

Spatial metaphors for affect influence emotional expression identification

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Abstract: Are you feeling up today, or down in the dumps? Spatial metaphors that connote affective valence are common in English, where up in space=happy/positive and down in space=sad/negative. Past research suggests that these metaphors have some measure of psychological reality: people are faster to respond to words with an emotional connotation in metaphor-congruent regions of space (Meier & Robinson, 2004), and simply making motor movements upwards/downwards can bias memory retrieval towards positive/negative events, respectively (Casasanto & Dijkstra, 2010). While most research has dealt with relatively abstract items/measures, we asked whether space could actually bias perceptual judgments of non-ambiguous visual stimuli. Participants viewed images of happy and sad profile faces in different orientations and had to identify the emotion depicted in each face. Results indicated an interaction between spatial orientation and response time: participants were significantly slower to respond to sad faces that were facing upwards as compared to happy faces.