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Linguistic descriptions of action influence object perception: The role of action readiness

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Abstract

Does hearing a story about performing an action activate corresponding motor representations? If so, can linguistically-activated motor representations affect our visual experience of the world? The present study tested whether hearing a story about performing power or precision grasps would cause people to perceive an ambiguous object in a grasp-congruent manner. Participants listened to a story in which they tossed water balloons either (1) without touching their knots (power grasp condition) or (2) by only touching their knots (precision grasp condition). Afterward, participants interpreted an object that could either be seen as an apple (power grasp) or cherry (precision grasp). To further manipulate participants' availability for subsequent action in the story, participants either (1) had just grasped, (2) prepared to grasp, or (3) had repeatedly grasped the water balloons before the ambiguous image appeared. People perceived the object in a grasp-congruent manner only when their hands were available for action.