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Iconic prioritization and Representational Silence in emotion

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Abstract

Emotions can be insensitive to certain attributes of a situation. A large body of evidence shows that information on probabilities, large numerical counts, or intentions is frequently disregarded in the elicitation and regulation of emotions. To date, no existing theory comprehensively accounts for the features that tend to be overlooked by emotion. In this paper I call attention to the common denominator of such features: they cannot be perceived nor contribute to the iconic representation of events. For instance, the exceedingly low probability of a plane crash does not affect its imagistic representation (i.e., the iconic representation of the event is silent about the event's probability). I introduce the Iconic Prioritization Hypothesis, positing that the prioritization of the iconic format in emotion can explain the neglect of information that is representationally silent in this format. Emotion may favour iconicity as it is the format of immediate, first-hand evidence about our surroundings.