

Conceptualization in Language and Its Relation to Perception

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Abstract

People typically use language expecting the result to be meaningful comprehension. People also expect their perceptions of the world to make sense. For example, the word “up” expresses useful meaning about spatial relations, just as perceiving distance to an object enables useful spatial reasoning. Links between language and perception have been studied in cognitive development (Gelman, Croft, Fu, Clausner & Gottfried, 1998). We studied the relation of language and perception in the context of adult visual search by representing spatial altitude as icons of varying size and contrast (Palmer, Clausner & Kellman 2008, Figure 1).

Language can express magnitude in terms of vertical space: Metaphors in cognitive semantic theory are largely treated as relations between knowledge domains. The metaphor MORE IS UP is a correspondence between vertical space and magnitude. The strength of a metaphor’s semantic relation varies positively with the number of distinct conceptualizations expressible in language (Clausner & Croft 1997), or expressible as visual forms (Clausner 2002). A wide range of basic sensory experiences (e.g., spatial distance, heat, brightness) can be understood in terms of a magnitude scale (Clausner & Croft 1999).

We studied whether magnitude of spatial altitude can be expressed as perceptual cues of size and contrast. Relative to no-cue (reading numerical altitude) the perceptual cues improved search accuracy (Figure 1) and reduced search time. Conceptualizing graphical symbols that are larger or darker as meaning *more* altitude may have helped our participants apprehend the altitude information present in written form. We will discuss explanations of these results by considering whether performance improved because perceptual cues are aligned with conceptual metaphors or if some perceptual encodings are more natural than others.

We will also discuss the relative contributions of depth processing and metaphoric correspondence, and report latest results derived from cues consistent or inconsistent with imagined vantage points. Each conceptualization was

primed by instructing participants as they bodily looked head up or head down at a 3D perspective model.

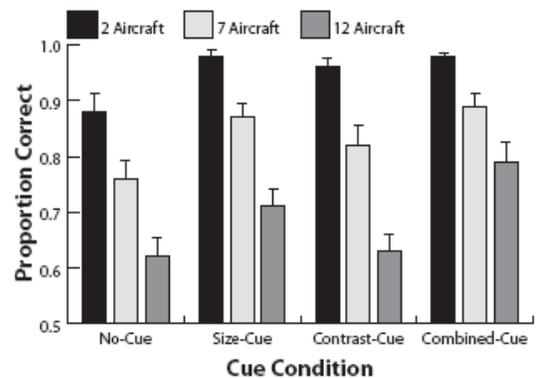


Figure 1: Perceptual cues improved visual search for two potential collisions among 2, 7 or 12 aircraft icons.

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