# UC Merced

**Title**
Is Iconic Language More Vivid?

**Permalink**

**Journal**

**ISSN**

**Authors**
Sidhu, David M
Vigliocco, Gabriella

**Publication Date**
2021

Peer reviewed

# Is Iconic Language More Vivid?

**David Sidhu**
University College London, London, United Kingdom

**Gabriella Vigliocco**
University College London, London, United Kingdom

### Abstract

Iconicity refers to instances in which the form of language resembles its meaning (Perniss et al., 2010). The most prominent example in spoken language is onomatopoeia (e.g., woosh, which sounds like a gust of wind). Here we tested whether iconicity makes language more vivid by depicting the sensorimotor experiences being referred to. In Experiment 1, 44 participants read ten short passages (five iconic, five non-iconic), and then rated their vividness on several scales. These passages differed on two key words, which were either iconic (e.g., screech) or non-iconic (e.g., yell). We found no evidence that iconic language was more vivid. In Experiment 2, 199 participants each rated one longer passage that was either iconic or non-iconic (differing on eight key words). We found only marginal evidence of iconic language being more vivid, on subscales related to felt vividness. These results suggest that iconicity does not make written language more vivid.