

Sound symbolism: Where and when do we find it in language?

Some speech sounds seem to relate to the meanings of the words in which they are contained, such as the vowels in “little” and “large” giving the impression of different magnitudes. Such “sound symbolism” has been characterized as prevalent in languages, useful for language learning, and providing insight into the origins of human communication itself. In this talk I provide a critical perspective on sound symbolism, analyzing how widespread sound symbolism actually is in language, whether it relates to certain meanings more than others, whether it is carried in certain sound properties more than others, and appraising the role of diachronic change in expression of sound symbolism.