Reviews

Michał Szawerna 2017: Metaphoricity of Conventionalized Diegetic Images in Comics: A Study in Multimodal Cognitive Linguistics. *(Łodź Studies in Language, vol. 54) Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 487 pp., including 66 b/w comics panels and an index. ISBN: 978-3-631-67521-2 (Hb).*

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The medium of comics is at least as old as the 19th century, Rodolphe Töppfer (1799-1846) often being honoured as its founding father. Nonetheless, it did not begin to be seriously studied in academia until the 1960s, mainly by semioticians. But it was the "how to" books by practitioners Wil Eisner (1985) and Scott McCloud (1993) that truly ignited comics scholarship, which nowadays can boast its own text books, conferences, and journals. The medium is not only of interest, however, for comics *aficionados*; its systematic examination feeds into the study of visual and multimodality studies more generally. One reason for this is that comics (like animation films) are, more so than photographs and live-action films, made rather than *recorded* representations or expressions of a real or imagined reality. Its creators must therefore think carefully about the significance of every single detail they include in their art. Moreover, comics draw on a number of long-established conventions to make meaning, such as text-balloons, motion and emotion lines, pictograms, and onomatopoeia. These are often wholly or partly "symbolic" in the Peircean sense, which means that comics have coded elements. The existence of codes allows for pattern-finding — and this should be a basic pursuit of humanities scholars no less than of (social) scientists.

The author of *Metaphoricity of Conventionalized Diegetic Images in Comics: A Study in Multimodal Cognitive Linguistics* is well aware of all this. In this monograph, building on earlier papers and chapters, Michał Szawerna meticulously inventories and summarizes the "new comics scholarship", much of which has been inspired by Cognitive Linguistics in general (e.g., Langacker 1987) and by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (e.g., Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2000) in particular. Discussions of a considerable number of studies in this vein, by and large positive but sometimes voicing criticisms, recur throughout the book. These include Khordoc (2001); Saraceni (2003); Forceville (2005); Groensteen (2013 [2011]); Duncan and Smith (2009); Forceville et al. (2010); Potsch and Williams (2012); and Cohn (2013). But Szawerna (partly drawing on Kowalewski 2015), also argues for the usefulness of Peirce's iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity and their various subcategories for comics scholarship, proposing that the insights from the two paradigms can be combined.

In his introductory chapter, Szawerna praises a number of comics studies written by cognitive linguistics-oriented scholars, but also points out certain shortcomings. These shortcomings often pertain to a relative lack of attention to semiotic modes that help constitute meaning, and can supposedly be remedied by drawing on Peirce's work. Both the basics of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and of Peircean semiotics are explained in Chapter 1. Here I need to confess straightaway that while I find the Peircean trinity of icon-index-symbol highly valuable, after several half-hearted attempts over the past thirty years I have abandoned trying to master its many subcategories. Szawerna's account has not persuaded me to change my mind. In short, I found the Peircean strand in the book not very illuminating. It may well be, as the author insists throughout the book, that a certain visual phenomenon in a panel exemplifies an imaginal, diagrammatic, or metaphorical hypoicon, or a designative index, but such labelling appears to corroborate the correctness of Peirce's distinctions rather than to aid interpretative work. Cognitivist scholars can undoubtedly benefit from the icon-index-symbol distinction, but I baulk at the claim that "Peirce's sign theory [...] remains the principal choice for an analyst interested in providing a serious-minded account of the way in which these visual signs achieve their meaning" (p. 57). Here the Peircean approach comes in my view dangerously close to falling into what Bateman et al. (2017: 231) call the pseudotechnicality trap: "the technical terms of the description can be largely removed without changing the results overmuch".

Chapter Two demonstrates how readers-cum-viewers make sense of comics by drawing on what CMT scholars call "image schemas" (Johnson 1987) — specifically the container schema. Comics panels and the balloons in them literally *contain* information, giving rise to conceptual metaphors such

as visual fields are containers, episodic situations are objects, constituents are contents, organization is physical structure, and acquiring information is looking out of the window (a variety of knowing is seeing). Both single panels and series of related panels ("multiframes") are analysed, as well panels in which characters self-reflexively interact with the panel in which they appear, for instance by leaning against one of its borders, or breaking it. Since what is visible in a panel often depicts what a specific character sees, Szawerna rightly refers to the concept of focalization, and to the fascinating variety in which what is "objectively" present in a scene merges with a character's subjective (mental) perception of it (p. 164) — exemplifying what narratologists call Free Indirect Discourse (e.g., Bal 2017: 47).

Chapter Three is devoted to the depiction of movement in comics, both in single panels and multiframes. Four conventions are distinguished (pp. 192-193). The first consists of depictions of actions or postures in a single panel that suggest a (part of a) body is moving ("*motion-cueing images of bodily configurations*"). Szawerna (over?)stretches this category to also include "facial movement". The second pertains to depictions of (overlapping) stages of a single action in a single panel ("*polymorphic motion signs*"). Here we see the same character depicted more than once to suggest various moments in the action. Interestingly, this type also allows for metamorphosis (e.g., someone transforming into a monster within a single panel). The third category labels depictions of actions across two or more panels ("*polyptychal motion signs*"). This is the common situation in which different stages of an action are each allotted their own panel. The final type signals single-panel depictions of actions or postures accompanied by motion lines ("*motion signs comprising an image of a moving body and motion lines*"). Motion lines (also known by other names) deserve special attention, since "for about a hundred years, the motion line has been a major visual convention deployed by creators to represent movement in static form" (p. 238). Szawerna points out that the depicted stages exemplify the part-for-whole metonymy known as synecdoche. The overall metaphor that structures our understanding of movement is episodic events are objects.

Chapter Four analyses the representation of sound in comics, rendered either inside or outside text balloons. Apart from verbal utterances, these comprise non-verbal vocalizations (laughter, humming, growling, etc.) and musical notations. Balloon shapes, letter fonts and font sizes, and sometimes colour play a crucial role here, for instance to indicate an utterance's loudness (or inaudibility), the emotion its utterer experiences, or his/her mental state. Another pertinent phenomenon here is onomatopoeia. Szawerna moreover convincingly argues that stand-alone punctuation marks (specifically: "?" and "!") often have to be interpreted as signalling sound as well. Conceptual metaphors underlying many sonic manifestations include acoustic/auditory

properties of sounds are tactile properties of objects and the pair perfect is regular and imperfect is irregular, whereas the more general episodic events are objects and sequences of episodic events are time lines metaphors are ofcentral importance.

Chapter Five charts the representation of another crucial type of event: the verbo-visual depiction of comics characters' sensory experiences (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) and non-sensory experiences such as emotions, ideas, memories, and interior monologue, often conveyed in thought balloons. Building on the container and source-path-goal schemas (the latter specifying the origin, trajectory, and the destination of the information), the metaphor communication is transfer — echoing Reddy's (1979) "conduit" metaphor — is presented as fundamental. In this chapter, Szawerna moreover returns to the matter of "focalization". This term, which pertains to the literal or mental perspective (usually: of a character) on the story-world the reader-viewer shares, hails from narratology which is, as suggested, another discipline that has much to contribute to comics scholarship (e.g., Mikkonen 2012; Kukkonen 2013).

Szawerna's achievement is an impressive one. As his discussions and long and varied bibliography testify, he combines attention to the theoretical work done by scholars in different paradigms with thorough analyses of the 66 panels chosen as case studies. In his scrupulous summaries of other scholars' work he shows where these, although using different terminology, often discuss the same phenomena. Here and there he criticizes these authors, at the very least giving food for thought. Szawerna is therefore justified to claim, in his final chapter, to have demonstrated in his book "that the expressive resources of the narrative medium of comics greatly rely on a range of conceptual metaphors for visual representation of the more elusive entities — situations, movements, sounds, thoughts, emotions, etc. — belonging to the stories narrated in this medium" (p. 430).

All these riches do not come for free. Although the author's English is excellent, and the book has a highly systematic structure, the monograph is very densely written. Its style is rather laborious, with a lot of repetition, some 250 footnotes, and long sentences (sometimes stretching over more than a hundred words). This makes for heavy reading. With the help of a stricter editor the book could have been more accessible — and considerably shorter. And including an index of the conceptual metaphors discussed would have been a bonus.

But the price is worth paying. Szawerna contributes insights to several crucial scholarly projects. In the first place, his synthesis of, and reflections on, work in contemporary comics scholarship helps the still young discipline come into its own by showing how CMT provides practical tools for analyzing meaning-making in comics. Secondly, the author proffers further

substantial evidence for the CMT claim that metaphor is primarily a matter of thought, not of language. Although only discussing English-language comics, the author points out that the same mechanisms occur in Polish works, which shows they are not dependent on a specific culture — and indeed may be universal. In line with this idea, he confirms on the one hand that the comics medium draws on the *same* conceptual metaphors as language does (the footnotes contain numerous attested verbal examples of these conceptual metaphors), while on the other hand pointing out medium-specific aspects. This latter also means that whereas CMT-oriented scholars working on visuals, gestures, and multimodal texts can benefit from linguistics, the reverse is no less true: a full-blown theory of conceptual metaphor (and other tropes) needs to pay attention to the affordances and constraints of a whole range of different media, and not automatically generalize those of language to these other media. Put differently, there are ways of expressing metaphors available to comics (and to film, ballet, opera ...) that are not available to language. Thirdly, Szawerna attempts to bring together conceptual metaphor theorists and semioticians. Although, as indicated above, I am sceptical about the degree to which Peirce's theory is useful to help understand meaning-making in comics, I trust that semioticians will appreciate this line of theorizing in the book. More generally, given their traditions to focus on the textual and conceptual levels, respectively, semiotics and CMT can happily complement each other. This last issue is important, as it suggests how work within different paradigms can yield converging insights, which in turn will illuminate how humanities' research can feed into cognition science.

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