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The impact of gestural representation of metaphor schema on metaphor comprehension

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate how priming a metaphor by the gestural representation of its schema affects the understanding of that metaphor. In each of the two tests, different groups of participants were invited to judge the sensibility of the same 20 metaphors preceded by congruent versus incongruent gesture primes as compared to no prime. In the congruent gesture-prime conditions, each metaphor was preceded by a gesture that represented the schema of the subsequent metaphor whereas this gesture was not compatible with the schema of the subsequent metaphor in the incongruent gesture-prime conditions. Results showed that a higher proportion of sentences were judged to be sensible in the congruent gesture-prime conditions compared to no-prime and incongruent gesture-prime conditions. Also, response times of sensibility judgements were shorter in congruent gesture-prime conditions compared to no-prime and incongruent gesture-prime conditions. These results suggest that metaphor schema affects metaphor comprehension through the activation of metaphorically-relevant information and suppressing irrelevant information.

Keywords: embodiment; metaphor comprehension; metaphor schema; prime