
Linguistic roots of concretism in schizophrenia: do ”concrete” words underlie ”concrete” figurative interpretations?

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Abstract

We tested whether concretism (i.e., the difficulty in understanding figurative language) in schizophrenia might be linked to processes at the lexical/semantic level. We analyzed speech samples produced by 63 patients and 46 controls, who were asked to explain the meaning of a series of figurative expressions. By automatically extracting a number of linguistic features of the speech samples, we observed that patients’ answers exhibited higher word concreteness, predicting their ability to understand figurative expressions. This supports the idea that concretism is rooted in the lexical/semantic level, particularly with a correspondence between concrete figurative interpretations and the use of concrete words.

Keywords: schizophrenia, figurative language processing, computational approaches

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