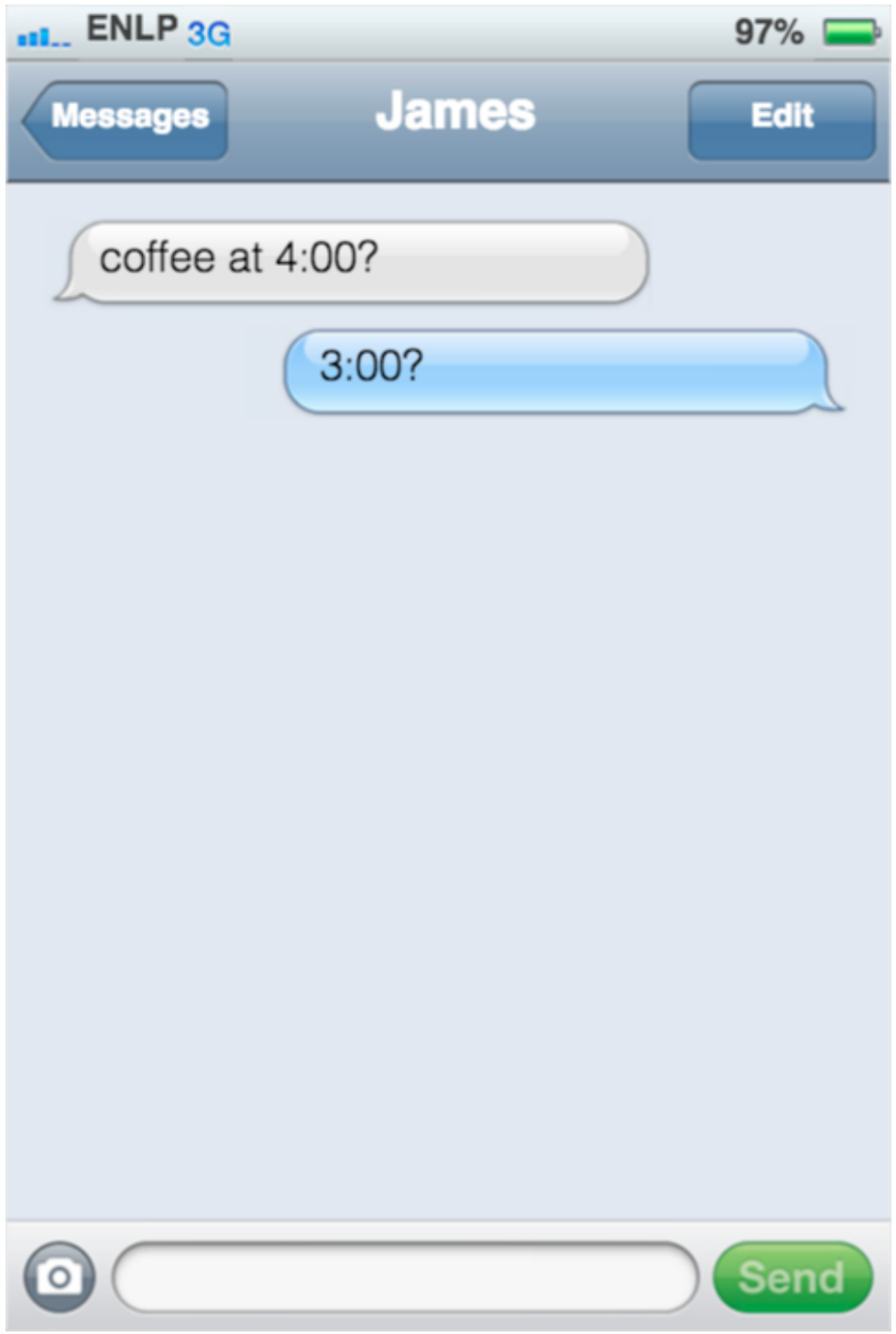


Semantic Analysis

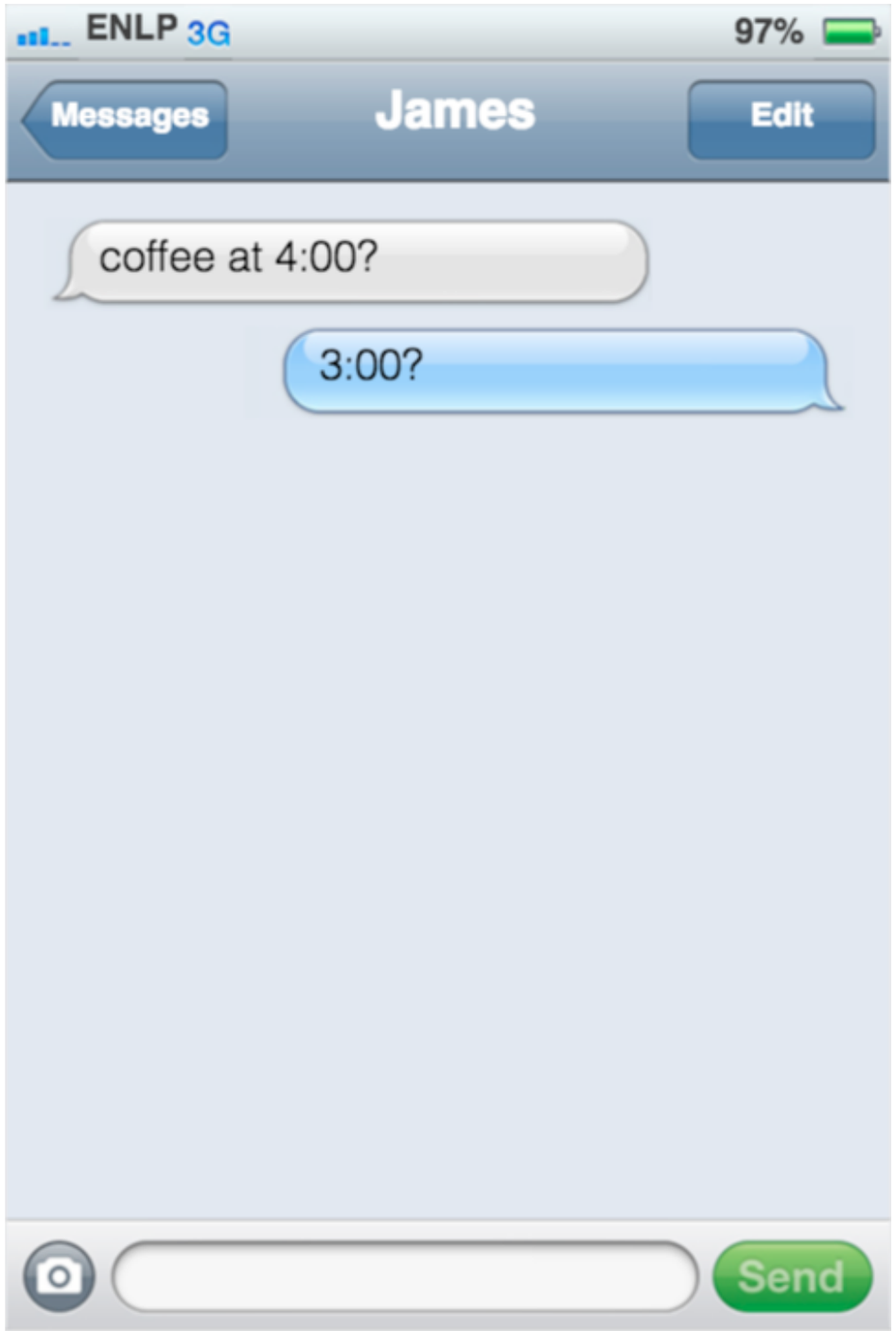
- We've seen tasks that analyze the meanings or topics of documents, words, and sentences
  - document classification
  - topic models
  - word representations & similarity
  - word sense disambiguation
  - semantic role labeling
- These are challenging tasks. But even if we could automate them perfectly, we'd still be a long way from human-like automatic language processing.

Understanding: Beyond Semantics

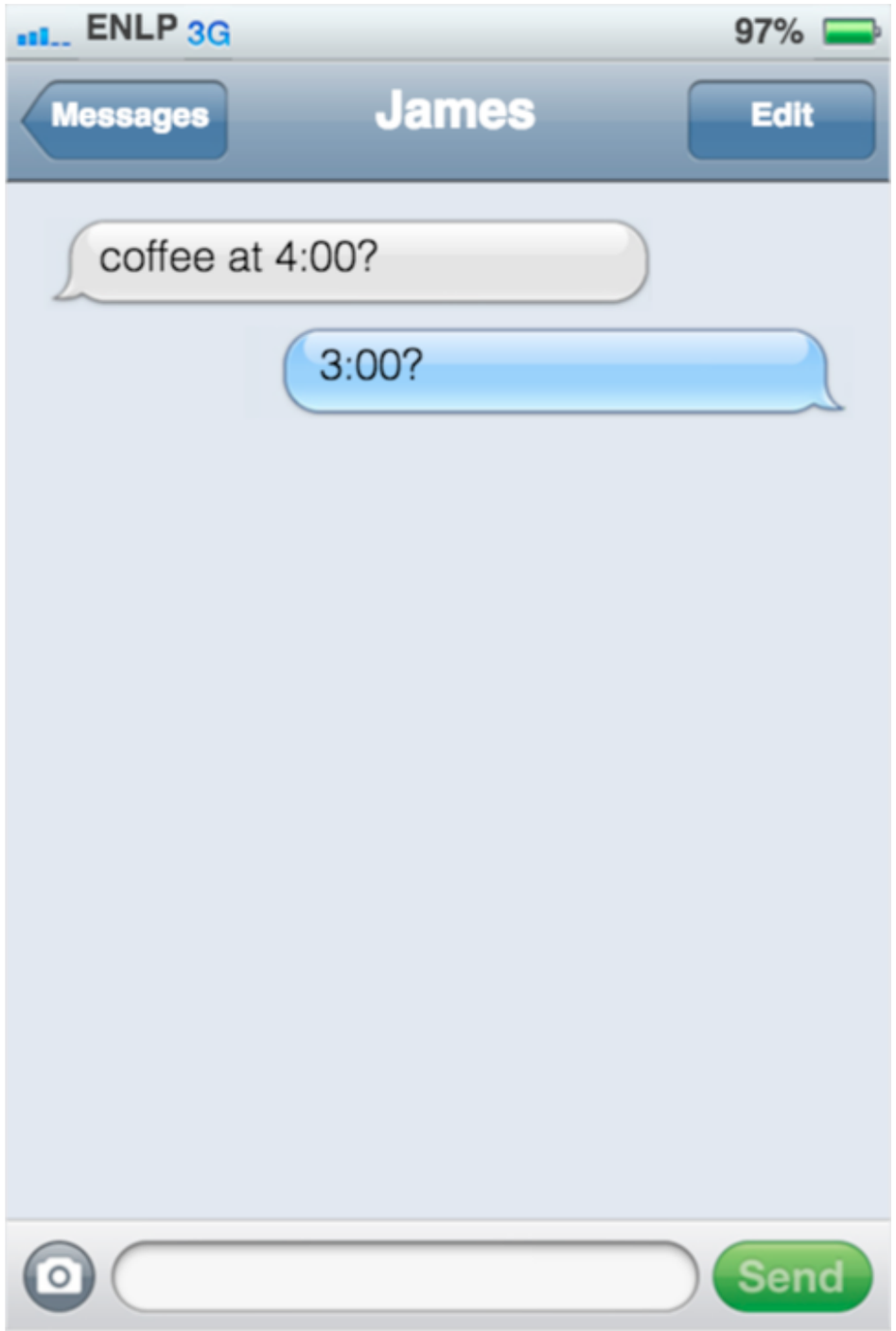
What is required to understand this conversation?



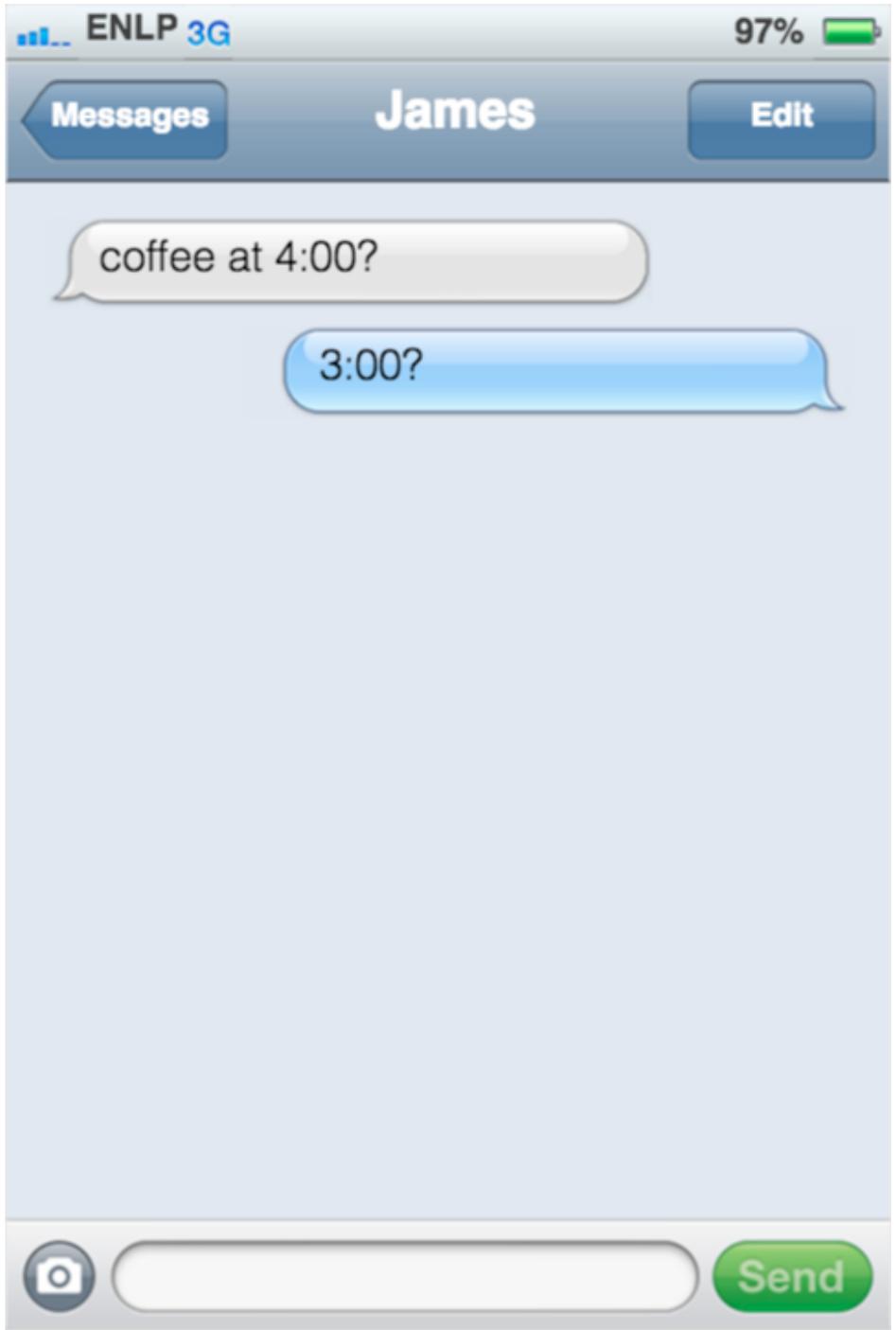
- **Semantics of the expressions themselves**
  - coffee refers to the drink, not the tree or bean (WSD)
  - 4:00 and 3:00 are times (NER)
  - “at 4:00”: semantic role marking the time of an event
  - “?” indicates question
- **But there’s a lot more to understanding than just the explicit language….**



- **Encyclopedic knowledge about the world**
  - Nobody would think this means “Does coffee exist at 4:00?” We know about social activities associated with coffee.
  - Likely 4:00pm, because people are normally asleep at 4:00am. (And people generally don’t go for coffee in their sleep.) Unless….



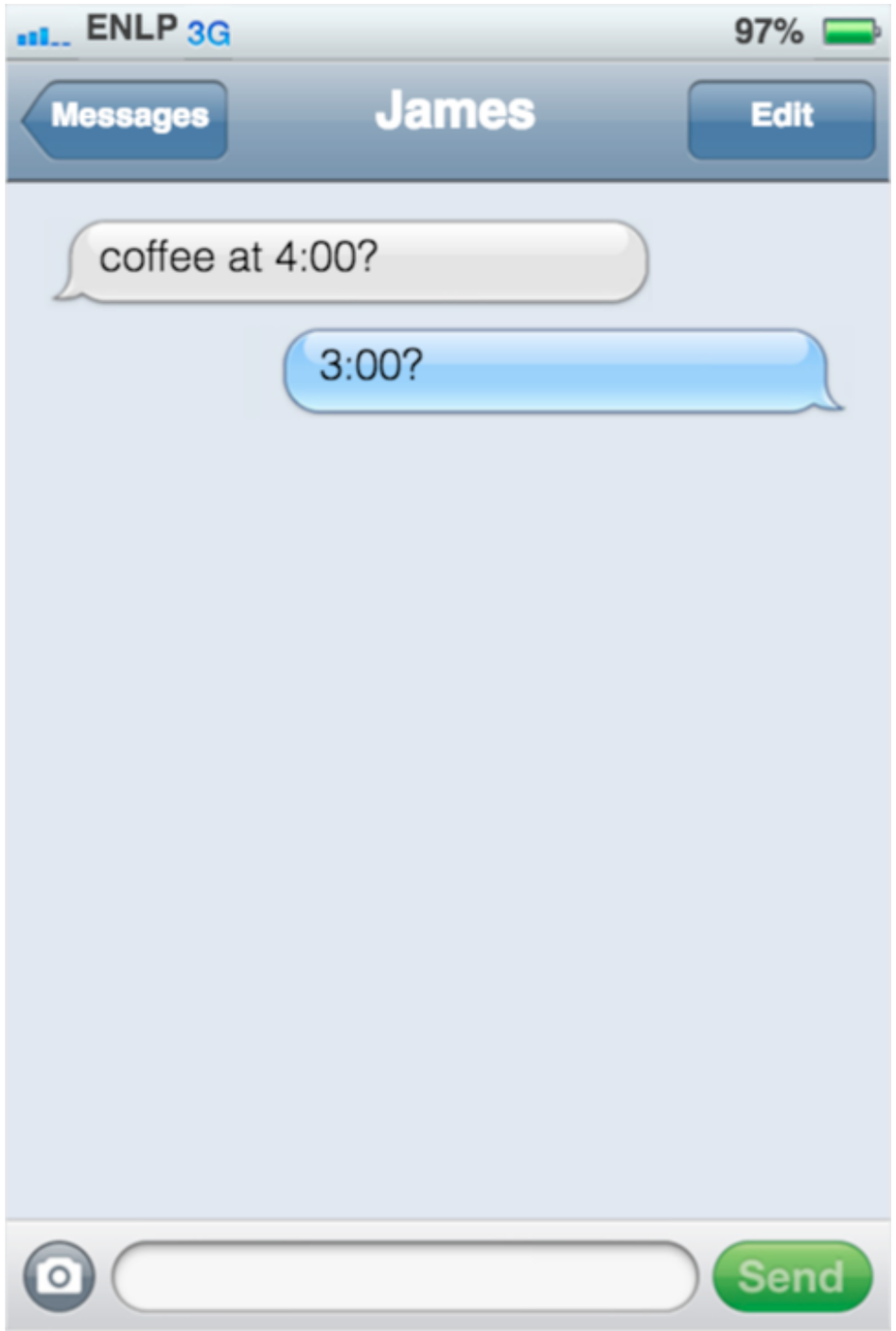
- **Knowledge of the situation/ conversational context/ common ground**
  - Perhaps it's 2:30am and we're working to finish something for a deadline. Or we both are back from a conference and are severely jetlagged.
  - Perhaps we have a habit of going to a certain place for coffee, so it can be left implicit.



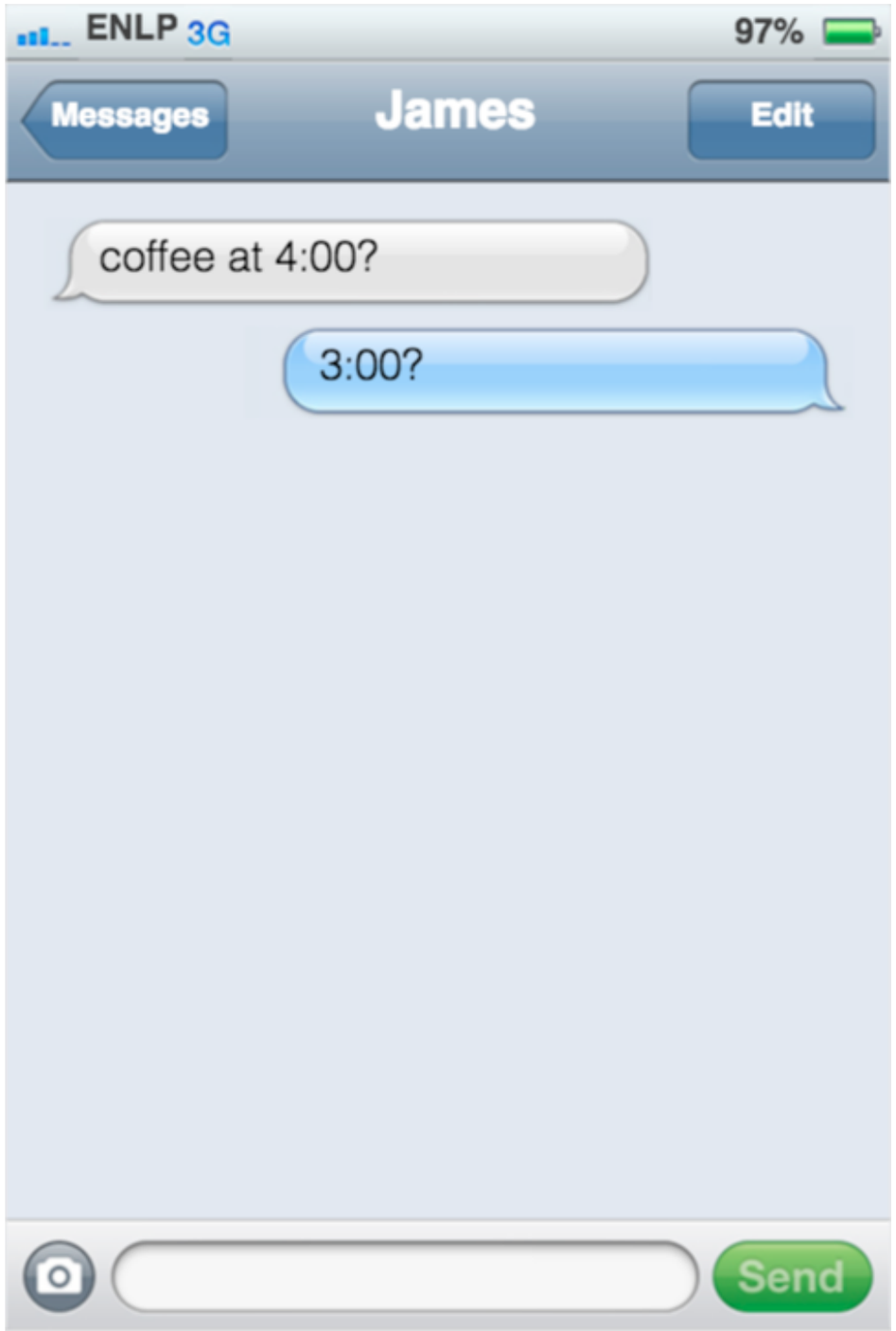
- **Discourse coherence**

  - We normally assume that interlocutors are "cooperative" (H.P. Grice): They respond with relevant information, say what they believe to be true, don't change topics without suitable pause or warning, etc.

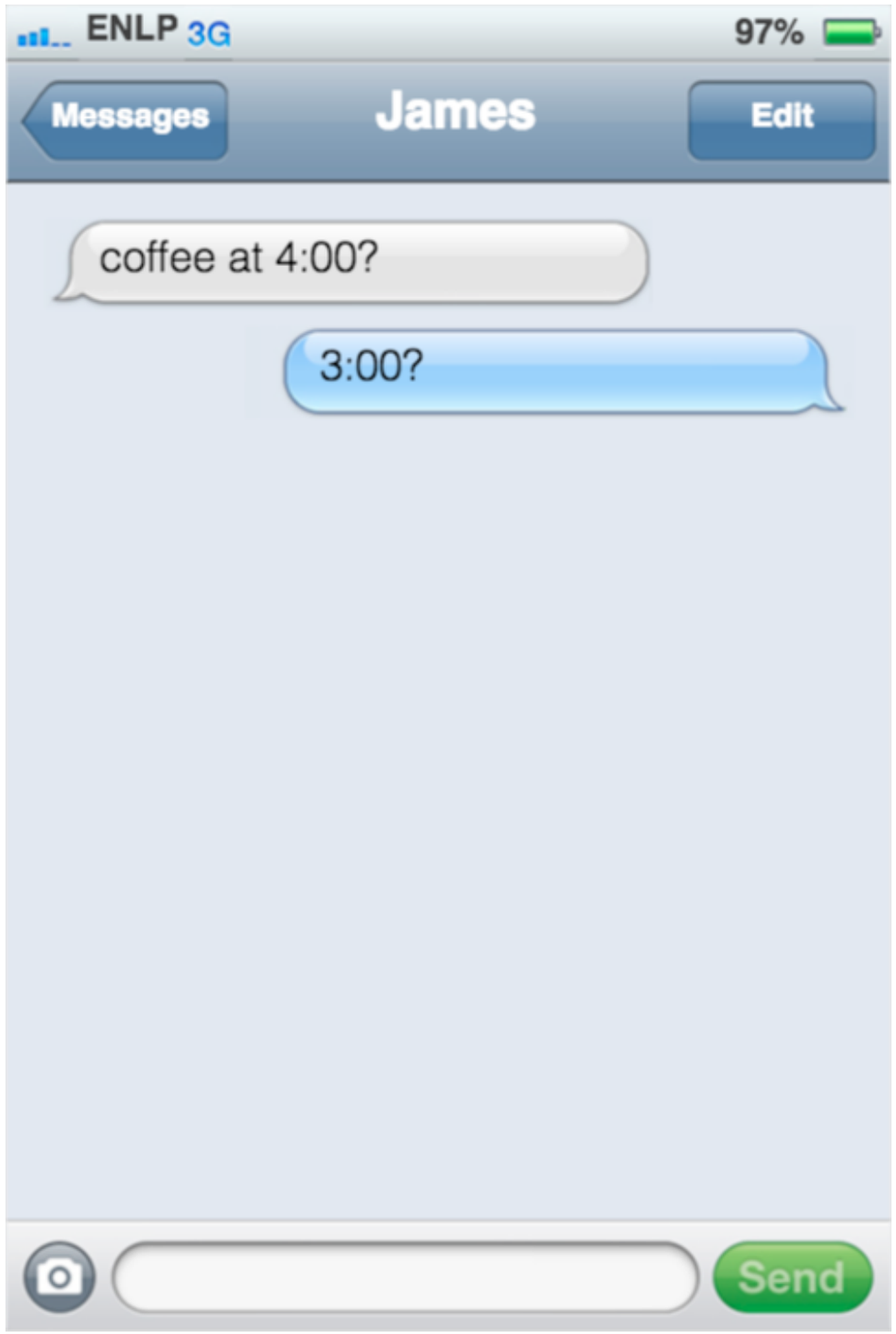
  - Here, we interpret the second question as *proposing an alternative* time, and requesting confirmation.
  (cf. Taboada & Lavid 2003)



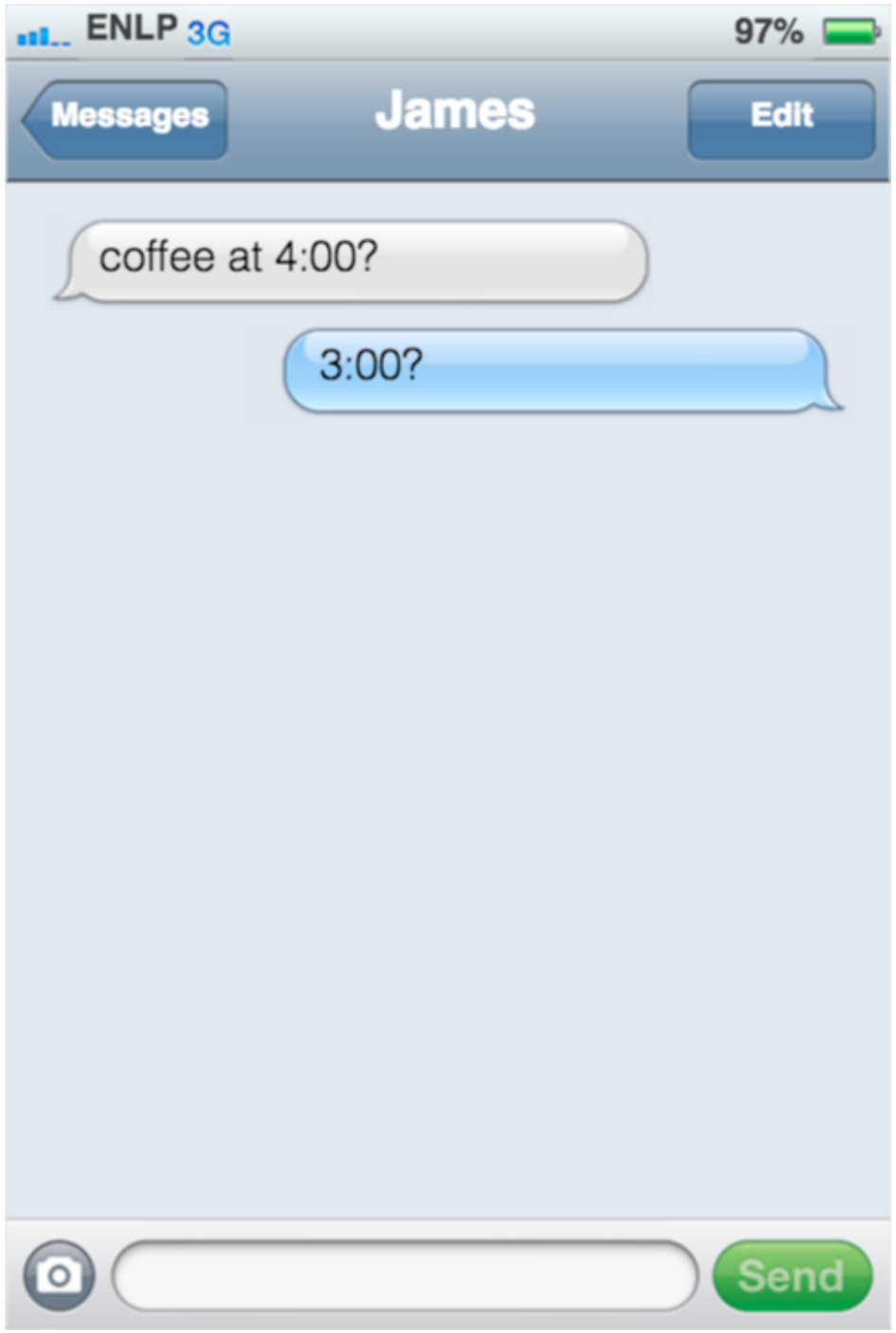
- **Relationship to action**
  - A truly intelligent app would offer information that would help my decision (e.g., when the café closes)
  - and put the event on my calendar at the agreed-upon time
  - and remind me to leave in time to arrive at the agreed-upon meeting place at that time.
  - If it is unsure of details, it should confirm with me rather than do the wrong thing.
  - Industry is already moving in this direction with personal assistants.



What else can be inferred from this conversation?



- **Relationship between interlocutors**
  - This conversation is informal. We might infer that the speakers are friends.



Types of Context

- **Conversational** (what has been said already, whose turn it is to talk)
- **Situational** (what is going on at the moment of conversation)
- **Social**
  - relationship between interlocutors—e.g. status/formality
  - their sociolinguistic identities—e.g. accent, expression of gender
- **Shared knowledge** (e.g. that we are in the same class and there is an exam coming up)
- **General knowledge** (e.g. that in order to stay awake late at night it might be helpful to drink coffee)

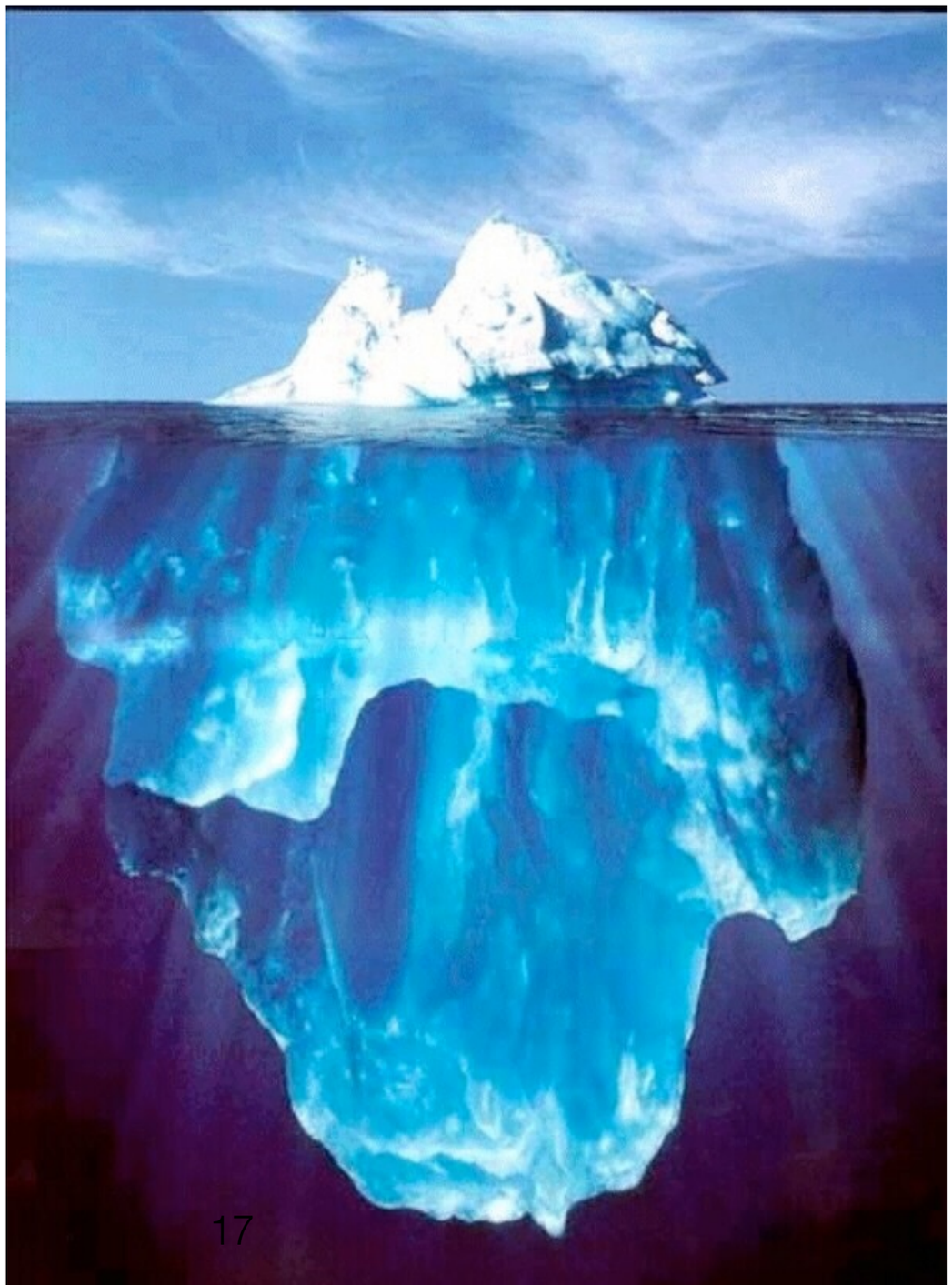
Understanding:
It's Not Just the Words

- Actually understanding such conversations requires a lot of inferences based on world knowledge and context (**pragmatics**).

Understanding:
It's Not Just the Words

WHAT IS SAID

WHAT IS UNDERSTOOD



Understanding:
It's Not Just the Words

- Actually understanding such conversations requires a lot of inferences based on world knowledge and context (**pragmatics**).

- But is that only true of conversations? What about unidirectional language use (books, articles)?

"Sherwood Park had its third fire in less than a month on Tuesday. However, there were no injuries" (http://www.sherwoodparknews.com/2016/01/14/no-injuries-in-park-fire)

- **Semantics:** Sherwood Park is a neighborhood (not a literal park); this fire is no longer active

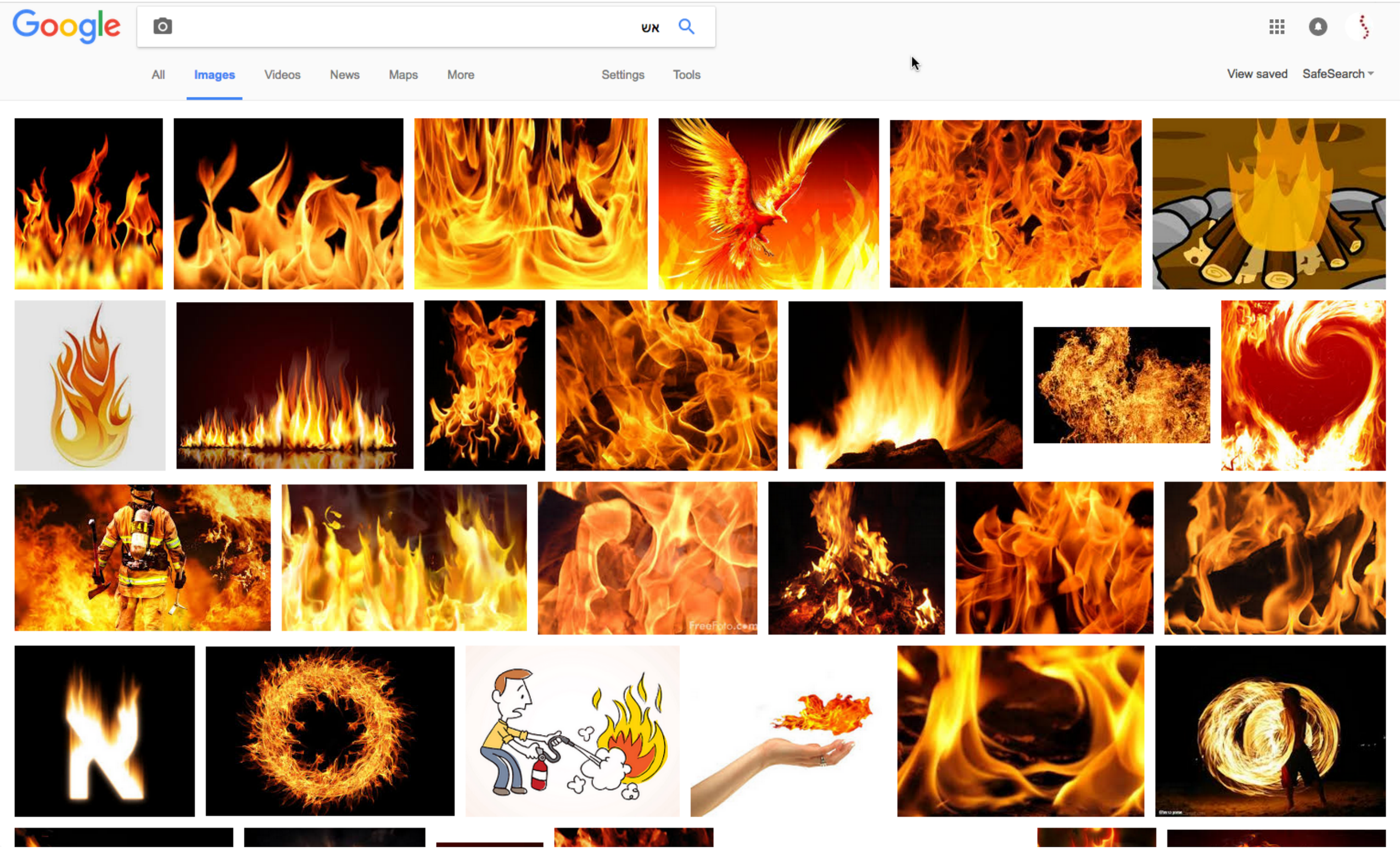
- **Discourse + world knowledge:**

  - no *humans* injured *in this fire* (unknown whether any ants were harmed)
  - "However" signals a contrast with an expectation raised by the first sentence: injuries might have been expected from an unintentional fire
  - Harm to humans is highly newsworthy, so it's important for the story to inform us of an event that DIDN'T occur
  - Likely inference: there is a pattern of fires in Sherwood Park (why?)
  - Were there injuries in previous fires? Unspecified.
  - What would have to change for the information to be presented in the opposite order?

Understanding:
It's Not Just the Words

- Different aspects of meaning are required to be explicit in different languages. E.g., **lexicalization** patterns in Hebrew vs. English:

eish אש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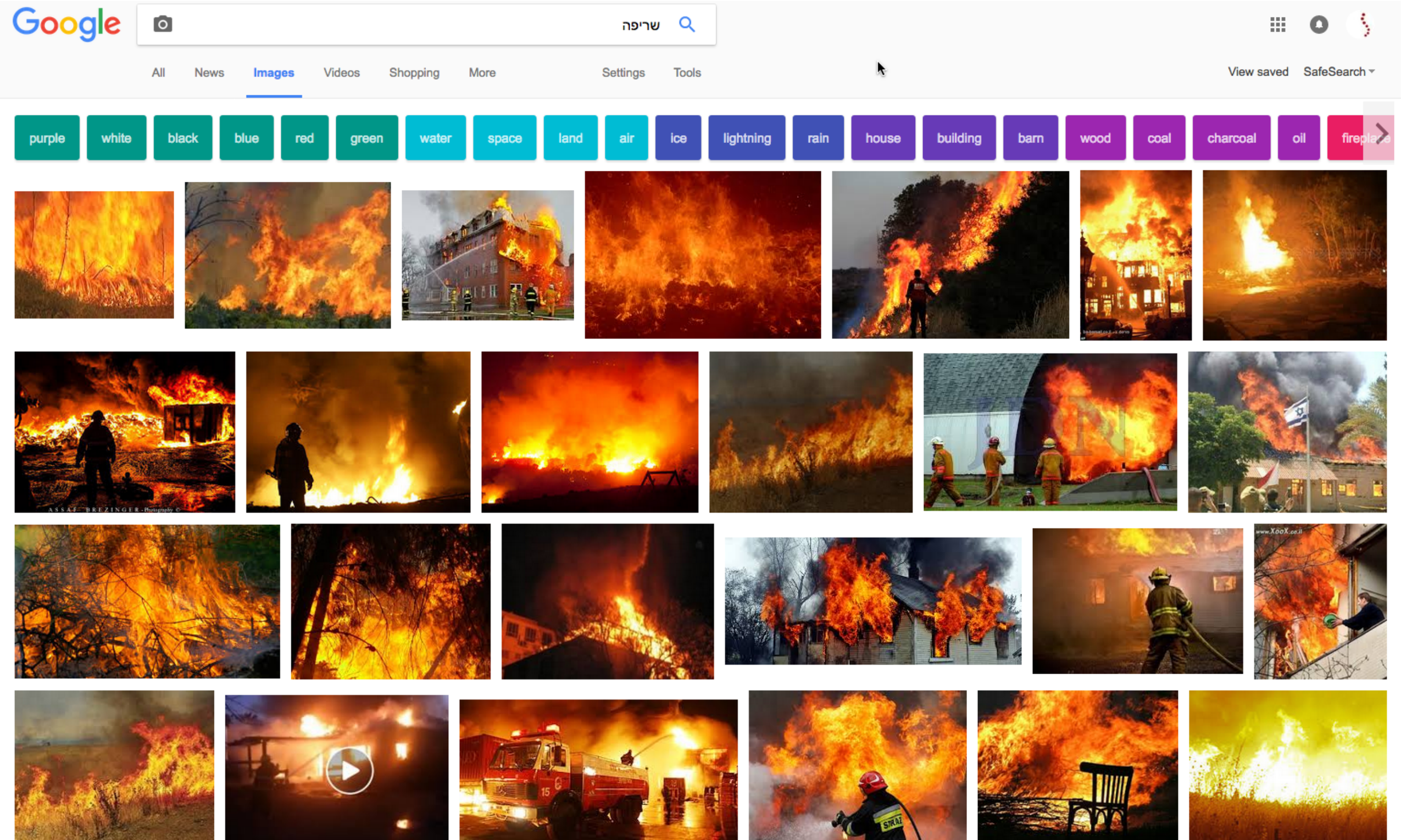
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water
space
land
air
ice
lightning
rain
house
building
barn
wood
coal
charcoal
oil
fireplace

Understanding:
It's Not Just the Words

- Different aspects of meaning are required to be explicit in different languages. E.g., **lexicalization** patterns in Hebrew vs. English:
  - EN "fire" ↔ HE {*eish* 'purposeful fire', *srefa* 'destructive fire'}
  - EN {"color", "paint"} ↔ HE *tseva*

- **formality/social status:** Which 2nd person pronoun to use in German or French?

- **evidentiality:** How does the speaker know the information? (directly observed, secondhand, etc.)

- **spatial systems:** absolute (compass directions) or relative

Understanding: It's Not Just the Words

- Some information can be made "minimally explicit", requiring discourse-level inference.

- **anaphora** (pronouns): ***He*** *sells the greatest soup* ***you****'ve ever eaten.*
  - Need to decide which pronouns are **referential**, and resolve their antecedents.
  - Special case of **coreference resolution** (grouping referring expressions that indicate the same entity).

- **pro-drop:** In many languages, pronominal subjects can be dropped (verb agreement helps disambiguate): *Quier****o*** *un taco.*

Perspective in language

- The choice of language can put a “spin” on the information being conveyed, emphasizing certain nuances or dimensions of meaning. Sometimes called **construal**.

- May indicate a social perspective (**framing**)
  - *Mistakes were made.*
  - “thrifty” vs. “stingy”
  - “terrorists” vs. “freedom fighters”

- May be mundane and subtle: ***on*** *the bus* vs. ***in*** *the bus*

Understanding: It's Complicated

- Lots of implicit information, even in expository text.

- How to even evaluate whether a system is comprehending the story?

  - Give the system an **exam**—multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank. Challenge datasets based on actual exam questions (reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning, biology).

  - Test the system's **decision-making** skills, such as controlling a robot or making moves in a game based on language. Requires link between comprehension and action/grounding.

  - **Multimodal**: Link text to image, video, or action.

Automatic Caption Generation

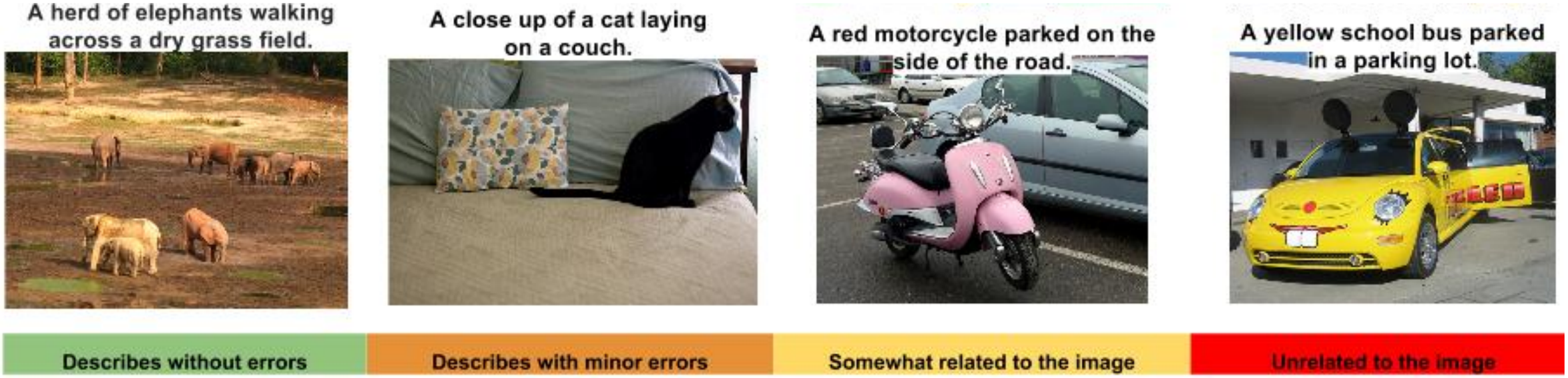

Figure 5. A selection of evaluation results, grouped by human rating.

Vinyals et al., CVPR 2015
http://www.cv-foundation.org/openaccess/content_cvpr_2015/papers/Vinyals_Show_and_Tell_2015_CVPR_paper.pdf

Language-Directed Robot Navigation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nUq28utuGM&list=PL6SYoj2z5jWfBFhZQdxF_luQ-sgpDXAO4&index=1

NLP in Academia

~~Muppets~~ Models

NLP in the Real World

Social Context

- NLP technologies have users.
- Sometimes characteristics of the users matter to the task.
- It's one thing to optimize F-score in a research paper. But this might not capture the true cost of certain errors to a user.
- Do users trust systems? Do they trust them *too much*?
- How can systems be designed to be more trustworthy and transparent?

Soci**et**al Context

How is the NLP/AI technology going to be used?
What positive or negative effects might it have on society?

- ACTIVITY: Give examples of how technology can be used in ways that are
  - Advantageous to society
  - Unintentionally harmful
  - Intentionally harmful

Soci**et**al Context

How is the NLP/AI technology going to be used?
What positive or negative effects might it have on society?

- Promote societal goals—health care, crime prevention?

- Unfairness—implicit bias against certain groups of people (gender, race, dialect, …)?

- Unethical or malicious uses—violating privacy, deception?

Recommendations

- Timnit Gebru et al.: Datasheets for Datasets
- Margaret Mitchell et al.: Model Cards for Model Reporting
- Emily Bender et al.: On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big? 🦜
- + Social Factors in CL & AI course!

Summary

- The techniques discussed in this course were aimed at classifying documents, or analyzing words and sentences.

- But much of human language exploits our awareness of discourse, pragmatics, perspectives, other modalities, and the world. This is really, really hard (AI complete).

- Different languages have different requirements for what needs to be explicit.

- Tasks like **coreference resolution**, **automatic caption generation**, and **language-directed robot tasks** are important for stimulating research along dimensions beyond local and explicit linguistic communication.

- NLP technologies have an impact on users and society. Important to consider potential malicious or unintentionally problematic implications.