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Metaphors in Street Art

The case of Athens

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Metaphors in Street Art: The case of Athens

Abstract

Since the beginning of the 21st century, art in "publicly accessible spaces" (Bengtsen, 2018: 125) has received significant attention within a number of academic fields, including most recently cognitive semiotics, which integrates methods, models, and theories from semiotics, cognitive science, and (cognitive) linguistics (Sonesson, 2014; Zlatev; 2015). Street art, graffiti, and urban art as expressive and worldwide phenomena are often considered to be variants of urban creativity (an umbrella term), encompassing several types of art in urban space (Bengtsen, 2018; Stampoulidis, 2016). Here, street art is understood as a visually perceived unsanctioned cross-cultural medium addressing socio-political issues and has been chosen due to its all-embracing nature (Stampoulidis, forthcoming). It typically combines two interacting semiotic systems – language and pictures, and is thus a form of *polysemiotic communication* (Zlatev and Devylder, forthcoming). By taking into account the interactions between those systems, the attention here, is paid on the expression of metaphoric and/or other potential figurative constructions.

For this paper, we use data derived from fieldwork research undertaken in central Athens periodically between 2014 and 2017, including photographic documentation and interviews. In this talk with the introduction of the Sedimentation and Motivation model (SEaM) (Zlatev, 2017), I show that the genre of street art usually requires an integration of three levels of metaphoric (figurative) interpretation, from cross-cultural experiences on a universal (inter)subjective level, via historical constraints on the level of shared conventionality among sign users, united on the level of contextual creativity and pragmatic communication. On all levels, street artwork's metaphoric (figurative) interpretation is motivated by panhuman experiences, previous sociocultural and historical knowledge among sign users, linguistic information, contextual and biographical information, and further genre conventions.

Along these lines, a further contribution is offered to the questions of a. how street artworks can be interpreted in the light of metaphoric conceptualizations, and b. how these are related to the semiotic systems of language and pictures taking into account their quite frequent interaction.

References

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