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Emojis and Inferential Processes: An Analysis of Bridging in Multimodal Settings

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Abstract

Situated within Neurolinguistics, this work explores inferential bridging triggered between text and emoji. We draw primarily on Grosz et al. (2021), who posit that emojis are independent discourse units that can have anaphoric effect. Proposing that this observed effect is frequently mediated through an inferential bridge, we investigate the processing of new and given information using ERP methodology. Mirroring the experimental design of Burkhardt (2006), we constructed a corpus of sentence-emoji pairs across three conditions: simple retrieval, inferential bridging, and new information. Two experiments were conducted: an offline norming test to validate the stimuli, followed by a main experiment recording neural activity using EEG (30 participants). The analysis focused on the N400 and P600 components. Following Burkhardt (2006; 2007), we expected distinct electrophysiological signatures for dependency formation and integration effort. We propose that examining neural responses in this multimodal setting will shed light on bridging phenomena and online comprehension processes.