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# The Affective Dimension of Word Meaning

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## Abstract

We present two experimental studies that suggest that affective meaning is cognitively prior to referential meaning. The first study shows that speakers are much faster in detecting the valence (positive or negative) of a given verb than its referential domain. The second study shows that speakers are generally much more sensitive to valence than to referential domain when asked to assess the semantic similarity of two verbs. The domain itself is only taken into account when the two lexical items already have the same valence. We also discuss some broader implications of these results for the study of word meaning.

**Keywords:** affective meaning, valence, verb meaning

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