

UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Interjections as Tools for Sharing Mental States

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3rn78507>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 47(0)

Authors

Royka, Amanda L

Choi, Kate

Schoenberger, Rory

et al.

Publication Date

2025

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Interjections as Tools for Sharing Mental States

Amanda Royka

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States

Kate Choi

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States

Rory Schoenberger

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States

Julian Jara-Ettinger

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States

Abstract

Humans are intuitive mindreaders. We use our Theory of Mind to infer other people's mental states based on how they behave. Yet, humans are also motivated to ensure that others can infer their mental states easily and accurately. However, to act on this motivation, we must have tools to help others efficiently understand our minds, particularly when our behavior could be misunderstood. We propose that interjections—simple vocalizations like oh, oops, and ew—are an important set of linguistic devices designed to reveal our mental states quickly and efficiently. We provide initial evidence for this account, showing that people believe that interjections ought to be used as if they were designed to broadcast mental states and that people spontaneously produce these interjections significantly more often in the presence of an observer. Our work sheds light on how humans are not only proficient mindreaders, but may also be adept mindsharers.