Replication of Study What makes words special? Words as unmotivated cues (2015, Cognition)

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Introduction

This study aimed to explore why verbal labels, such as the words "dog" or "guitar," activate conceptual knowledge more effectively than environmental sounds associated with these objects, such as the bark of a dog or the strum of a guitar. I chose this topic because it intersects with my interests in language learning and auditory perception. This study finds that verbal labels (or words) are more effective than sounds in activating abstract category concepts because labels act as "unmotivated cues," broadly representing a category without specific reference to particular instances. In contrast, sounds are "motivated cues" that link directly to specific sources or instances, limiting their effectiveness in promoting conceptual abstraction. This difference is highlighted by experiments showing that words activate category-level knowledge more selectively than environmental sounds.

In this experiment, participants will be presented with either a verbal representation or environmental sound for the following categories: bird, dog, drum, guitar, motorcycle, and phone. Participants are presented with an auditory cue (either a word or sound) and a picture presented 1 second after the auditory input is made. Participants are tested on how quickly and accurately they can determine if the picture presented matches the auditory cue they received. They will use a yes or no button on the computer screen. Potential challenges of this study could be sound quality of the environmental sounds to ensure they are clearly recognizable. Additionally, finding a diverse group of participants for this study could be a challenge.