

## Discourse spaces, stance-stacking and viewpoint blends in Internet memes

Barbara Dancygier<sup>1</sup> & Lieven Vandelanotte<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of British Columbia, barbara.dancygier@ubc.ca

<sup>2</sup>University of Namur & KU Leuven, lieven.vandelanotte@unamur.be

**Keywords:** fictive interaction, Internet memes, multimodality, quotation, stance, viewpoint

Quotation plays an important role in evaluating and typifying attitudes (Clark & Gerrig 1990, Dancygier 2021), and similarly, Internet memes are used as tools to express attitudes and emotions (Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2017). It is small wonder, then, that Internet memes often feature fictive quotation (Pascual 2014), speech representation, and, more generally, many forms of depiction (Clark 2016). These fictive depictions have the added advantage of frame-metonymically evoking rich contents in a limited space, making them a useful tool for use in memes. Building on the work on quotations, we discuss a subtype of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1994 [1985]) prompted by discourse configurations. We focus on several types of memes, to flesh out the role of fictive quotation in building complex blended viewpoints.

We start with *be like* memes. In its linguistic manifestations, *be like* has been widely studied as a pseudo-quotative construction in examples like *And I'm like, OMG!*, where *OMG!* profiles the stance, rather than quoting linguistic form (cf. Buchstaller 2014, D'Arcy 2017, Hsu et al. 2021). For comparison, *be like* Internet memes combine plural NP subjects and base forms of *be like* (as in, e.g., *moms be like*) with images (Fig. 1). Use of the base form of the verb is a feature influenced by African American Vernacular English (cf. Cukor-Avila 2002). *Be like* memes serve to reinforce (often negative) stereotypes about the class of referents identified in the plural subject NP by evoking discourse spaces as source domains in a similitive reasoning (cf. Vandelanotte 2019).

In the main argument of the paper we focus on fictive quotations reinforced with complex images, such as whole cartoons or grid-like arrangements of multiple stances (Du Bois 2007), juxtaposed and left for the meme viewer to integrate into a coherent blended viewpoint. We discuss a range of meme types relying on fictive quotations including Anakin and Padmé memes (Fig. 2) and complex grids representing political options (Fig. 3).

Figure 2, for instance, refashions what is originally a fictive dialogue between *Star Wars* characters. Elizabeth, newly made Queen, is pretend-quoted as affirming her accession; youngish Charles expectantly asks confirmation that he is next in line; no verbal reply is given but the ageing Queen, close-up, looks unsmiling; prompting a doubtful, older Charles to echo his original question without much hope. The example's considerable compression across time underscores the fictive nature of the exchange, and embodied aspects help construe the lower viewpoints. The overall viewpoint blend allows us both to understand Charles' predicament, and take an ironic distance towards it.

Overall, we compare discourse spaces in linguistic and memetic constructions to propose an interpretation of their frame-metonymic role in representing attitudes and emotions. We argue that multimodal artifacts such as memes employ constructionally determined combinations of linguistic forms and images to profile multiple stances and arrange them into complex stance-stacking constructions (Dancygier 2012). We show how the multimodal structure of memes is exploited in constructionally supported stance configurations. These examples support our proposed view of multimodal constructions as stance-stacking constructions.



Fig. 1: 'Be like' meme.



Fig. 2: 'Anakin and Padmé' meme.

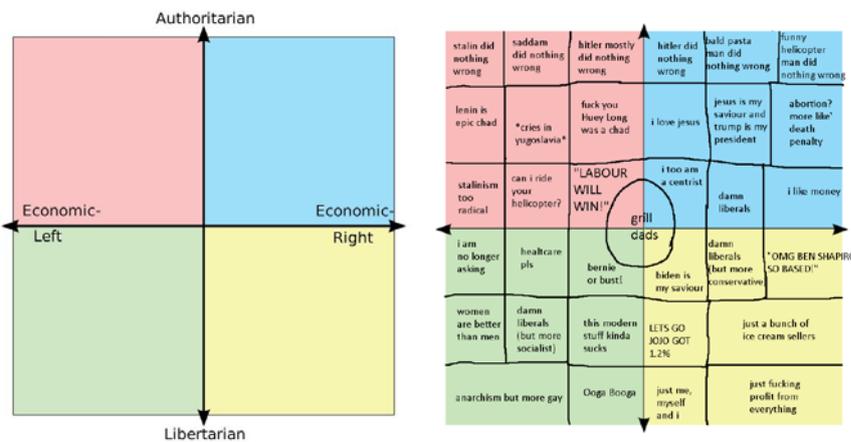


Fig. 3: Political compass chart and example of a meme based on the chart.

## References

- Buchstaller, Isabelle. 2014. *Quotatives: New trends and sociolinguistic implications*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- Clark, Herbert H. & Richard J. Gerrig. 1990. Quotations as demonstrations. *Language* 66(4). 764–805.
- Clark, Herbert H. 2016. Depicting as a method of communication. *Psychological Review*, 123(3). 324–347.
- Cukor-Avila, Patricia. 2002. *She say, she go, she be like: Verbs of quotation over time in African American Vernacular English*. *American Speech* 77(1). 3–31.
- Dancygier, Barbara. 2012. Negation, stance verbs, and intersubjectivity. In Barbara Dancygier & Eve Sweetser (eds.), *Viewpoint in language: A multimodal perspective*, 69–93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dancygier, Barbara. 2021. Fictive deixis, direct discourse, and viewpoint networks. *Frontiers in Communication* 6. Article 624334.
- Dancygier, Barbara & Lieven Vandelanotte. 2017. Internet memes as multimodal constructions. *Cognitive Linguistics* 28(3). 565–598.
- D'Arcy, Alexandra. 2017. *Discourse-pragmatic variation in context: Eight hundred years of LIKE*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Du Bois, John W. 2007. The stance triangle. In Robert Englebretson (ed.), *Stancetaking in discourse: Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction*, 139–182. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Fauconnier, Gilles. 1994 [1985]. *Mental spaces: Aspects of meaning construction in natural language*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hsu, Hui-Chieh, Geert Brône & Kurt Feytaerts. 2021. When gesture “takes over”: Speech-embedded nonverbal depictions in multimodal interaction. *Frontiers in Psychology* 11. Article 552533.
- Pascual, Esther. 2014. *Fictive interaction: The conversation frame in thought, language, and discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Vandelanotte, Lieven. 2019. Changing perspectives: Something old, something new. *Pragmatics* 29(2). 170–197.