

Dimensional congruence and color-emotion associations in Spanish

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In previous experiments (Soriano & Valenzuela, 2009) using an Implicit Association Task (IAT), we demonstrated that RED, BLUE, GREEN and YELLOW as semantic domains in peninsular Spanish have a connotative dimensional structure congruent with the 3 Osgoodian dimensions Evaluation (positive-negative), Activity (excited-relaxed) and Potency (strong-weak) (Osgood, May & Miron 1975). RED was found to be preferentially associated to the features “positive”, “excited” and “strong”. YELLOW was “positive”, “relaxed” and “weak”. GREEN was “positive” and “relaxed”. Finally, BLUE was “negative” and “relaxed”.

At the same time, the GRID study (Fontaine, Scherer and Soriano, forthcoming) has provided us with a similar semantic dimensional structure for 22 Spanish emotion words. When comparing the dimensional profiles of colors and emotion terms, we observe that some colors are particularly congruent with some emotions in their connotative load (for example, RED and ANGER share the dimensional values “excited” and “strong”). In congruent cases, the association is frequently coded in the language in an explicit way by means of conventional expressions, like the collocation “rojo de ira”.

However, some of the congruent pairs do not find expression in language. This is the case of the domains SADNESS and BLUE (both are “negative” and “relaxed”) – an association that does exist in some other languages, like English (“to feel blue” = to be sad). The association between JOY and RED in Spanish (both “positive” and “excited”) is possible under certain circumstances, but there is no conventionalized phraseology linking the two (? “rojo de alegría/júbilo”).

Do speakers of Spanish have an implicit association between the domains BLUE and SADNESS and RED and JOY in spite of the lack of expressions linking the two in the language? In our study we test this hypothesis with one IAT including emotion faces (happy or sad) and color chips (shades of red and blue). An statistically significant implicit association was found for both color-emotion pairs, which raises questions about what receives explicit mention in languages of the world and why

References

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