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The Sound Fits the Size- Graded Sound Symbolism for Magnitude

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Abstract: A fundamental tenet of Structuralist linguistics is that the sounds of a word are unrelated to its meaning. However, there is mounting evidence that speech sounds do convey some properties of word meaning (i.e., sound symbolism). Previous examinations have treated sound symbolism as dichotomous (e.g., big v. small) and have conflated multiple properties (e.g., large/round/slow v. Small/sharp/fast). The present study specifically examines the relation between object size and object naming. Participants viewed novel 3-D figures (Greebles) in several sizes, and chose the most appropriate name from a list of non-words with varying levels of large (like /o/ and / m/) and small (like /i/ and /t/) phonemes. Results indicate a statistically reliable and graded relation between speech sounds and object size. Studies are ongoing to examine sound symbolism using auditorily-presented names.