

**Cognitive motivations of second(ary) voices:
Notes on parenthetical and quotative constructions from a multimodal perspective**

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Alluding to the Bakhtinian notion of ‘voice’ as an umbrella concept, I will draw attention to the critical commonality of two phenomena, highly pervasive in language but inexplicably marginalized in linguistics -- parenthetical and quotative constructions.

From a descriptive point of view, written representations of these two constructions feature unequivocally distinct figural devices (parentheses, dashes and colons as well as quotes) that are conventionalized to demarcate, equally for both constructions, an adjacent constituent as different from its linguistic environment. Such discriminative tagging, well-known in vision research, will generate attention effects: Similar to primes in visual perception, the figural elements will trigger in readers a metalinguistic awareness of the immediately adjacent sequence’s status as a(nother or) second voice. In linguistics, these phenomena have remained marginalized and, counter-intuitively and tacitly, assumed to be secondary, defocused constituents of the text (quite iconic to their inattention even in pertinent contemporary studies).

While in form- or syntax-based accounts these two constructions are never investigated together, I will, in light of their common medial profile, call on Nunberg’s (1990) early observation of a substantial analogy in their punctuation ‘behavior’ (in English) that is taken to subserve an underlying text-structural function: Balancing out the communicative needs and interests of authors and readers, texts provide options for authors to elaborate or comment on the ongoing message in their own voice ‘in parentheses’ or introduce another (or their own) voice from a prior (actual or imagined) linguistic event, a quotation.

Committed to Leonard Talmy’s cognitive semantics framework and expanding on previous studies (e.g., Lampert 1992, 2011, 2014, submitted a,b), I would like to outline a common attention-sensitive, multimodal profile of both constructions, as -- unsurprisingly from a cognitive linguistics perspective -- their notable share of perceivable formal similarities and their suggested communicative-functional analogy, appears susceptible to a cognitive motivation, deriving from fundamental principles such as iconicity and attention.

Contrary to pertinent claims in the literature, no one-to-one cross-medial correspondence is identifiable, casting doubt on the generally presupposed homology of speech and writing (see Nunberg 1990): Different in their concrete medial effects, the second voice is enhanced through its unequivocal demarcation in print, resulting in an increase in salience, while speakers typically attenuate or even suppress its differential status in discourse through their non-distinct styles of delivery (see Kasimir 2008).

Yet a definite trend toward an essential analogy across the language modalities is clearly observable, suggesting a general re-analysis integrating parenthetical and quotative constructions. In support of my argument, I will present an initial case study, adopting a multimodal approach that probes into their verbal, vocal, and gestural features: Comparing the two constructions as instantiated in a manuscript of an eminent public speech to their actual oral performances as epiphenomena of writing, they are seen to analogously functionalize their representational formats -- unambiguous and discrete demarcation in print vis-à-vis elusive and gradient indication in speech. Such cross-modal commonalities would not only corroborate their functional similarity but testify to a still further-reaching more basic analogy suggestive of fundamental, shared underlying principles: External to language itself, the options and constraints of the production and reception circumstances as well as of cognition, with attention as its major determinant (see Talmy 2007a,b, forthcoming), ultimately shape their concrete medial profiles in the face of the essentially linear mediums of language for conveying two voices at a time.

Selected References

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