

What beats the bouba-kiki effect?

Iconicity is a fundamental phenomenon where a form resembles its meaning, bridging perception and communication across modalities. While iconicity has been widely accepted in gesture and sign language research, the iconic potential of vocal communication has often been questioned. This talk delves into vocal iconicity, showcasing that sounds can convey meaning far beyond traditional language boundaries. Drawing on cross-linguistic research on novel vocalizations, I demonstrate the expressive power of vocal iconicity.

The second part of the talk explores cross-modal correspondences, where sensory modalities interact to form iconic mappings, such as associating shapes with sounds. I begin by presenting the classic bouba-kiki paradigm, which demonstrates a cross-modal correspondence between vision and sound bridged across cultures by iconicity. I then move on to a recent study revealing that trilled [r] is associated with jaggedness and roughness even more robustly than the bouba-kiki effect, raising questions about multimodal integration and the evolutionary underpinnings of communication.

Through this lens, I aim to enrich our understanding of iconicity's role in linguistic creativity and multimodal expression, ultimately addressing the question: what beats the bouba-kiki effect?