

Social Semiotics and Social Media

Association française de linguistique systémique
fonctionnelle (AFLSF)
CREA - EA 370 - Discours et Pratiques du Discours



BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Plenary talk:

Social Photography and Social Media: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Selfie Genres

Sumin Zhao, University of Edinburgh

In this talk, I will examine the role that visual genres play in shaping contemporary social media discourse, with a focus on social photographs commonly referred to as selfies. Based on two collaborative projects on selfies, this talk aims to achieve three objectives. First, I will provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on selfies, mapping out key themes, debates, and theories. The second and primary objective is to illustrate how linguistic theories, particularly those that evolved from the Hallidayan tradition, can offer insights into the selfie as a visual artefact. Specifically, I will focus on two theories: social semiotics and grammaticalization. Social semiotics provides a synchronic perspective on selfies, while grammaticalization offers a diachronic view. Using social semiotic theory, I will explore how selfie genres can be classified based on how they frame the relationship between the self, the photographer, and the viewer. Through the lens of grammaticalization, I will investigate why certain genres of selfies can be easily recontextualized across different social media platforms and communicative contexts. The final objective is to examine the nature of selfies as technologically mediated genres. I will analyse how three types of technologies—smartphone cameras, editing apps, and social media platforms—have shaped and been shaped by selfie practices. By using selfies as a case study, this talk aims to open dialogues with scholars from diverse theoretical and methodological traditions who study social media and multimodality.

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Thematized, signal-like and supported emotions in citizens' text-image social media content

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I am interested in visual political engagement online – how citizens participate in the dynamism of life in society by expressing their opinions and emotions on various issues of democratic life in image-based social media posts, independent of collective actions. In this contribution, I will focus on *affect* and *judgement* (Martin and White 2005). Affect and judgement (roughly emotions and opinions, respectively) are often tightly interwoven and their expression relies on a broad range of multimodal devices, cues, and related discourse patterns that are not always easy to distinguish. My approach is structured around three broad modes of the *semiotisation* of attitude in discourse: 1) *thematized*, 2) *signal-like* and 3) *supported* attitude. Firstly, in discussing thematized attitude, we will see how *emotions* and *opinions* become the object of visual and/or textual discourse either through direct denotative processes, or through more figurative and less conventionalised, connotative expressions. Secondly, for *signal-like* attitude, specific patterns signal the presence of emotions and/or opinions in discourse, especially when they are combined with each other (e.g., exclamation marks can signal emotions and/or opinions). Unlike thematized attitude, which concerns discourse *about* emotions and opinions, signal-like attitude refers to discourse *as* emotion or opinion. Lastly, supported attitude is informed by cognitive schematisations rather than by specific linguistic patterns, as in the case of thematized and signal-like attitude. I am concerned here with the visual and/or textual clues of what causes certain emotions and opinions rather than their consequences in discourse (i.e. signal-like attitude). Analytically, I rely on a set of eight appraisal criteria that help me to infer emotions and opinions from manifest text-image content, like the proximity in time and space between a situation that is schematised in discourse and its writer/speaker.

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Images de guerre en Ukraine : comment la nouvelle communication visuelle crée la nouvelle identité

Oksana Lychkovska-Nebot, Odesa I. I. Mechnykov National University

Depuis la plus haute Antiquité, la guerre a régulièrement fait l'objet d'une représentation iconique. Les progrès de l'outil photographique, l'apparition des images en mouvement, par le cinéma d'abord et la télévision ensuite, ont rendu encore plus prégnantes les réalités des conflits. Considérée comme la plus importante opération militaire qu'ait connue l'Europe depuis la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, l'invasion russe de Ukraine déclenchée le 24 février 2022

interroge de plusieurs manières l'évolution de la numérisation de nos sociétés contemporaines. La médiation journalistique des médias traditionnels est également bouleversée par les plateformes de messagerie sécurisée, à l'instar de Telegram dont les canaux de diffusion regroupent d'importantes bases d'utilisateurs. Ainsi, les communautés disposent d'un espace au sein duquel les membres lisent, interagissent ou participent grâce à des messages composés de textes, d'images fixes et en mouvement et de fichiers audio. Ce faisant, la guerre est édifée en un récit que l'individu relate et communique en temps réel, il participe à un espace de communication désintermédié par l'exploitation de l'autoreprésentation et l'expression directe.

Face à l'apparition d'une nouvelle communication visuelle de guerre, il convient de s'interroger sur les enjeux qu'elles représentent, notamment dans l'imaginaire collectif, dans la construction des récits nationaux et de l'identité. Nous envisageons d'étudier avec l'analyse du contenu (content analysis) socio-anthropologique l'évolution de nouveaux éléments visuels sur les plateformes numériques (Telegram et FB) au cours de la guerre en Ukraine, notamment, des mêmes humoristiques de guerre, des photos et des vidéos suivis de courts textes. Ainsi, principalement conçu dans une visée humoristique et/ou ironique, affective ou tragiques, ces nouveaux éléments visuels ne sont pas que de simples objets de représentation, tout au contraire, ils fonctionnent comme de redoutables composants politiques, comme un moyen de la propagande, aussi bien que les éléments d'un inconscient collectif, de nouveaux mythes nationaux ou des constituants d'une nouvelle identité ukrainienne.

Images of war in Ukraine: how new visual communication is creating a new identity

Since ancient times, war has been regularly depicted in iconic images. Advances in photography and the emergence of moving images, first in cinema and then on television, have made the realities of conflict even more pervasive. Considered to be the largest military operation in Europe since the end of the Second World War, the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 raises a number of questions about the digitisation of contemporary society. The journalistic mediation of traditional media is also being disrupted by secure messaging platforms, such as Telegram, whose distribution channels bring together large user bases. As a result, communities have a space in which members can read, interact or participate using messages composed of text, still and moving images and audio files. In this way, the war is constructed as a narrative that the individual relates and communicates in real time, participating in a disintermediated communication space by exploiting self-representation and direct expression.

Faced with the emergence of a new visual communication of war, we need to consider the issues they represent, particularly in the collective imagination and in the construction of national narratives and identity. Using socio-anthropological content analysis, we plan to study the evolution of new visual elements on digital platforms (Telegram and FB) during the war in Ukraine, in particular humorous war memes, photos and videos followed by short texts. Primarily conceived with a humorous and/or ironic, affective or tragic purpose,

these new visual elements are not simply objects of representation; on the contrary, they function as formidable political components, as a means of propaganda, as well as elements of a collective unconscious, new national myths or constituents of a new Ukrainian identity.

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Intermusicalité connectée : analyse sémiotique de mêmes musicaux en contexte socionumérique

Justine Simon, Université de Franche-Comté, ÉLLIADD (UR 4661)

Le dispositif socionumérique TikTok est marqué par une dynamique de création et de partage de réalisations musicales connectées prenant sens au sein de mouvements collectifs participatifs, créatifs et/ou engagés. Après le GIF animé – cette boucle muette donnant l’illusion de l’infini (Gomez-Mejia, 2016) – c’est la musique qui devient le nouveau jouet des tiktokeur.euses. Les boucles sonores et musicales accompagnent parfaitement les mouvements de l’image et appellent à la créativité des tiktokeur.euses. Ces petites formes sont caractérisées par leur courte durée, leur répétition en boucle, leur composition mosaïque reposant sur une plurisémiocité (montages de textes chantés, *covers* musicaux, remix de sons et de musiques découpés et recomposés, à l’aide – ou non – de l’intelligence artificielle). Et le potentiel de reprise de ces boucles musicales – impulsé par la plateforme TikTok – offre à ce nouveau format une occasion d’augmenter le capital attentionnel des publications.

Le travail proposé vise à analyser les créations partagées sur TikTok en mettant au cœur de l’analyse le rôle joué par la musique dans l’expérience mémétique. L’hypothèse met l’accent sur le potentiel de reprises et de déclinaisons de ces boucles musicales – impulsé par la plateforme TikTok – qui offre à ce nouveau format vidéo une occasion d’augmenter le capital attentionnel des publications. L’analyse proposée pour cette journée d’études souhaite mettre la dimension politique au cœur de l’analyse. Un corpus de vidéos se positionnant *pour* ou *contre* Jordan Bardella – tête de liste du « Rassemblement national » – est en cours de construction dans le contexte électoral des européennes (9 juin 2024). Celui-ci réunira différentes publications marquées par plusieurs formes d’engagements (productions humoristiques, critiques et militantes) et reposant sur différents types de réalisations intermusicales (mèmes, remix, trends et productions réalisées grâce à l’intelligence artificielle).

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Connected intermusicality: a semidiscursive analysis of musical memes in a digital social context

The TikTok digital social network is marked by a dynamic of creating and sharing connected musical creations that are meaningful within participative, creative and/or committed collective movements. After the animated GIF - the silent loop that gives the illusion of infinity (Gomez-Mejia, 2016) - music has become the tiktokers' new toy. The sound and music loops are a perfect accompaniment to the movements of the image, calling on the tiktokers'

creativity. These short forms are characterised by their short duration, their looped repetition, their mosaic composition based on a multi-semiocity (montages of sung texts, musical covers, remixes of sounds and music cut up and recomposed, with the help - or not - of artificial intelligence). And the potential for these musical loops to be taken up again - boosted by the TikTok platform - offers this new format an opportunity to increase the attention-grabbing potential of publications.

This work aims to analyse the creations shared on TikTok by focusing on the role played by music in the memetic experience. The hypothesis emphasises the potential for repetition and variation of these musical loops - stimulated by the TikTok platform - which offers this new video format an opportunity to increase the attentional capital of publications. The analysis aims to place the political dimension at the heart of the analysis. A corpus of videos positioning themselves for or against Jordan Bardella - head of the 'Rassemblement national' list - is being constructed in the context of the European elections (9 June 2024). It will bring together various publications marked by different forms of commitment (humorous, critical and militant productions) and based on different types of intermusical production (memes, remixes, trends and productions produced using artificial intelligence).

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Question sequences and their gestural correlates in spoken monologic discourse

Michele Cardo, Agnès Celle, Manon Lelandais, Université Paris Cité, CLILLAC-ARP

This paper examines question sequences and their gestural correlates in spoken monologic discourse, as observed in a corpus of 18 English TED talks (6 hours and 4 minutes, 1110 questions across 17 speakers). All questions were segmented and annotated for syntactic, discursive and gestural parameters (hand gestures; head and eyebrow movement) using ELAN (Sloetjes & Wittenburg, 2008).

Questions are assumed to be produced by an ignorant speaker seeking information (Farkas, 2022) and are generally analysed as turn-taking triggers (Stivers et al., 2009). However, when questions cannot contribute to dialogue moves, their function is less clear. TED talks are a digital medium which belongs to the New Oratory as defined by Rossette-Crake (2019, 2022), and are characterised by an asymmetrical relationship between speakers and addressees. Although backchannel and gestural responses (such as hand-raising) may be produced, the speaker-controlled discourse cannot be explicitly updated by an addressee. This discursive constraint has consequences on the grounding process (Clark & Brennan, 1991) and on the gestures associated with questions (Shattuck-Hufnagel & Ren, 2018).

As a result of the lack of direct interaction, questions in TED talks tend to appear in clusters. These sequences are a distinctive feature of spoken monologic discourse (Cardo, 2024) and constitute functional discourse units (Egbert et al., 2021) because they are used to achieve different communicative goals including conveying salience (Falk, 2014), demonstrating stance (Hyland, 2005), and facilitating engagement. While little work has been carried out on gestures in question sequences, gesture repetitions have been analysed as useful discourse-structuring and attention-centering resources (Bressem, 2021).

We hypothesise that the emphatic and interactive functions of question sequences are reflected by the gestures they co-occur with. Our preliminary results indicate that question sequences are marked with head beats, two-handed gestures, and formal repetitions of hand gestures with modifications in trajectory or size.

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Plenary talk:

Avatars, cursors and controllers: Multimodal resources in video game interaction

Biagio Ursi, Université d'Orléans

In this talk, I study the impact of bodily, material and visual resources in video game interactions within a multimodal interactional approach (Mondada 2018, Traverso 2016). As a first step, I look at the role of the controller during a match of the football game Fifa08 for PlayStation3 (PS3). Two friends play together against anonymous players connected through the internet and they refer to controllers (and their parts) as well as to visual cues (i.e. cursors) in the video game interface. The multimodal EMCA approach to interaction allows the analyst to highlight the coordination of actions and talk in and out of the video game (Reeves et al. 2017). More particularly, I show that both participants rely on material and visual resources to position themselves epistemically as more or less expert players.

In a second step, I study the interaction during a collaborative online game. Three players crew on a damaged submarine, and they must repair it while regulating the water level to prevent it from sinking. The players play turn by turn and can communicate remotely via the audiovisual channel by their webcams as well as a written chat. I show how players employ bodily and vocal resources (i.e. the display of players' faces and their voices via webcam) as well as visual cues (notably cursor movements, cf. Heyden et al. 2023) to negotiate conversational sequences and to manage taking game-turns. Through the mobilization of multimodal resources, all participants ensure the progressivity of video game interactions.

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Gricean Framework in Visual/Pictorial Communication: Applicability of Implicature, the Cooperative Principle, and Maxims in Visual Interactivity
Taulant Salihi, , Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest

Despite the cultural theories of the late 20th and ongoing 21st centuries suggesting a shift towards a pictorial turn, i.e. a visually dominated communication culture (Mitchell, 1992-1994), language remains centrally significant in the frame of communication and the creation and conveying of meaning. Linguists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists from different schools of thought have worked intensely to better understand the mechanisms of human cognition concerning language use, and the related processes of subjective and intersubjective meaning-making and communication.

One such figure is Paul Grice, the British philosopher of language and one of the most influential figures in the philosophy of language, linguistics, and pragmatics in the second half of the 20th century. He is best known for his work on the philosophy of communication and the development of the theory of implicature. My intention in this paper is to highlight Grice's perspectives on Implicature, and the Cooperative Principle and Maxims used in verbal and written communication (language). I explore their applicability for understanding communication through pictorial text, focusing on their possible role in interface design interactivity implicatures in practical cases of distinct digital (social) media platforms through the analysis of the graphically minimalist (reduced) pictorial icons. This inquiry draws upon semiotic theories of pictorial representation such as Charles Sanders Peirce's sign categorization, Saussurean signification principles, and the Jakobsonian model of communication, among other media relevant sources to further explore practical cases of visually communicated information. I will observe how these cases convey and imply meaning beyond their objective resemblance, similar to the semantic truth-conditional limitations in language, by examining their

adherence to the Cooperative Principle and (by observing or flouting) different maxims.

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Visibilisation et lutte pour la reconnaissance de l'identité américaine musulmane sur X : Une approche sociosémiotique

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L'objectif de cette communication est d'analyser comment des Américains de confession musulmane utilisent le média social X pour donner à voir une autre image d'eux-mêmes et pour esquisser les traits d'une identité américaine musulmane plus conforme à l'image qu'ils se font d'eux-mêmes. L'analyse de tweets de notre corpus portera essentiellement sur la double question de la visibilisation et de la lutte pour la reconnaissance ; cette analyse se fonde sur le postulat le suivant : au cœur de la construction d'une représentation identitaire se trouve la question d'une agentivité collective. Les différents tweets du corpus seront considérés comme l'expression d'un groupe qui décide de parler au lieu d'être « parlé » afin de faire entendre sa voix et donner à voir une autre image de soi.

Notre analyse prend en considération les spécificités du médium utilisé, à savoir le réseau socionumérique X, et les possibilités que les fonctionnalités qu'un tel médium ouvre à sur la construction de l'identité d'un groupe ainsi que les contraintes qu'il lui impose. Notre analyse prend également en compte la nature polysémiotique du corpus lui-même ; elle s'appuie sur l'approche multimodale conceptualisée par Gunther Kress et Theo van Leeuwen. Nous accorderons une attention particulière à l'articulation des trois aspects d'un texte polysémiotique : l'aspect représentationnel, l'aspect interactif et l'aspect compositionnel. Nous verrons comment les tweets de notre corpus ne disent pas seulement en quoi consiste l'identité musulmane américaine, mais ils la donnent à voir, la mettent en scène et la présentent à des auditoires composites, formés de musulmans et non musulmans. L'approche multimodale et sociosémiotique permettra de mettre en lumière comment l'environnement interactif numérique de la plateforme X et les formes d'actions discursives, notamment la dimension visuelle, qui lui sont propres sont mobilisées pour mettre en place un contre-régime de visibilité. Ce contre-régime participe de la lutte pour la reconnaissance d'un groupe social qui revendique sa spécificité et son enracinement dans l'imaginaire et la réalité politiques et culturelles des États-Unis.

Visibilisation and the struggle for recognition of American Muslim identity on X: A socio-semiotic approach

The aim of this paper is to analyse how Muslim Americans use social media X to present a different image of themselves and to sketch out the features of an American Muslim identity that is more in line with their self-image. The analysis of the tweets in our corpus will focus on the twin issues of visibility and

the struggle for recognition, and is based on the following premise: at the heart of the construction of a representation of identity lies the question of collective agentivity. The various tweets in the corpus will be seen as the expression of a group that has decided to speak instead of being 'spoken to', in order to make its voice heard and present a different image of itself.

Our analysis takes into account the specific features of the medium used, namely the socionumeric network X, and the possibilities that the functionalities of such a medium open up for the construction of a group's identity, as well as the constraints that it imposes. Our analysis also takes account of the polysemiotic nature of the corpus itself; it is based on the multimodal approach conceptualised by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. We will pay particular attention to the articulation of the three aspects of a polysemiotic text: the representational aspect, the interactive aspect and the compositional aspect. We will see how the tweets in our corpus not only say what American Muslim identity consists of, but also display it, stage it and present it to composite audiences, made up of Muslims and non-Muslims. The multimodal and sociosemiotic approach will highlight how the interactive digital environment of Platform X and the forms of discursive action, particularly the visual dimension, that are specific to it are mobilised to establish a counter-regime of visibility. This counter-regime is part of the struggle for recognition of a social group that is asserting its specificity and its roots in the political and cultural imaginary and reality of the United States.

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Figures and legends in the physical sciences research article, 1922-2022.
David Banks, Université de Bretagne Occidentale, EA4249 HCTI

Illustrations have always been used in the scientific research article and were already present, despite the technical difficulties involved, in the early issues of the *Philosophical Transactions*, for example. The use of illustrations in the physical sciences research article has continued up to the present day, but the legends which accompany them seem to have changed radically over the last hundred years or so. Based on examples taken from the *Proceedings of the Royal Society A*, in 1922, illustrations usually had minimal labels: simply "Fig. 1", "Fig. 2" etc., and sometimes no legend at all. Examples from 2022 show that, a hundred years on, legends accompanying figures can be relatively extensive, running to five or six lines of text. Sometimes these can be relatively simple, made up of one or more noun groups, but they can be more complex with complete finite clauses. It is therefore of interest to consider the nature of these texts that accompany figures in the physical sciences research article. Do they indicate a transfer of material from the main text to the legend? What is their lexicogrammatical nature? Where they use finite verbs, what is the process type involved? Is it possible to speculate on the reasons for this change in the nature of legends?