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Language influences how Spanish speakers from different cultural backgrounds think, talk, and gesture about causality

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Abstract

Causality is a shared general experience, but languages differ in the way they encode it. This research explores the possible correlation between society type, language and causal attribution in the way Spanish speakers think and judge causality. 202 native speakers of European and American Spanish participated in three different studies: (i) an adaptation of Singelis' (1994) psychological questionnaire for social in(ter)dependency; (ii) a non-verbal categorisation task for the attribution of causal responsibility; and (iii) a multimodal description task for causal events. Data were elicited with a set of 58 causal videoclips from the CAL project (NSF,BCS-1535846). Results show that all Spanish speakers, regardless of their Western (Spain) or Eastern (Latin America) backgrounds, categorise and linguistically describe causality based on the degree of the action's intentionality. A strong correlation between language and causal categorisation was found, supporting the idea that language is a determining factor in the causal attribution.