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Embodied representation in oral-poetry improvisation

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Abstract

Oral poetry improvisation is a demanding cognitive task. It depends on multi-level processes of constraints including verbal rules, audience behavior, performance space setup and musicality. Improvisers follow strict restrictions of time reaction, theme scope, meter and rhyme norms, to control, monitor, and evaluate the results of their own improvisations during and while improvising. We are interested in the embodied metacognitive processes that enable improvisers to monitor their performances. We investigate self-corrective responses of improvisers focusing on the embodied representational process during improvisation. Using ELAN software, we analyze the relation between gesticulation patterns and verbal meter and rhyme schemes in freestyle rap and brazilian repente battles. Initial results suggest that gesticulation act as a motor template, stabilizing a manipulable representation of the verse in the body, offloading part of the cognitive cost used to monitor and control process for real time evaluation of complex rhythmic structures.