

Parault, S.J. (2006). Sound symbolic word learning in written context.
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Summary: Sound symbolism is the notion that the relationship between sounds and meaning is not arbitrary for all words. Rather, in some languages, sounds and their symbols have some degree of correspondence. Researchers investigated sound symbolism as a possible means of gaining semantic knowledge of unknown words within written context. Two studies were conducted to assess adults' expressive knowledge of word meanings for sound symbolic and non-sound obsolete words. Participants were able to generate more correct definitions for sound symbolic words compared to non-sound symbolic words. It was concluded that sound symbolism is a word property that influences the learning of unknown words.

Assumptions:

- New words can be learned through direct vocabulary instruction, which can occur through explicit reference or labeled example.
- Word learning from context allows people to add many new words to their vocabulary.
- There are language-specific sound symbols in most of the world's languages.
- Sound symbols aid the word learner's ability to attain word knowledge from context.

Results:

- Participants were able to combine information from context with sound symbolic information to yield greater word learning.
- Words presented in context yielded more correct definitions than those presented in isolation.
- An effect of word type was found: sound symbolic words yielded more correct definitions than the non-sound symbolic words.
- Sound symbolic word information is helpful in generating semantic information for words presented in both helpful and unhelpful contexts.
- Sound symbols seem to be a real phenomenon of language, one that provides word-level information from which word learners can draw semantic information about what an unknown word might mean.
- Sound symbols seem to be a word-level property that affects word learning.

Conclusions:

- Significant differences existed between the sound symbolic words and the non-sound symbolic words embedded in unhelpful context, with the sound symbolic words yielding more correct word definitions.
- For words embedded in helpful context there was also a significant difference between the sound symbolic words and the non-sound symbolic words.
- Sound association cannot fully account for the effect of sound symbolism.

- Sound symbolic words consistently yielded more accurate word definitions than the non-sound symbolic words in different contextual settings.
- Further investigation into sound symbols effect on word learning was warranted.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Sound symbols may be an effective strategy to use when helping children develop word-learning skills.
- Consider that when combined with sentence-level information, sound symbols can lead to even greater word learning.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Provide resources for teachers to obtain information on the effectiveness of sound symbolic learning.
- Help educators recognize the possibilities of sound symbolic learning.

