

Abstract

The present experiment focuses on the effect of emotional experience on two aspects of cognitive processes: one is the conceptual breadth and the other is the structuredness of thinking. There have been two main approaches in the study of the effect of emotion on the breadth of conceptual scope: A valence-based approach states that positive emotional experiences tend to broaden the conceptual breadth, whereby individuals are able to take on more global perspectives, and negative emotional experiences tend to narrow it, while an arousal-based approach maintains that low arousal level broadens while high arousal level narrows. However, these two approaches have not yet been reconciled, and it has not yet been clear whether these two factors would also exert differential influence on the level of structuredness. An experiment was conducted where five distinct categories of emotions were induced, varying on both valence and arousal dimensions. The breadth of conceptual scope was measured by performance on a word association task, and the structuredness was measured by an idea generation task. No significant results on the word association task were obtained, but on the idea generation task, arousal was shown to significantly disturb the structuredness in idea organization, and there were non-significant trends that valence produced consistent patterns within each level of arousal. The failure of demonstrating a broadening and narrowing effect on conceptual breadth may suggest that the effect itself may be more complex than it has been thought. Results are discussed in the light of the possible relationships between the conceptual breadth and the structuredness.

Keywords: Affect, valence, arousal, conceptual scope, structuredness.