

Spreni, Thursday 19 October 2023 at 15:15-17

Arken, Helikon (Fabriksgatan 2, Åbo) / Zoom: <https://aboakademi.zoom.us/j/66312703059>, Meeting ID: 663 1270 3059).

VISUAL APHORISMS AS STANCE-DRIVEN MULTIMODAL INTERNET MEMES

Kukka-Maaria Wessman (University of Turku)

Aphorisms are short, concise and polished phrases expressing original and insightful thoughts. As such, they lay in between of philosophy and literary art. (Häkkinen 2006; Morson 2012.) Aphorisms have become popular in social media and transformed into an internet meme – a group of digital items sharing common characteristics (Shifman 2014).

My presentation explores visual aphorisms as stance-driven multimodal internet memes. Focusing on visual aphorisms in a Finnish Facebook group, I examine collective meaning-making and stance-taking. The research questions addressed are the following:

1. How are the visual aphorisms in the data constructed?
2. What is the role of the visual mode in the visual aphorisms in this group?
3. How is the stance reversed within the group?

The data consist of a collection of visual aphorisms from a Finnish Facebook group meant for sharing bad or shallow aphorisms called *Paskat teepussiaforismit eli kuinka lakkasin rakastamasta ja opin vihaamaan* 'shitty tea bag aphorisms or how I stopped loving and learned to hate'.

Visual aphorisms are interesting internet memes, because they contain no visual fixed textual or visual elements. In this aspect, the visual aphorisms differ from more studied multimodal internet memes, like image macros. The visual aphorisms consist of a textual, a visual mode and a stance. The text is an aphorism giving advice on how to live, either a well-known quote or one written by the creator of the visual aphorism. The image portrays something with positive connotations – flowers, hearts and young women. The visual aphorisms are recognized as such by a shared stance. In the studied visual aphorisms, the stance is encouraging and empowering.

The role of the image in the visual aphorisms is to portray the elements in the aphorism and enforce the encouraging stance. Pictures can depict the elements in the text directly or by connotation. The text is understandable without the image in the visual aphorisms under investigation. This, too, differentiates the visual aphorisms from other multimodal internet memes, where the image is often an integral part of the linguistic construction (see e.g. Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2017).

The study shows that the encouraging stance is reversed and ridiculed in the context of the group. The visual aphorisms may not have been originally intended as amusing, but by

adding a caption and sharing them with the group, the members reframe the aphorisms with a humorous stance.

References

Dancygier, Barbara & Vandelanotte, Lieven 2017: Internet memes as multimodal constructions. *Cognitive Linguistics* 28(3): 565–98.

Häkkinen, Kaisa 2006: Aforismin kieli ja mieli. *Sananjalka* 48(1): 43–63.

Morson, Gary 2012: *The Long and Short of It*. Stanford University Press.

Shifman, Limor 2014: *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press.