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Inner Speech Supports the Processing of Abstract and Vague Concepts During Social Interactions

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Abstract

This preregistered study examines the use of mental representations, with a particular focus on inner speech, during social interactions involving concepts that vary in abstractness and vagueness (semantic precision), using a hybrid methodology combining an interactive task, experience sampling, and survey measures. Results showed that abstract concepts relied more on verbal internal representations, whereas concrete concepts engaged more visual ones. Both abstractness and semantic precision affected participants' uncertainty in their evaluation of the ongoing inner experience. Together, these findings demonstrate that inner speech plays a functional role in negotiating meaning during social interaction, particularly when concepts are abstract or semantically vague.

Keywords: inner speech, internal representations, social interactions, abstractness, vagueness