

## Langues & Langage à la croisée des Disciplines (LLcD)

### 1ère Rencontre annuelle

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#### *Images in computer-mediated discourse : issues, forms, integration, functions*

Key-words : images, computer-mediated discourse, digital discourse, online interaction, computer-mediated communication

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#### Workshop presentation :

This workshop is aimed at addressing images, by which we mean visual iconic signs (i.e., signs whose main characteristic is to present a visual resemblance with the object they stand for), used as a means of expression in written digital discourse.

As Osterroth (2018) writes, “traditionally, pictures were not part of linguistic research”. However, in the age of the so-called “pictorial turn” (Mitchell 1994), that is, in an era marked by the omnipresence of pictures and screens, a text does not, or no longer, necessarily consist in written verbal language only but may frequently include images in all their forms and manifestations. As a result, it now seems inevitable for linguistic scholars, in the wake of Gunther Kress (*Multimodality*, 2010), Theo Van Leeuwen (author with the former of *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 1996, 2021), or Jean-Marie Klinkenberg (2020), who have shown how rich interactions between text and image are, even outside the digital context, to incorporate pictures in their accounts of textual objects, and more generally discourse.

This workshop is more specifically focused on the use of pictures (emojis, GIFs, photos, illustrations, sketches, videos, etc.) as a means of expression within written discourse online. In what may be the first reference book on computer-mediated communication (CMC), American linguist Susan C. Herring calls the use of “emojis [...] and other graphics” one of the computer-mediated register’s “unique feature[s] of its own” (Herring, 1996: 3). Since then, many linguists (such as Bieswanger 2013) have tempered this view and shown that the use of images as a means of expression in written text is by no means specific or

exclusive to digital discourse. However, it arguably remains one of its salient features, particularly in the context of user-to-user interaction, which is still text-based for the most part. Although digital discourse has been receiving increasing attention from linguists since the turn of the century (see, for example, the work of Herring 1996, Anis 1999, Marcoccia 2000, Baron 2000, Panckhurst 2006, Crystal 2006, Yus 2011, Paveau 2017), the status and role of pictures in it, as well as their interaction with written text, is still a relatively unexplored area for linguistics, which could benefit from more research.

## Research questions

Below are a few research questions that could be addressed (but not limited to):

-quantitative studies on the presence of images in digital discourse. In what proportions do users resort to images in written discourse online? What categories of visual iconic signs are used most, depending on the platform, the medium (text / instant messaging, chat, online comments, emails, etc.), or in general?

-integration of images into the structure of utterances or discourse (Halté 2018a). For example, in verbal interaction online, images such as GIFs, emojis, photos, or stickers, sometimes constitute single utterances in their own right (see for example the case of “reaction GIFs” as defined by Eppink 2014). Emojis can also be used as substitutes for lexical items or content words within a verbal utterance, or emoticons and emojis as a form of punctuation (Dresner et Herring 2010).

-qualitative and quantitative studies on the functions of images in digital discourse (Herring and Dainas 2017), or on the functions of specific categories of images (Schneebeli 2019), or on a specific function of images in discourse. For instance the enunciative function of pictograms (Halté 2019), their expressive function (Schneebeli 2018, Sasamoto 2023), or their role as discursive or pragmatic markers (Walther and D'Addario 2001, Lo 2006, Dresner and Herring 2010), the socio-pragmatic functions of GIFS (Miltner and Highfield 2017), or the use of GIFs, emoticons and emojis as stand-in for gestures in computer-mediated interaction (Tolins and Samermit 2016, Halté 2019, Schneebeli 2019).

-Interaction between verbal language and pictures (Klinkenberg 2020). Do pictures allow users to express or make things that verbal language does not? To what extent do pictures complete, interact with, or replace verbal signs (Schneebeli 2017)? A possible case study in this respect would be internet memes that combine a caption and an image, where text and image both contribute to meaning-making (to varying degrees) (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017, Yus 2019, Zappavigna 2019).

-Typology of images used in online discourse. Study of the different visual iconic signs used online, with a diachronic or synchronic approach, combined or not with their functions.

-Sociolinguistic issues such as the impact of age and gender in emoji and emoticon usage in instant messages (Koch et al. 2022), the influence of gender and age the interpretation of

emoji functions (Herr Herring et Dainas 2018 et 2020), or, conversely, what the functions of emoji reveal about the age and gender of their users (Marko 2022). Other possible research questions include the relationship between discourse type, register, interpersonal context and image use and interpretation in written discourse (Sampietro 2019).

-pragmatic or enunciative study of image-use in written discourse online: what is the role of pictures in meaning calculation (elaboration of implicit content, inferential processes, etc., see Yus 2014 for instance); what is their role in enunciative endorsement (in the sense of Rabatel 2006); what impact do they have on the different enunciative instances?

-Semantic study of visual iconic signs and mood in written language: how do visual iconic signs contribute or allow the calculation of modal meaning (in the sense of Gosselin 2010 or even Portner 2018)? What modalities do they allow to express?

-Semiotic issues: Vaillant (1999) has already explored the language of iconic signs, particularly pictograms, but there is still a lot of work to be done on the semiotic characterization of “new” forms of iconic signs such as GIFs, stickers, etc.

## **Workshop objectives**

The aim of this workshop is to examine the use of images in digital discourse from the point of view of linguistics in its broadest sense, in all their forms (emoticons, emojis, GIFs, still images, photos, illustrations, sketches, embedded videos, etc.), functions, and contexts of use (SMS, instant messaging, posts on social networks, comments on commercial websites, emails, blog posts, etc.). To this end, its ambition is to bring together scholars with different approaches and perspectives, and contributions will therefore be welcomed from all the fields of linguistics potentially concerned with the question (semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics, etc.). Papers may be case studies, theoretical or methodological; they may be quantitative or qualitative; or they may focus on one or more types of images.

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