

Picturing words: the semantics of speech balloons

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Emar Maier

University of Groningen

e.maier@rug.nl

Utterances and pictures both express propositions and hence can be used to tell stories. The key differences between pictorial and linguistic meaning are in how they express propositions. Linguistic meaning is mostly symbolic and compositional, while pictorial meaning is iconic and holistic. On closer inspection, of course, many aspects of language turn out to be more or less iconic, while some aspects of picture interpretation are more symbolic and/or compositional. Interestingly, quotation really straddles the divide. On the one hand, spoken language quotation is often analyzed as iconic: in quoting, a reporter ‘demonstrates’ a previous speech act by producing something similar (Clark & Gerrig 1990). On the other hand, speech balloons, the conventional device for quoting speech and thought in pictorial narratives, are highly symbolic and compositional. The goal of this talk is to give a compositional semantics of speech and thought balloons, integrated into a projection-based dynamic semantic account for pictorial narratives. To this end I extend Maier & Bimpikou’s (2019) PicDRT framework for interpreting wordless comics (in turn based on Abusch 2012), with some Davidsonian event semantics, and then apply the powerful event-modification semantics of quotation (Davidson 2015). In a nutshell, the minimal information that the salient individuals depicted in a panel participate in some event(s) is encoded semantically: each new individual *dref* (associated with a region of interest in the picture) comes with an event *dref*. Bubbles of various shapes contribute different types of speech and thought events, whose agents are specified by the discourse referents corresponding to the regions these bubbles point to. I conclude that quotation is the key phenomenon to study for linguists interested in multimodal communication and the relationships between linguistic and pictorial meaning.

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References: Abusch, D. (2012). Applying Discourse Semantics and Pragmatics to Co-reference in Picture Sequences. *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 17. Clark, H. & R. Gerrig. (1990). Quotations as demonstrations. *Language* 66(4). Davidson, K. (2015). Quotation, demonstration, and iconicity. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 38(6), 477–520. Maier, E. & S. Bimpikou. (2019). Shifting perspectives in pictorial narratives. *Sinn und Bedeutung* 23 (2).