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Are Scientific Abstracts Written in Poetic Verse an Effective Representation of the Underlying Research?

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The central purpose of science is to explain (Purtill, 1970). However, who is that explanation for, and how is this explanation communicated once it has been deduced? Scientific research is typically communicated via papers in journals, with an abstract presented as a summary of that explanation. However, in many instances they may be written in a manner which is non-communicatory to a lay reader (Halliday and Martin, 2003). Research concerning climate change in particular demands to be communicated, because of its global relevance and the potential societal consequences of its findings. This study begins to investigate if poetry could be used as an alternative form of communication, by first assessing if poetic verse is an effective form of communication to other scientists. In order to assess this suitability, a survey was conducted in which two different groups of participants were asked questions based on a scientific abstract. One group of participants was given the original scientific abstract, whilst the second group was instead given a poem written about the scientific study.

Quantitative analysis found that whilst a scientific audience found a poetic interpretation of a scientific abstract to be no less interesting or inspiring than the original prose, they did find it to be less accessible. However, further qualitative analysis suggested that the poem did a good job in conveying a similar meaning to that presented in the original abstract. The results of this study indicate that whilst for a scientific audience poetry should not replace the prose abstract, it could be used alongside the original format to inspire the reader to find out more about the topic. Further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of this approach for a general audience.

References:

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