STUDI

The Particularity of Emotional Words: A Grounded Approach

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Abstract This work focuses on emotional concepts. We define concepts as patterns of neural activation that re-enact a given external or internal experience, for example the interoceptive experience related to fear. Concepts are mediated and expressed through words. In the following, we will use "words" to refer to word meanings, assuming that words mediate underlying concepts. Since emotional concepts and the words that mediate them are less related to the physical environment than concrete ones, at first sight they might be depicted as abstract concepts. Evidence coming from several studies shows, instead, that the issue is more complex. In this work, we will briefly outline the debate and illustrate results from recent studies on comprehension of concrete, emotional and abstract words in children and adults. We will argue that emotional words can be accounted for from a grounded perspective and will contend that emotional words represent a particular set of words that differs from both the concrete and purely abstract ones.

KEYWORDS: Embodied and Grounded Cognition; Abstract Concepts; Emotional Words; Language Acquisition; Language Processing

Riassunto La peculiarità delle parole emotive: un approccio basato sulla grouded cognition – Questo lavoro si incentra sui concetti emotivi. Intendiamo qui per concetti i pattern di attivazioni neurali che riattivano un'esperienza interna o esterna, per esempio le esperienze interocettive collegate alla paura. I concetti sono mediati ed espressi dalle parole. Di seguito, useremo "parole" in riferimento al significato delle parole, assumendo le parole come veicolo dei concetti. I concetti emotivi e le parole che li esprimono, dal momento che sono meno legati all'ambiente fisico rispetto a quelli concreti, potrebbero essere a tutta prima classificati come concetti astratti. Molti studi invece mostrano come la questione sia più complessa. In questo lavoro illustreremo brevemente il dibattito e i risultati di recenti studi sulla comprensione di parole astratte, concrete ed emotive in bambini e adulti, per mostrare come una prospettiva grounded possa rendere conto delle parole emotive, sostenendo che queste rappresentano un insieme particolare di parole, diverse sia da quelle concrete che da quelle puramente astratte.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Embodied and Grounded Cognition; Concetti astratti; Parole emotive; Acquisizione del linguaggio; Processamento del linguaggio

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Emotions and embodiment

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE HEAR, read and produce a word like "happiness"? Does the word induce in us an emotional experience? Do we feel happy and joyful? In this paper, we focus on emotional words starting from an embodied and grounded perspective, i.e. from a perspective according to which the body and the environment shape and constrain our cognitive activity. In line with such a view, we will argue that using a 99 word like "happiness" implies a partial re- 100 enactment of what we have learned to be the 101 feeling of happiness. Furthermore, we will 102 highlight the particularity of emotional 103 words with respect to other words such as 104 concrete and abstract ones (e.g. "bottle" and 105 "justice"), referring to recent data found in 106 the literature and to recent results obtained 107 in our lab. Compared to concrete words, ab- 1081 stract words typically do not refer to a con- 109 crete, single, and specific object/entity, they 110 are more detached from sensorimotor experience, and they are characterized by higher var- 112 iability both within and across subjects. Emo- 113 tional words are sometimes considered to be a 114 kind of abstract word, as are "freedom" and 115 "fantasy". We will argue instead that they 116 have a special status and differ from both con- 117 crete and from purely abstract words.

The theoretical framework for our work is 119 constituted by theories of embodied and 120 grounded cognition, which have largely inves- 121 tigated the relation between language pro- 122 cessing and multi-modal representations and 123 which have provided various accounts of the 124 connection between emotions and cognition. 125

Following this perspective, emotion pro- 126 cessing seems to be strictly related to the 127 bodily expression of emotion itself, hence 128 the role of the sensorimotor system in experiencing emotions is crucial. The mechanism 130 of reenactment of multimodal features is at 131 the core of embodied theories that account 132 for the acquisition and elaboration of emotions and emotional language. Such theories 134 have emphasized through experimental stud- 135

ies that both perceiving and recognizing an emotion, as well as understanding emotional language rely on embodied representations.

Following the embodied interpretation, when we perceive "fear", e.g. while looking at a barking dog, we form a simulation, in which different perception modalities cooccur. Our cognitive and perceptual systems are entirely involved, starting from the visual processes that register and impress on our retina the aspect of the dog, its shape and color for example, continuing through the auditory system that perceives the dog barking, and ending with what is typically called the emotion of fear, i.e. the sensation of being scared by something, which can result in the physiological phenomena of accelerated heart beating and sweating. When thinking about fear, all the past experiences that we have collected and conceptualized as "fear" are reactivated, through the re-enactment of all the perceptual and multi-sensory features that were involved in those experiences. In this sense, theories of embodied and grounded cognition on language processing and acquisition are clearly denying the idea of universal concepts, and underscoring the importance of the cultural and environmental context in the shaping and formation of concepts through the re-enactment of experiences. The idea of simulation assumes a powerful explanatory strength in theories of embodied cognition, and it accounts for a lot of phenomena - for example, it underlies both the experience of emotions and the experience of using words that refer to emotions such as "love", "fear" and "anger". Obviously, simulating is not acting, since it implies some form of inhibition at some level, even if our neural system is activated so as to react to the emotion itself. Simulation is thought to be at the basis of situated conceptualization, and is defined as the partial re-enactment of modal states acquired through experiences with the environment. This is an unconscious process, and it accounts for the mechanisms of conceptualization that otherwise would be difficult to clarify in absence of a direct stimulus.³

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Language comprehension in an embodied 184 and grounded perspective 185

Embodied and grounded theorists have 187 proposed that in comprehending and pro- 188 cessing language we recruit the same mecha- 189 nisms involved in perceiving and elaborating 190 physical information. Evidence has shown, 191 for example, that when comprehending ac- 192 tion-based words, such as "grasping", and 193 words referring to concrete objects, such as 194 "ball", we activate the same bodily patterns 195 that are elicited during the action of grasping 196 and during interaction with these objects. 4 197 Hence, word processing must be grounded in 198 the sensorimotor system through a simula- 199 tion process.

While the evidence on sensorimotor 201 grounding of action words and concrete 202 nouns is varied and compelling, the issue of 203 how we represent abstract and emotional 2041 words is still a problematic point for a simu- 205 lation-based theory. Consider the difference 206 between concrete, abstract and emotional 207 concepts. If we think about a very prototypi- 208 cal concrete concept such as "bottle", the 209 embodied approach can easily predict which 210 perceptual and motor features will be re- 211 activated during the elaboration of the word 212 referring to the concept: a multimodal repre- 213 sentation of the bottle will include the activa- 214 tion of the neural circuits underlying its 215 shape, dimension, color and the experience 216 of grasping it. If we think about a prototypi- 217 cal abstract concept such as "freedom", it is 218 clearly more difficult to predict which sen- 219 sorimotor features will be re-enacted in the 220 processing of the related word. The case of 221 prototypical emotional words such as "love" 222 is more complex than that of concrete words, 223 since the former do not possess an object as 224 referent; in spite of this, an embodied ap- 225 proach can predict that during processing of 226 emotional words the neural circuits and the 227 bodily expressions subtending the corre- 228 sponding emotions will be activated.

Emotional language comprehension acti- 230 vates a simulation, as shown by a number of 231

recent studies. Moseley and collaborators⁵ found that the passive reading of emotional words activates the same part of the premotor cortex that is also involved in the processing of face related and arm-hand related words, used generally to speak about overt actions. Notably, the same areas are also activated by highly abstract related emotional words such as "spite" which are more detached from bodily experiences than emotional words like "scream". The results of this study clearly provide evidence for an embodied and grounded theory of emotions, that is also able to account for the process of abstraction implied in the learning and in the representation of a word meaning.

The role of simulation in the comprehension of emotional language has also been explored in behavioral studies. Havas and colleagues6 injected botulinum toxin in the forehead of participants, to consider whether the understanding of an emotional sentence involves the simulation of its content. If reading emotion sentences activated a simulation, the inability to involuntarily move the facial muscles due to Botox toxin should be reflected in slower response times during emotion language processing. Havas and colleagues displayed an experiment in which they presented a set of happy, sad and angry sentences to participants, both before injecting the Botox toxin and after the injection. The results showed that the understanding of an emotional sentence, especially sad and angry sentences, was hindered by the impairment of the facial mimicry induced by botulinum. This was reflected in a reduction in response times when sad and angry utterances were processed after the injection. This finding indicates that embodied simulation can also account for the processing of emotion-related language.

Grounding abstraction and emotions in language: The specificity of emotional words

While there is clear evidence that emotion

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words activate a simulation, the debate on 280 whether emotional words can be considered 281 a particular kind of abstract words or not is 282 still open. The growing scientific literature 283 on emotional words has expanded this dis-284 cussion, by supplying contentious evidence. 285

According to some scholars⁷ emotional 286 concepts can be considered a means for the 287 acquisition of more abstract concepts, since 288 they represent the first concepts acquired 289 without the mediation of a specific and single 290 concrete referent. Their results show, among 291 other things, that abstract words are pro- 292 cessed faster than concrete ones; this is ex- 293 plained by the authors on the basis of the 294 greater affective connotation of abstract 295 words compared to concrete nouns. Emo- 296 tional valence was proved to modulate word 297 processing: words judged to have positive or 298 negative emotional connotation were pro- 299 cessed faster than words with an emotionally 300 neutral meaning. Crucially, abstract words 301 tended to be rated as highly emotionally va- 302 lenced. In a recent study, Ponari and col- 303 leagues⁸ asked adults to evaluate the age of 304 acquisition of abstract and concrete words, 305 including positive, negative and neutral emo- 306 tional words. They found that positive and 307 negative abstract words were acquired earlier 308 than neutral ones, and that both abstract and 309 concrete positive words tended to be ac- 310 quired earlier than other words. In a further 311 lexical decision task they asked children aged 312 6 to 12 to discriminate positive, negative and 313 neutral abstract and concrete words. Results 314 showed that accuracy increased with age and 315 valence interacted with age for abstract but 316 not for concrete nouns: children aged 8-9, 317 the age in which abstract vocabulary increas- 318 es, were more accurate with positive abstract 319 words compared to neutral words. Overall, 320 studies such as these insist on the idea that 321 emotional aspects characterize all abstract 322 concepts and that emotional words are a sub- 323 set of abstract words and concepts.

Other studies have instead claimed that 325 emotional concepts are to be considered dis-326 tinct from both concrete and abstract ones. 327

In their studies, Altarriba and colleagues⁹ have demonstrated that emotional concepts are recalled more accurately than concrete and abstract ones, and that they are rated differently with respect to psycholinguistic criteria such as concreteness, imageability and contextual availability. The results obtained by Setti and Caramelli¹⁰ using a rating and a definition production task, also suggest that the conceptual knowledge related to emotional concepts is markedly different from that related to both concrete and abstract ones. Mazzuca and Borghi¹¹ also compared concrete, abstract and emotional words. Participants had to perform a lexical decision task followed by a word recognition task; responses were given by pressing a pedal while holding a key with the hand or with the mouth. In the lexical decision task response times for concrete and emotional words did not differ, while responses to abstract words were slower. The analysis on accuracy in the recognition task revealed that responses to abstract words were more accurate than those to emotive words and tended to be more accurate than those to concrete ones. The interaction between the effector involved (hand, mouth) and the kind of word showed that recognition was facilitated by the mouth for abstract and emotive words, while facilitated by the hand for concrete words. The results of this study in both the lexical decision and the word recognition task are clearly difficult to reconcile with the view that emotional and abstract concepts are of the same kind.

Crucially for a perspective that emphasizes the role of the body in cognition, another recent study has shown that emotion related sentences are rated as associated with the mouth and with other bodily effectors. Ghio and colleagues¹² asked participants to rate associations with the mouth, hand/arm or leg/foot of sentences related to mental states (e. g. "she remembers the past"), to emotions (e.g. "she shows her disappointment") and to mathematics (e.g. "she determines the sum"). Ratings for the mouth scale indicated that

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emotional sentences were significantly more associated with mouth actions than were either mental states or mathematical sentences; ratings for the hand scale revealed that 379
mathematical sentences and emotional sentences were significantly more associated 381
with hand actions than were mental state utterances. As for the leg scale, emotional sentences were significantly more associated 384
with leg actions than the other two kinds of 385
sentences. These results support the idea that 386
emotions are more grounded in bodily states, 387
including embodied multi-modal representations, than other kinds of abstract concepts 389
(mental concepts and numbers).

As highlighted by our brief overview of 391 the literature, interpreting data on emotional 392 words is still a controversial matter. Considering the complexity of the theoretical and 394 empirical evidence about emotion related 395 words, in our view emotional concepts represent a particular and intriguing case. Moving 397 from an embodied and grounded approach, 398 we will here contend that emotional concepts 399 hold a special status with respect to concrete 400 and to purely abstract ones.

On the one hand the direct involvement 402 of the body in emotional representations 403 mediated by words could render them similar 404 to concrete concepts, although concrete 405 words (with some exceptions, such as concrete words referring to food) usually activate neural areas related to the actions performed with manipulable objects (e.g. hand 409 or arms), while emotional words elicit a more 410 general bodily activation.

On the other hand, there are reasons for 412 including emotional concepts and words in 413 the semantic domain of abstract concepts. 414 Like abstract concepts, emotional concepts 415 are characterized by a high intra- and inter- 416 personal variability connected to the assign- 417 ment of meaning: since they lack a single and 418 concrete referent, they are more subject to 419 variation across people and spaces than con- 420 crete concepts. There are other similarities 421 between emotional and abstract concepts 422 that can be taken into account. An important 423

similarity concerns the fact that, like abstract words, emotional ones seem to strongly involve not only the hand/arm but also the mouth motor system. Different mechanisms could subtend this activation of the mouth.

A first mechanism might be the fact that emotions involve our body in its wholeness. A second might be the activation of linguistically conveyed information. mechanism, which in our view is highly critical for abstract words, is not so crucial for emotional words, but might play some role especially for more abstract emotional terms. Even though basic emotional words like "anger" and "fear" activate a clear bodily pattern, suggesting that they are experienced and stored in conceptual knowledge as complex and multiple representations, other kinds of emotional words are indeed more abstract and not so clearly bounded. For these concepts, similarly to what happens with abstract words¹³ the mouth activation could be due to the activation of linguistically conveyed information, contributing to shape and delimit the meaning of some emotional concepts. Consider for example a term like "love" and how language contributes to contextualizing its meaning. It is reasonable to think that a child's first experience with "love", whatever it might be - i.e. the love of her/his parents - is considerably different from her/his subsequent experiences with that feeling. With increased experience and linguistic competence, the child will presumably learn that the feeling that relates to her/his parents, or the affection for her/his dog, are all occurrences that can be collected under the linguistic label of "love", even though they have different hues. The word helps to collect and put together different representations of "love". In that view, we can consider the relationship between language and simulation as a bidirectional one, viz. a relation in which both terms are mutually influenced one by another. In any case, the importance of language in delimiting their meaning and their association with the mouth is not sufficient to completely embrace a vision of

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emotional terms as a subset of abstract ones. 472 Certainly, language may play a role in the con- 473 ceptualization of emotional words, by provid- 474 ing a frame in which to ground all the emo- 475 tional experiences, but the activation of the 476 mouth effector can have other implications, 477 for example it could be a consequence of more 478 general bodily activation. 479

In sum: we propose to reconsider the rela- 480 tion between concrete and abstract concepts, 481 not as a dichotomy, but as a continuum, in 482 which concepts are organized and represent- 483 ed at a different level of abstractness, and in 484 which emotion concepts represent a particu- 485 lar kind of concept. In line with the sugges- 486 tion of the Words as Social Tools proposal,14 487 multimodal representations are involved 488 both in the comprehension of a concrete 489 term, and in the comprehension of an ab- 490 stract one. Words should be considered as 491 social tools, that is, as having a performative 492 aspect, as being useful tools to use in order to 493 operate distinctions in the environment, and 494 to cooperate in society.¹⁵ According to this 495 proposal, linguistic explanations provided by 496 competent speakers could be the basis for the 497 acquisition of abstract meanings, helping to 498 glue the linguistic label to the experience. If 499 concrete words mostly activate the sen- 500 sorimotor system while abstract words also 501 rely heavily on linguistic and social experi- 502 ence, what happens with emotional words? 503 We propose that emotional words first of all 504 activate an embodied simulation, leading to a 505 re-enactment of the original emotional expe-506 rience. However, social and linguistically 507 conveyed information can also contribute to 508 shaping emotion concepts, especially more 509 complex and sophisticated emotions like 510 "shame". As the studies mentioned in the 511 previous sections show, emotional words and 512 sentences seem to activate both the hand and 513 arm areas and the mouth; the mouth activa- 514 tion can be either a byproduct of the whole 515 bodily activation or can be due to the activa- 516 tion of the linguistic system. In conclusion, 517 emotional terms seem to be an intermediate 518 level between concrete and abstract ones, 519

sharing properties of both, but at the same time maintaining a peculiar status, and being irreducible to either of these categories. In the next section we will report recent evidence supporting this view.

Concrete, abstract and emotion words: Some empirical results

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the debate on whether emotion words can be considered a subset of abstract words or not is far from being settled. We will now briefly report some recent results on word acquisition and word processing we have obtained which contrast the three kinds of words.

In line with the scientific literature that has outlined the relation between abstract and emotional words and the activation or the engagement of the mouth effector, we predicted that linguistic information together with experiential and sensorimotor information, is at the basis of the acquisition of abstract and emotional concepts. In our view, if linguistic and social input can be considered crucial for assessing memories of abstract and emotional terms, its embodied counterpart is represented by the mouth. Numerous studies have assessed the importance of the mouth effector for the processing of abstract words;16 this could either be due to the particular way in which abstract terms are acquired, that is strictly related to linguistic explanations¹⁷ which can be re-enacted during the processing of abstract words, or due to the need for reexplaining the meaning of abstract terms through a form of inner talk, given their complexity. Both of these explanations are contemplated here.

As for emotional terms, it has been claimed that alterations of facial mimicry in adults imply a reduction in emotional skills, also related to emotional language processing. Recent studies on the relation between a pacifier and emotional competence have emphasized the negative impact of the device on the development of emotional

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skills,¹⁸ while the role of the pacifier on the 568 acquisition of emotional language has not 569 been explored.

We hence investigated the possibility that 571 a forced reduction of mouth and face move-572 ments caused by the overuse of an oral device 573 such as a pacifier during infancy could modulate the acquisition of abstract and emotional 575 concepts more than that of concrete ones. 576

We thus conducted two different studies, 577 aimed at verifying if and how the extended 578 use of an oral device, such as a pacifier, could 579 impact the acquisition and consolidation in 580 memory of abstract and emotional words in 581 children. More importantly, we wanted to verify if abstract and emotional concepts differ in 583 terms of the conceptual relations they elicit 584 and response times they require to be processed, in order to examine the different nascessed, in order to examine the different nascessed, in order to examine the different levested thildren with different levested of education, on two different tasks.

For the first study¹⁹ we asked 7-year-old 590 children to provide oral definitions for a set 591 of selected abstract, emotional and concrete 592 words. Children who participated in the re- 593 search had used a pacifier for different peri- 594 ods, on a scale from never to three years or 595 more. The definitions provided were ana- 596 lyzed and rated using two scoring systems, 597 the first pertaining to the accuracy of re- 598 sponses (a three-point scale in which "2" 599 corresponded to totally correct, "1" to par- 600 tially correct and "0" to incorrect or no re- 601 sponse), the second focusing on the concep- 602 tual properties. The definitions produced 603 were parsed in conceptual components and 604 the different relations produced were coded 605 by two independent researchers. The catego- 606 ries used included among others "perceptual 607 features", "emotion", "experiential" (referred 608 to direct experiences with the concept), "in- 609 teraction" and "taxonomic" (referred to the 610 higher or lower level of a taxonomy).

Results showed that abstract words are 612 more difficult to define, producing more fre- 613 quently inaccurate definitions, compared to 614 emotional and concrete words. As for the 615

conceptual relations elicited by the three types of concepts, emotional and concrete words clearly differed: concrete concepts were more linked to perceptual features and to taxonomic and functional relations, while emotional concepts elicited more emotion, and experiential interactive definitions among all children. As for the relations elicited by abstract and emotional words, the former elicited a higher percentage of free associations, while emotional words yielded a higher percentage of interactional and emotional relations. Despite these differences, abstract and emotional words showed some commonality: they were both affected by the prolonged use of a pacifier, especially compared to concrete words. This could be explained by the fact that abstract words and concepts rely more on linguistic information and simulation, while emotional words seem to involve more interactional and social aspects; in both cases, by the way, the static position of the facial and oral muscles induced by the overuse of a pacifier during social and linguistic interaction, could have played a role, causing a less accurate conceptual structuring. We suggest two different mechanisms that can account for that phenomenon, both stressing the centrality of the mouth effector in the acquisition and elaboration of abstract and emotional language; on the one hand, it is possible that the extensive use of a pacifier might have impeded children for a long time from simulating the word meaning, and consequently from re-enacting the linguistic experience connected to its acquisition, or it might have inhibited the process of reexplaining the meaning through inner talk, both of which are crucial aspects for the acquisition of abstract words. On the other hand, the pacifier could have hindered facial expressions and the social and interactional aspects connected to the development of emotional competence. One could also speculate that the pacifier might play the role of transitional object,²⁰ helping the baby to dissect reality, and to gradually acquire competence in understanding what is in the internal

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and what is in the external world. While until 664 age 2 this does not represent a problem, its 665 overuse could somehow interfere with the 666 processes connected to the acquisition of 667 language, if we consider language as the oth-668 er elected tool that operates distinctions be-669 tween ourselves and the world, and thus the 670 pacifier might also interfere with the devel-671 opment of social and emotional processes.

Overall, the results of this study suggest 673 that emotional words cannot be assimilated 674 under concrete nor abstract words. Like concrete words, emotional ones yield more accurate definitions than abstract words. Like abstract ones, the conceptual relations they elicit are influenced by the long-term use of a 679 pacifier.

In the second study,²¹ we intended to test 681 whether the influence of the pacifier found in 682 the first study is extended in time. For that 683 reason, we asked 9 year-old children (who 684) had presumably stopped using pacifier since 685 when they were 3/4 year-old) to perform a 686 categorization task. As in the previous study, 687 children who participated had used a pacifier 688 for different periods, on a scale from never to 689 three years or more. Children were requested 690 to decide if the words presented on the 691 screen of the laptop were words that referred 692 to animals or not. In the first case, they had 693 to press the key 1, otherwise they had to 694 press the key 0. Children were divided into 695 two groups, the first performing the task 696 with the "animal" key 1, and the second with 697 the "animal" key 0. Non-animal words were a 698 set of selected abstract, emotional and con- 699 crete words; response times and accuracy 700 were recorded, in order to investigate if the 701 overuse of a pacifier has an impact on the 702 processing speed and accuracy of abstract, 703 emotional and concrete words. Results 704 showed that responses to emotional words 705 were faster than those to concrete ones, 706 which also tended to be faster than responses 707 to abstract ones. As for the effect of a pacifi- 708 er, children who had used one until the age of 709 three years (or more) responded more slowly 710 than all the other children to abstract words. 711

The theoretical implications of these results are quite surprising; even if the interaction between the overuse of an oral device and the acquisition and consolidation of abstract and emotional concepts still needs to be clarified, it seems plausible to assume that the pacifier has an impact on the process of acquiring language. More importantly, this is a long term influence, as demonstrated by the results of our last study.

Overall, our results outline a complex framework, that could be interpreted as follows: abstract concepts, and their related words, are in general more complex to define, and are strictly bound to linguistic and social information. This is clearly underlined by the results of our first study, which shows how children that have been less in contact with the linguistic environment, due to the overuse of a pacifier, are less accurate in defining abstract concepts. In line with an embodied and grounded perspective on the acquisition and development of language, impairments in accuracy related to the extensive use of the device can be ascribed to decreases in the articulatory movement of the mouth. As for the conceptual features elicited by the words, emotional concepts show a distinct pattern especially if compared to concrete words, but also to abstract ones. They seem to be characterized more by experiential and interactional properties, while concrete words evoke more taxonomic and spatial or functional relations. If combined with the results of the second study, the distinction between abstract and emotional words appears to be even more relevant: in fact, emotional words were shown to be processed faster than all other kinds of words, thus emphasizing the difference between emotional and abstract concepts, with the latter always showing the slowest responses.

Discussion and further directions

Altogether, our results indicate that overall emotional and abstract concepts should be treated as distinct entities, distributed along

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a continuum. The notion of continuum is 760 here employed to outline the idea that categories such as those of abstract, concrete and emotional concepts differ in terms of abstractness level, and is corroborated by empirical findings demonstrating that people perceive some words to be more/less abstract than others. We have outlined that linguistic experience, combined with sensorimotor experience, is the salient feature for the acquisition of abstract terms in children, and in our findings emotional concepts reveal conceptual properties related to social and interactive experience. Moreover, data on response times indicate faster responses to emotional than concrete words, although the latter usually exhibit faster responses compared to abstract words. This result confirms the idea of a direct activation of all the bodily experience related to emotional terms. In our view, those findings drop a hint for considering emotional concepts as an independent category, with its distinctive traits.

Further research is needed to investigate the bodily grounding of emotional words both from a developmental and from a behavioral perspective. In addition, further studies are needed to determine if and how linguistic and social experiences can ground emotional words, as demonstrated for abstract words. In our studies, emotional terms are characterized by bodily simulations and especially interactive and experiential features. Crucially, however, the words we chose did not refer to complex emotions. It is possible that complex emotional terms like "shame" are processed or acquired differently from basic emotional words like "fear", and that the role of language in the acquisition of the former is more important than for the acquisition of words referring to basic emotions. This would be in line with the data showing that, the higher the abstractness level of emotional words, the later they are acquired.

In any case, this explanation would also strengthen the idea of the need for a finegrained distinction in the general domain of abstraction.

Notes

¹For overviews see A.M. BORGHI, F. CARUANA, Embodiment Theory, in: J.D. WRIGHT (ed.), International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, vol. VII, Elsevier, Oxford 2015, pp. 420-426, 2nd edition; H.E. MATHESON, L.W. BARSALOU, Embodiment and Grounding in Cognitive Neuroscience, in: J. WIXTED, E. PHELPS, L. DAVACHI, J. SERENCES, S. GHETTI, S. THOMPSON-SCHILL, E.J. WAGENMAKERS (eds.), The Stevens' Handbook of Experimental Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience, Wiley, Hoboken (NJ), 4th edition, forthcoming.

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