

Cross-dimensional Mappings in Sound Symbolic Foreign Words

Christina Y. Tzeng

Emory University

Lynne C. Nygaard

Emory University

Laura L. Namy

Emory University

Abstract: Sound symbolism— non-arbitrary correspondences between the sound of a word and its meaning— exists cross-linguistically and facilitates listeners' ability to infer the meaning of foreign words. However, the specificity of these mappings remains unclear. The present study investigated whether sound symbolic properties correspond only to a specific meaning domain or to other semantic dimensions as well. Native English-speaking adults heard sound symbolic foreign translations of eight dimensional adjectives (big, small, round, pointy, fast, slow, moving, still), and for each word (e.g., "bamba" meaning 'big'), chose a correct translation from two English antonym pairs (one matched and one mismatched with word dimension, e.g. big, small, fast, slow). Listeners selected meanings within the matched choice dimension more often than the mismatched choice dimension, suggesting that although sound symbolic properties facilitate foreign word interpretation across a range of meanings, this facilitative effect is greatest for mappings within a specific meaning domain.