

Acting with the hands and with the mouth: from affordances to abstract concepts

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Abstract

During my talk I to try to highlight the role that action has in shaping our mind. I will start illustrating the main claims of embodied and grounded views of cognition. Then I will overview some recent studies in our lab, focusing on two aspects: objects affordances and abstract concepts. First, I will report evidence showing that observing objects activate manual actions (affordances), and that these affordances are flexibly modulated by the context and by the task. Second, I will suggest that words can be considered as social tools, helping us to act in the surrounding world. Starting from this view I will illustrate recent studies on adults and children showing that, while the hand is mostly activated during processing of concrete words, during processing of abstract words we activate the mouth. This activation is due to the difficulty of these words, that require us to re-enact the experience of their (mostly linguistic) acquisition, and/or to re-explain to ourselves their difficult meaning through inner talk.