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Typological encoding of agency constraints causal event cognition

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Languages vary in how agency is morphosyntactically encoded, but it remains unclear whether such typological differences relate to non-linguistic representations of causality. We compare Spanish (nominative-accusative) and Basque (ergative-absolutive), two languages that encode intentional vs. accidental causation but differ in agent marking. Thirty-two Spanish speakers and twenty-two Basque speakers completed a verbal event description task and a non-verbal responsibility-rating task using video stimuli from the Causality Across Languages project (USNSF/BCS-1535846). Verbal descriptions revealed convergent strategies for distinguishing intentional from unintentional events across languages. By contrast, non-verbal responsibility judgments differed reliably (Mann-Whitney $U = 78$, $p = .01$, $r = .68$). Spanish speakers organized causal events primarily by agent intentionality, whereas Basque speakers weighted degree of agent involvement more strongly. These findings suggest that typological patterns of agency encoding systematically constrain how causal events are represented, even when linguistic behavior is held constant.