

CALL FOR PANEL CONTRIBUTIONS

Pragmatic insights for analysing multimodal argumentative discourse

Panel organizers

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Theme

In the last two decades or so, scholars from discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, as well as pragmatics and argumentation studies have started paying attention to the non-verbal modes that interact with the verbal in a variety of media and communicative genres. Within multimodal discourse analysis, each mode is studied as realising part of the information communicated and their interaction as contributing to meaning-making processes. In most of the studies within multimodal analysis, however, the focus is more on the image-internal aspects than on the interaction between the image and the viewer and the properties of the context that play a role in the interpretation process.

Cognitive approaches to visual communication, by contrast, have focused on the interpretation processes involved in understanding multimodal texts. However, the focus on the cognitive processing has left the discussion of the effects of the choice among the various modes and of their combinations largely implicit. Pictorial tropes, for example, such as metaphor, metonymy and irony, have been studied more with an interest in identifying their verbal and nonverbal cuing than an interest in the rhetorical effects of their use, or of the choice to cue them visually instead of verbally in a given piece of discourse.

Scholars from argumentation studies who have taken seriously the role that visual images play in argumentative discourse have paid little attention to the affordances of the various modes, focusing on what is depicted and overlooking issues of style and composition. Two approaches have emerged, one thematizing the persuasive effect and emotional appeal of visuals, the other examining their indexical properties and thereby reducing them to their evidentiary function.

For an assessment of the use of non-verbal modes in argumentative communication, a combination of insights from pragmatics, multimodal analysis, and argumentation studies is required if one is to account for their role in rational and cognitive terms rather than in purely aesthetic and affective terms. Discourse-oriented approaches to argumentation have traditionally drawn insights from pragmatics in an attempt to account for the context dependency of the identification and interpretation of arguments. The question we then raise is: how can pragmatics also benefit the analysis of multimodal argumentative discourse?

For this panel, we invite papers that discuss ways in which insights and concepts from speech act theory, relevance theory or other pragmatic approaches can prove useful in accounting for the argumentative function and effect of the use of visuals and other non-verbal modes in communication. Which concepts and distinctions operative within pragmatic analysis of verbal communication developed so far can also account for the interpretation of multimodal communication? How can the different communicative effects of the verbal and the visual modes be accounted for in pragmatic terms? Which pragmatic principles can help the analyst justify the verbalisation of non-verbal modes for the purposes of identifying the elements of an argument put forward in a multimodal text? How can pragmatic approaches account for the ways in which various modes interact in order to create a coherent argument?

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Deadline for abstract submission: Wednesday, 15th October 2014

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