SSCC - Sound Symbolism and Crossmodal Correspondences
SPTC - Symbolisme Phonétique et Correspondances Transmodales

International Interdisciplinary Conference
University of Paris 4 - Sorbonne / Salle des Actes
4 and 5 May 2017

Organizers
Philippe Monneret (University of Paris 4 - Sorbonne)
Luca Nobile (University of Burgundy)

Keynote speakers
Damián Ezequiel Blasi (University of Zurich, CH)
Ophélia Deroy (University of London, GB)
Vanja Ković (University of Belgrade, RS)
Søren Wichmann (University of Leiden, NL)

Call for papers
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The SSCC//SPCT conference aims to create an encounter between researchers working in the field of sound symbolism and those working on crossmodal correspondences. The disciplines involved are linguistics, philosophy, literary studies, experimental psychology and, more broadly, cognitive science. If at an international level, research on sound symbolism and crossmodal correspondences has considerably developed over the past twenty years, these issues are still relatively overlooked in France. The SSCC//SPCT conference therefore also aims to contribute to the development of this type of approach in French research.

The concept of "sound symbolism" (cfr. 40, 47, 54, 73, 74, 79) intends to characterize any type of motivated link, whether direct or indirect, based on similarity or contiguity, between the phono-articulatory signified of a linguistic unit and its signified, its meaning or its referent. It is a form of linguistic iconicity operating at a phonological level (27, 51, 70). Even if this concept is clearly in opposition with the principle of the "arbitrariness of the sign", contemporary works on sound symbolism usually do not deny this principle, but they consider that it only covers a partial aspect of the linguistic phenomena. The existence of sound symbolism is indeed evidenced by a large set of data, both experimental and descriptive.

Experimental research (6, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 26, 35, 38, 41, 42, 57, 65, 67, 71, 72, 79, 85, 88, 92, 97) has largely documented the spontaneous tendency of speakers to assign intrinsic "proto-semantic" values to speech sounds. It has demonstrated, for instance, that the phono-articulatory contrast between [grave] phonemes like /u/ or /b/ and [acute] phonemes like /i/ or /p/ is regularly associated with visual contrasts between {large} and {small}, {rounded} and {sharp}, {dark} and {bright}, among others. More recently, neurophysiological research has started to identify the areas of the cortex and the time slots in the cortical activity that are specifically associated with processing sound symbolism (5, 58, 81).

On the other hand, descriptive research has been producing more and more in-depth and systematic analysis of the main phenomena of sound symbolism existing in languages: onomatopoeias (43, 54, 82, 93, 100), ideophones, mimetics or expressives (1, 2, 3, 19, 33, 34, 45, 48, 53, 78, 86, 87, 96), phonesthemes and submorphemes (6, 8, 9, 10, 37, 44), phonosemantic structures in morphology (51, 52, 59, 94, 68, 69) and more recently the general tendency of the lexicon to organize along the line of iconicity, as exemplified by a number of studies over big corpora (7, 25, 46, 61, 95, 98).

These results can have interesting applications in several fields, for instance in marketing (55, 66, 99), in language acquisition and language learning studies (76, 60, 49, 50, 75), in literary analysis (4, 12, 28, 29,
39, 89, 91) and in theoretical speculations on the origin of language (14, 80, 83, 84).

At the theoretical level, sound symbolism is an exemplary case of "embodied cognition", as its existence in language pleads for a fundamental link between linguistic units and the motor, perceptual and emotional life of speakers.

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Research on crossmodal correspondences (cfr. 32, 90) can be considered as a generalization of the problem of sound symbolism. Instead of focusing on the link between the phono-articulatory experience of speech sounds and the experience of meanings, the crossmodalist approach focuses on the relationship between any two sensorimotor experiences: hearing and touch, hearing and taste, vision and touch, vision and olfaction, etc.

For instance, it has recently been demonstrated that odors of smoke and chocolate tend to be associated to more grave sounds than odors of citrus and fruit (23, 24, 30), while bitter and salty tastes are perceived as lower pitched than sweet and sour (21, 22, 56). Relationships between crossmodal correspondence and synaesthesia are still being studied but it seems established that, if synaesthetes show cognitive features distinguishing them from most people, crossmodal correspondences, on the contrary, are a general feature of human cognition (30).

Some of these correspondences are considered universal (e.g. between sound intensity and brightness) while others are considered culturally variable (for instance between physical height {up:down} and acoustical height {acute:grave}; cfr. 36). They are thus a fundamental property of our cognitive system, which can play an essential role in understanding multisensorial integration and be considered as a precursor of the ability of abstraction. That is why this type of phenomenon concerns both cognitive psychology and neuropsychology as well as the philosophy of cognition (32, 77).

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The encounter between phonetic symbolism and crossmodal correspondence can prove fruitful, not only for their points of intersection, but also because of the differences that separate them. On the one hand, the two phenomena proceed from heterogeneous analogies, that is to say from cognitive processes based on similarities between entities of different ontological nature (62, 63). On the other hand, however, each partially exceeds the domain of the other.

Research on crossmodal correspondence analyzes a wider variety of perceptual phenomena and highlights the network of extralinguistic links that exist between them: this can be an important source of hypotheses for the research on phonetic symbolism (for example, if bitter taste is associated with grave notes, one may wonder whether the linguistic expression of bitterness tends to prefer grave phonemes or not, or whether or not it tends to approximate phonologically to the linguistic expression of gravity).

As for research on sound symbolism, it certainly analyzes only a limited subset of crossmodal phenomena, but it always has to do so within the framework of a formal system of oppositions and combinations, which is that of language itself. The latter functions partly as an interdependent and complex whole. This may constitute a challenge for experimental research on crossmodal correspondences because it is a matter of understanding how a plurality of simple perceptual effects combine within a system to generate complex effects.

This conference will address both the point of intersection between the two fields and their complementarity, offering to bridge the gap between linguists, psychologists, philosophers and literary studies, cognitive science and natural language processing specialists. The guiding questions of this conference are the following:

a) In the present state of research, how can we build on the available results and methodologies to move on to systematizing the analyses?

b) What strategies can be adopted to achieve conclusive analysis not only on basic perceptual facts, but also on their interactions and combinations within complex structures languages are?

c) How to separate universal phenomena from those depending on languages and cultures, and how to account for their simultaneous presence and their mutual influence?

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We invite paper proposals which may address the following topics (not exhaustive):

- Theoretical approaches of sound symbolism and / or crossmodal correspondences
- Universals in the field of sound symbolism and / or crossmodal correspondences
- Experimental research on sound symbolism and / or crossmodal correspondences
- Descriptive research on sound symbolism in languages and in texts
- Role of computerized corpora and natural language processing in the descriptive research on sound symbolism
- Role of sound symbolism and / or crossmodal correspondences in the acquisition and learning of languages
- Applications in the areas of marketing, semantic web and artificial intelligence

Conference languages are French and English.

Proposals, consisting of a title and an abstract of 2000 characters (including spaces and bibliography), should be sent before 10 February 2017 simultaneously to the two organizers:

philippe.monneret@paris-sorbonne.fr
luca.nobile@u-bourgogne.fr

Registration fee for the participants is 100 € (before 10 Avril) or 150 € (after 10 Avril). Free attendance for the general public.

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