TSANG, Wing Yan
Universität zu Köln (MA Linguistics)

Topic:

Understanding figurative constructions in political cartoons: A case study of the 2019 Hong Kong Protest

Abstract (223 words):

Political cartoon, as a form of critical discourse, is an illustration published on the editorial or comment pages containing a political or social message regarding current events or issues (El Refaie 2009; Schilperoord and Maes 2009). Similar to verbal language, where we can make figurative expressions for conveying meanings different from the literal description, such as metaphor, irony and metonymy, increasing studies have highlighted the pervasiveness of non-verbal figurative constructions, particularly in gestures and pictures. With regard to political cartoon, then, how do visual elements facilitate readers' interpretation of figurative meanings? To what extent, as raised by Bounegru and Forceville (2011), may the degree of knowledge affect readers' understandings of the political cartoon?

This study collects 19 political cartoons published by the Radio Free Asia (RFA) with the theme of the 2019 Hong Kong (HK) Protest as a case study to identify three crucial components for understanding figurative constructions in political cartoons: (1) metonymy, (2) personification, and (3) readers' extra-textual knowledge. A process of integrating multiple meanings is further proposed for a complete interpretation of the cartoons, which is highly dependent upon (3) readers' extra-textual knowledge. In the present case study, the meaning integration is seen to be particularly reliant on one's familiarity with specific protest-related events, as well as their encyclopaedic world knowledge, including the genre conventions (Forceville 2020) of political cartoons.

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