

*Sara Lenninger, Olga Fischer, Christina Ljungberg,  
and Elżbieta Tabakowska (eds.) 2022*

*Iconicity in Cognition and across Semiotic Systems.*

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In the Introduction to the volume, Sara Lenninger alludes to challenges that a book in a series launched in 1999 and including seventeen titles already might reasonably face. “[T]he forms and practices of iconicity in language, literature and art have been traced and analyzed many times in this series on ‘Iconicity in language and literature’” (p. 1). This discussion has valorised “different communicative resources” (p. 1), and it now depends on a continued effort to delve “deeper” and investigate “further”, in “expanding” media (p. 2). Aligned with “embodied” and “intersubjective” Cognitive Semiotics, the discussion of iconicity would touch upon both the reality of “perceiving and sharing different subject matters by different means of communication”, but it should also involve an “adjust[ment]” to “the ‘other’ in a dialogue” (p. 2). The following review picks up on this idea and turns to the present volume tracing how the study of iconicity might benefit from the dialogue between the analytical mind and the conversing mind.

The volume contains a selection of papers from the Twelfth International Symposium of Iconicity in Language, hosted by Lund University, Sweden, in 2019, as well as invited papers. The contributions have been arranged in five parts, suggesting, but perhaps not rigorously applying, a kind of devolution-

ary logic, whereby the reader may start with general theoretical questions and proceed to collate consecutive case studies, problem papers, and research reports. To explain what just such collation may produce in a reader, it may be useful to outline the contents of the entire volume.

The first contribution is a magisterial comment by Göran Sonesson (pp. 11-26), who revisits his distinction between primary and secondary iconicity, offering clarifications over the ways in which secondary iconicity should not be confused with conventionality. The clarification takes stock of new contexts in which the original formulation has been applied (from pictures, through language, gestures to music). With this instructive overture to the present discussion of iconicity, Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness are read into principles, ground, and sign, forming a matrix that is to stay with us until the final pages of the volume.

Next, Kimi Akita and Mutsumi Imai (pp. 27-45) discuss the distinction between primary and other kinds of iconicity in an evolutionary perspective. Building mostly on evidence from Japanese, the authors lay out their evolutionary “ring” model of sound symbolism, proposing stages of primary iconicity, arbitrariness, systematicity, and emergent iconicity. This intriguing paper sets the stage for interdisciplinary discussions, suggesting that the envelope of ontological assumptions in the study of iconicity may and would be pushed to accommodate many disciplinary traditions.

This happens soon enough. Fernando Andacht (pp. 47-61) has the floor to present his analysis of how the plot of the film *Das Leben der Anderen* integrates the epistemic function of iconicity to deliver a dramatic reversal for the protagonist (discussed as “a self-interpretative process” [p. 47]). It is a swivel for the reader, too: at this point, you plunge into a reflection on iconicity as a force eroding totalitarianism. And the big picture approach to iconicity is continued in the next contribution. With the article by Francesco Piluso (pp. 63-75), the discussion turns its attention to how indexicality and iconisation may be employed in post-structuralist and post-colonialist analyses of linguistic reproduction, such as embodied in “Mock Spanish”.

With “Symmetry” and chiasmic structures the discussion is scaled back ontologically: iconicity is traced in linguistic forms, syntactic forms, but also in composition (including story arcs). Winfried Nöth (pp. 79-102) discusses mirror symmetry, translational symmetry, and antisymmetry, demonstrating how these concepts apply to analyses of surface and deep structures of language and literature as mental diagrams. Randy Allen Harris (pp. 103-134) explores chiasmic structures to showcase the ways in which chiasmic symmetry leverages other figures, actuating, specifically, the meanings of COMPREHENSIVENESS, IRRELEVANCE OF ORDER, RECIPROCAL SPECIFICATION, and RECIPROCAL ENERGY. Jamin Pelkey (pp. 135-152) presents case studies of transverse embodied chiasmus serving narrative arc transformations, showing how

embodied diagrammatic iconicity remains embedded in tonal, affective qualities ultimately implicit in the embodied experience of upright posture.

Four papers deal with “Visual and intermedial iconicity”. Elżbieta Tabakowska (pp. 154-171) discusses Ronald Langacker’s theory of grammar alongside Władysław Strzemiński’s theory of vision in art and painting, and argues that, since the relation between vision and language rests on principles of iconicity, conceptual analyses of visual perception will obtain for explanations of language creation and development. Julian Moyle (pp. 173-192) studies John White’s poems tracing the ways in which deliberately ‘iconoclastic’ forms engage with the themes of violence, colonization, and injustice explored in selected poems. Adding to contributions by Michel Foucault and Douglas Hofstadter, Juan Carlos Moreno Cabrera (pp. 193-211) revisits Rene Magritte’s conceptual paintings (*This Is Not a Pipe*, *The Interpretation of Dreams*) and explores interpretative shifts whereby linguistic signs may be seen as arbitrary or iconic. Anke Müller (pp. 213-241) provides a comparative study of image superimpositions in films and sign language, showing how, despite obvious medial differences, superimpositions in both mediums depend on iconicity to express spatial, intentional, or temporal connections, specifically connecting an action with a human emotional response to this action.

Three papers centre on “Gesture and sign language”. Katerina Fibigerova and Michèle Guidetti (pp. 245-263) report on a study involving seventy-two Czech children and adults describing motion events, and they discuss, among other things, the ways in which gestures allowed speakers to modulate verbal content when experiencing limitations implied by the specifics of Czech coding of movement path and manner. Reiner Konrad et al. (pp. 265-288) discuss data from German Sign Language corpus with the view to developing criteria for type-token matching of modified signs. Marloes Oomen (pp. 289-328) conducts an analysis of recurring iconic properties of different verb types in German Sign Language.

The final part, dedicated to “Onomatopoeia and sound symbolism”, contains four articles. Maria Flaksman (pp. 331-349) studies occurrence of onomatopoeic words in English over the last millennium and suggests that mass replacement of onomatopoeic words should be associated with de-iconisation. Takashi Sugahara (pp. 351-368) concludes his quantitative study saying that Japanese tends to use sound-symbolic words as verbs when they are related to near senses and inner states rather than far senses. Ji-Yeon Park (pp. 369-388) studies the Korean monosyllabic ideophone *ttak* in spoken language to conclude that it expresses an epistemic modality, certainty. Mashael Assaadi (pp. 389-403) looks at Hijazi Arabic Non-Lexical Expressions of disgust, tracing how they serve as indexical and iconic signs.

The tour proposed above aims at more than extracting some proposi-

tional juice from the volume. I hope it showcases the difficulty that is inherent in interdisciplinary, theme-centred conversations. A collection that rich is bound to give answers and provoke questions. Some questions and answers belong to expert conversations evoked by each contributor in their turn. But others really coalesce out of the experience of processing the volume as a volume.

Here is an example of such a reader response. It happens that cognitive semiotics has inspired recent translation studies discussions on the reality of translation scholarship experiencing a glottocentric tank (Marais 2020; Blumczyński 2023; Litwin 2023). Indeed, a tendency to profile the linguistic dimension in thought about the intermedial flux of reality may be less than desirable for scholarship hoping to make sense of this reality. And four papers on sign language in the present volume combined offer an instructive commentary on how semiotics remains susceptible to the linguistic drift. The insights into type-token description challenges for the German Sign Language, studied explicitly by Konrad et al., highlight the extent to which sign language “grammar” does not neatly match over linguistic categories used even to explain what this grammar might consist in.

But this perceived heteromorphism will be up for examination if you turn to the volume’s contributions on intermediality and symmetry. Elżbieta Tabakowska’s take on the visual foundations of Cognitive Grammar reminds you that vision analysis and language analysis may be two ends of the same avenue. The language form may be worked out at the face of visual experience, but, at the face of it, “vision” is still a noun. And there is more. A scholarly discussion of iconicity, when you think about it, presupposes a symmetrical, potentially chiasmic, interface between the perceived object and the conceptual/linguistic form produced to discuss this object. This interface may leverage different iconic figures. Following Randy Allen Harris’s insights, we may speculate that while the proposition “Sign Language is not a language properly speaking, but, speak of it, it is a language” may profile arbitrariness (irrelevance of order), it may also profile reciprocal energy at work between the two domains. (The implication behind the verb *may* would be that paradoxes of semiotics are given to stay in scholarship [cf. Litwin 2023]). The volume will be a universe for thinking about iconicity as a relationship between thinking human agent and materiality, if you care to establish points of contact between its varied contributions.

And sometimes one feels it is a loss that such points of contact between different articles were not elaborated in post-conference re-drafting or editing. Here is an example. The theoretical proposal of the “ring model” in iconicity by Akita and Mutsumi finds a counterpoint in experimental data in at least two studies. The occurrence of Japanese sound-symbolic verbs coincides with conceptualisations of proximal body space, we learn from

Takashi Sugahara's study, and this pattern, hypothetically, might obtain in the de-iconisation underlying the great replacement of Old English onomatopoeic words (the latter, we know from Maria Flaksman's study, had been dropped coinciding with civilisational changes). That is fair enough by way of connecting evidence laid out before you as a reader, but the hypothetical connection whereby Japanese data on onomatopoeic conceptualisation will connect with Old English de-iconisation is a kind of de-iconisation itself, so far that abstracting categories from data is, semiotically speaking, a move away from Firstness.

We get a glimpse that this move might have been considered by the editors when we look closely at the introduction. Sara Lenninger characterises Akita and Mutsami's model as pertaining to "language development" that includes a four-stage interplay between the poles of primary and secondary iconicity (p. 3). But she mentions only in passing that the model builds on data about sound symbolism, consequently implying the model were more than just an explanation of data at hand. Indeed, Akita and Mutsami do seem to have gestured toward the possibility of their model being applicable in a broader sense when they closed their discussion saying: "The development of the sound-symbolic lexicons of ideophone-rich languages may be considered as a miniature model for the process [of symbol grounding]" (p. 41). But they were careful enough not to go to great lengths speculating how this model captured a generalised account of language development. Given their model, and their data, what do we learn about universals of language development? One can almost hear the sound of coffee break chat in Lund where moot points like this one could be laboured upon to the satisfaction now denied from the readers who were absent.

With what comes across as non-intervention, the editors appear to have adopted a laissez-faire policy relative to interests, idioms, disciplinary tactics, or, for that matter, global Englishes making up the Lund experience now in print. Letting the scholars speak, without necessarily nudging them to relate one with another, is a prudential policy that confronts the reader with a plurality of author voices, and I think it does encourage, if not enforce, a "careful investigation", as promised in the introduction (p. 2). But it also loosens, or even occasionally lifts, checks that may be productive in a series of publications where breaking new ground is ever more difficult. I think that two contributions to the volume are a case in point.

In his analysis of iconicity in *Das Leben der Anderen* Fernando Andacht dealt with a significant problem. The transformation of Gerd Wiesler, the principal character, involved a change in the self, triggered by an encounter with firstness. But firstness was firstness in a movie, in a fiction. Andacht truncated: life in a communist state was "represented fictionally in the realist cinematic mode" but the signs still had "the cognitive value (...) as a reflection

on that society” (p. 52). The story was “an allegory – or ‘fable’”, and one could dispense with the controversy surrounding just how realistic it was (p. 52). It may be true a Stasi officer like Gerd Wiesler never existed, but we can ignore the problem of “verisimilitude”, Andacht said (p. 52).

The present author enjoyed as a reader every stage of “the pleasant journey of a film narrative” with Andacht (p. 58). But the reader is answerable to the scholar. And the fact that the story is not plausible for millions of people with first-hand experience of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, and, specifically, for those with a well-informed historical sense of the GDR, the argument proposed by Andacht risks derailment as a take on iconicity. Apparently, there are very many people for whom ignoring the actual connections with reality, historical firstness, puts Wiesler somewhere between mythical figures, say, Prometheus, Zeus, and Pandora. If the conversion of Gerd Wiesler is supposed to stand as a case in point for “firstness” at work, what would “firstness” stand for if those with “first-hand” knowledge of the tonal, embodied, historical reality of Stasi suggest they consider the story steeped in “thirdness”, a fable? If a repressive reality may be “represented fictionally in the realistic ... mode” the way the argument proposes, because what matters is the interpretive value we choose to locate in fictionality, realism, and mode, much like scholars who argue that the film is “hyperrealist” (Westphal 2012), does it not follow that “iconicity”, itself an element “in human self-perception” (Lenninger citing Andacht, p. 1), is a synonym for “interpretation”? To suggest that the answer is to be associated with the notion of “dream-like icon” (p. 60) is to postpone an important question rather than answering it.

There is more similar liberality. Francesco Piluso sets out to apply the concept of iconicity to discuss “Mock Spanish”, and he draws on the resources of post-structuralist and post-colonial scholarship to examine ideology expressed linguistically. But his argument contains gaps that seem surprising when viewed outside the discipline-specific consensus that he builds on: “When we speak Mock Spanish, the relevant aspects of this practice are usually activated and acknowledged in terms of lexical connections to specific stereotypes” (p. 63). Who does “we” refer to? Why is “Spanishness” juxtaposed with “Whiteness” rather than “Englishness” if the study is linguistic? Or is it? If it is not, what exactly are we investigating: what is “Mock Spanish” in terms of firstness if firstness here is associated with a very broad stereotype? If “Mock Spanish” depends on an intention rather than specific linguistic forms, as the article suggests but does not explicitly say, how can we even attest that what we are discussing does, in fact, fall into the category of “Mock Spanish”, and not something else? I think it is a pity that the author and the editors did not take more time to align this interesting argument

more closely with iconicity studies rather than ideology studies.

Perhaps such questions might be answered referring us to different scholarly traditions of applying elements of semiotics. But regardless of what such explanations would contain, I think it is useful to note what is at stake when a broad discussion relaxes the norms of falsification to house more diverse and original views. Results whereby “iconicity” may be synonymous with “innovation”, “spontaneity”, “dream-like” non-dualism (“interpretation”?), and for the most part may be used interchangeably with “cognitive metaphor/metonym” ask to be questioned. And perhaps this questioning might have been forestalled had more cognitive linguistics been admitted to inform the discussion, helping parse the yield of different, though similar, concepts to the study of firstness in human cognition. The point is that for some years now cognitive linguistics has added important conceptual distinctions to accounts of embodied cognition, and those appear to have reached maturity that puts this theory on a par with much older semiotics (e.g. Kövecses 2020). Studies have been conducted that bring together precisely the apparatuses of semiotics and cognitive linguistics (e.g. Szawerna 2017) to deal with multimedial material, and discussion has been offered to just what we gain from such parallel applications (e.g. Forceville 2021). The volume under review features Langacker’s theory of cognitive grammar and it mentions theoretical contributions by Turner, Talmy, Lakoff and Johnson, but it does not seem to capitalise on the ways in which cognitive linguistics in its descriptive, Continental usage may illuminate – falsify and verify – semiotic arguments when they risk becoming uneconomical.

Iconicity is likely to puzzle scholars, and for the discussion to advance it is important that the public give authors the benefit of the doubt when faced with a method, or an approach that does not fall in line with what you already know. I think this is what the contributors and the editors strove for, and I consider their effort largely successful, and at times, as I have tried to share, genuinely inspiring. If you are interested in iconicity, here is a volume whose numerous and diverse elements, positive and negative content, will allow you to experience rich scholarship.

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