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Do we see things better when we know grammar?

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Abstract: Language affects perception. But how? Recent findings (Boutonnet & Lupyan, 2015; Bocanegra, Poletiek & Zwaan, submitted) suggest a dissociation between perception that is mediated as compared to not mediated by language. One explanation is that language –that is combinatorial in nature- stresses the separate features of objects. We investigated the effect of combinatorial (two words) and non-combinatorial (one word) labels on the perceptual separation of features in visual recognition. Participants were trained to categorize meaningless objects with two dimensions: shape and height. Each category had either a one word name; or a two words name reflecting its features. Participants then were tested on new objects . Combinatorial labels enhanced categorization performance as compared to single labels. This suggests that language, by decomposing objects into parts, might drive dimension separation in vision as well.