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Investigating social grounding of abstract words

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Abstract

The semantic representation of abstract words is a topic of discussion within the embodied cognition framework. Existing theories propose the involvement of emotional, linguistic, and social experiences in abstract word representation. Focusing on ‘socialness’ – a variable with limited empirical evidence – our study explores whether abstract words are associated with richer social experiences. Two semantic categorization tasks (explicit and implicit) with socialness priming and a lexical decision task with socialness priming were conducted to examine the effect of socialness on abstract words recognition. Additionally, we run similar experiments with affective priming to examine the effect of valence on abstract words recognition. Our results indicate that only valence facilitates the recognition of abstract words and only in the explicit task. Conclusively, we find no evidence supporting a non-strategic effect of socialness and valence on abstract words recognition, thus challenging existing theories on the grounding of abstract words in social information and emotion.