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Effects of Voiced Initial Consonants in Japanese Sound-Symbolic Words: Experiments 1 and 2

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Abstract

Theoretical linguists have hypothesized that the vocalization of the initial consonants in Japanese sound-symbolic words affect their psychological evaluations. By using 5-point semantic differential scales associated with 13 psycholinguistic features (familiarity, visual imagery, auditory imagery, haptic imagery, arousal, preference, disgust, hardness, softness, heaviness, lightness, fastness, and slowness), we asked 36 Japanese participants to evaluate sound-symbolic words with voiceless (SSWVL; e.g., kirakira) or voiced initial consonants (SSWV; e.g., giragira) in experiment 1, whereas we asked them to evaluate sound-symbolic words with semi-voiced consonants (SSWSV; e.g., pochapocha) or SSWV (e.g., bochabocha) in experiment 2. Results of experiments 1 and 2 showed that the participants had higher levels of disgust, arousal, hardness, heaviness, and slowness for SSWV as opposed to SSWVL and SSWSV ($p < .05$). In sum, these findings suggest that the presence of vocalization of initial consonants in Japanese sound-symbolic words contribute to their psychological evaluations to sound-symbolic words.