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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 38(0)

Authors

Cox, Sarah

Thibodeau, Paul

Publication Date

2016

Peer reviewed

Metaphor and Memory: How Metaphors Instantiate Schemas in and Influence Memory of Narrative

Sarah Cox
Oberlin College

Paul Thibodeau
Oberlin College

Abstract: Metaphoric frames are prominently featured in public discourse. They highlight certain aspects of the target issues they are used to describe, thereby encouraging specific patterns of inference. Our goal was to test whether they would influence memory as well. Building off prior work, we contrasted two metaphors for crime: virus and beast. In a pilot study, we identified specific causes, examples, and solutions to crime that were congruent with each frame (one but not the other; e.g., people thought “drug use” better exemplified a crime virus, whereas “murder” better exemplified a crime beast). Participants (n = 469) read or listened to a short metaphorically-framed crime report, completed a filler task, and were prompted for the information they had seen/heard. Results indicated the virus metaphor facilitated memory, overall, but not the specific frame-congruent information, suggesting a more general influence of the frame than predicted.