Testing the crossmodal usage of iconic words in the Oxford Children's corpus and the CHILDES corpus

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This proposal aims to provide a corpus study of the behaviour of common iconic word in a children's corpus of English. Iconic words part of the core lexicon (such as *bubble*, *gobble*, *snap* etc) have been shown to map crossmodal correspondences to a multiplicity of sensory experiences such as sound, visual, motion, emotio**n** (see Smith (2019), Smith & Farina (forthcoming), Tsur & Gafni (2019), Winter et al. (2023)). This paper seeks to examine the role of these iconic words in the acquisition of the lexicon using two large children's corpora. It is believed that iconic words play a key role in organising the foundations of the core lexicon and act as fundamental crossmodal markers in the lexicon. As proposed by Perniss & Vigglioco (2014) and Winter et al. (2023), the iconicity conjecture affects not only language evolution, language processing but also language learning. To test the role of iconic words in language learning and the development of children's lexicon, we carry out a distributional semantic collexeme corpus study of iconic words in two children's corpora (the Oxford Children's Corpus and the CHILDES) using Sketch Engine. A significant key word analysis of the corpora confirms that iconic words, and phonesthemic words in particular, are central to children's lexicon, both in child-directed discourse and in children's own discourse. Such iconic words include a large number of interjections (*oops, oopsie, yuck, boo, shush*), sounds (*beep, boop, hiss*, etc.), and words of sensory experience (such as *squish, squash, tickle, wiggle, jingle, bobble, gobble*). The collexeme study then identifies patterns of usage showing that iconic words do play a central role in the development of lexical variety via sensory learning. The findings confirm Perry et al. (2017)'s conclusion that "iconicity scaffolds the production and comprehension of spoken language during early development". Iconicity has an unquestionable qualitative role in organising the early core lexicon, confirming that iconicity measures in a corpus go beyond purely quantitative statistical measures.

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