

Forms and functions of quotation in Internet memes

This paper proposes to revisit the notion of quotation from the perspective of Internet memes. Internet memes have been analysed as constructions combining image and (very limited) text in recognizable, highly patterned ways, inviting communicators' inventiveness to create new variations within the established constructional constraints of the meme, allowing them to quickly express viewpoints and elicit responses (see, e.g., Shifman 2014, Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2017, Zenner & Geeraerts 2017). That quotation should feature prominently in a number of meme families should come as no surprise, given the recognized role of quotation in dramatizing and evaluating important actions in spoken interaction (e.g. Mayes 1990, Haiman 1990, Holt & Clift 2007) and in evoking attitudes in certain genres of fiction and poetry (e.g. Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2009, Dancygier 2012, Dancygier 2021).

Given the absence of specific 'real' speakers in meme quotations, our investigation of meme quotation ties in with existing research on so-called non-quotative uses of quotation in language more generally (e.g. von Roncador 1988, Tannen 1989, Clark & Gerrig 1990, Vandelanotte 2009, Pascual 2014). It expands on this body of research by considering more closely the nature of the fictive deictic 'grounds' or speech events (Dancygier 2021) evoked for the purposes of meaning emergence in these memes. Our analysis also incorporates broader notions of depiction as articulated by Clark (2016) and applied to enactments in co-speech gesture (Hsu 2021) and sign language (Vandenitte 2022). This extension is needed in particular because what is (pretend-)quoted in memes can be something with considerable internal complexity (e.g. a whole cartoon) compared to the single utterance typically quoted in standard direct discourse constructions.

Based on an extensive manually collected data set and expanding on initial analyses (e.g. Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2016, Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2017, Vandelanotte 2019), we propose a fuller analysis of the forms and functions of various types of quotation found in Internet memes, including faux reporting clauses such as *said no one ever* or *they said*, resulting in viewpoint reversal; *be like* memes occurring with plural NP subjects and unconjugated verb; and uses of quotation marks without any accompanying quoting phrase or clause, especially as the apodosis or protasis of predictive meme constructions. Additionally, quotations are also used as 'labelling' devices, interpreting images in dialogic terms. The way in which this range of quotative usage quickly and often humorously typifies attitudes (individual or collective) supports earlier research on 'non-quotative' uses of quotation. On the other hand, the unique deictic and constructional features invite a rethink of more traditional descriptions of the direct discourse construction.

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