

Speech Act Theory in Visual Narratives: An Analysis of Communication through Sequential Art

Pallabi Chattopadhyay

PhD Research Fellow in Visual Linguistics, Department of Languages and Mass Communication, Kathmandu University, School of Arts

ARTICLE INFO

Corresponding Author

Pallabi Chattopadhyay

Email

chattopadhyay.pallabi@gmail.com

Article History

Received: 06 March 2024

Revised: 12 May 2024

Accepted: 20 June 2024

Orcid

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5771-6941>

Cite

Chattopadhyay, P. (2024). Speech act theory in visual narratives: An analysis of communication through sequential art. *Gipan*, 6(1), 119–133. <https://doi.org/10.3126/gipan.v6i1.68143>

ABSTRACT

An increasing curiosity in communication through visual narratives has been observed in recent years in multidisciplinary research. This paper focuses on how speech act theory plays a role in visual linguistics through the analysis of a few selected visual narratives. With the help of a content analysis methodology, this paper focuses on qualitative research by analysing the data through the speech act theory present in the visual narratives. It demonstrates its intent through a few carefully chosen visual narratives, 'Hada Bhoda' and 'Doraemon' from two different cultures, Bengali and Japanese respectively. The study indicates how picture stories serve as a type of speaking act, transmitting meaning in the conversations present in the visual narratives and also prompting responses from viewers. It is possible to have a greater knowledge of the communication dynamics, intentionality, and impacts of language and speech within the visual narratives by analysing locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in the picture stories.

Keywords: Visual Narratives, comics, manga, speech act theory, linguistics

Introduction

An increasing curiosity in communication through visual narratives has been observed in recent years in multidisciplinary research. This paper focuses on how speech act theory plays a crucial role in visual linguistics through the analysis of a few selected visual narratives. The study contributes to the field of Linguistics by its exclusive and pioneering approach to language education. It can contribute in several ways by improving multimodal communication skills, or by promoting cultural competence by exploring different cultural norms and practices present in the culture-specific cues in visual narratives. It also appeals to a diverse

range of learning styles while also fostering deeper knowledge of the lexicon of grammatical ideas.

Art is an expression used by human imaginations and creative abilities; it demands visual perceptions, thereby a unique comprehension takes place in each individual human brain. According to Locke (1689), the only things we perceive immediately are ideas. Locke's understanding of knowledge of the external world within its broader epistemology and theoretical philosophy requires probing beyond his epistemology and the depths of its accounts of perception, representation, and contents of thoughts. Therefore, it seems that the real difference between humans and other animals is the collective level. We rule the world because we can cooperate flexibly in



large numbers, unlike other animals. This is again because human beings are the only organisms that live in a state of dual reality- a reality of ideas and conceptions along with objective reality like other animals (Harari, 2015). Human beings possess this dual reality because of the cognitive revolution (c. 70,000 BCE, when Sapiens evolved imagination). As a result of this, humans can form stories or ideas with the help of the social contexts present around them, and eventually they give birth to creation. Art is a medium that has been our companion since time immemorial and it plays a vital role in human lives; it is also a way of expressing human feelings. From the time of cave paintings and rock paintings in the Paleolithic Age to the present time where it has taken a commercial turn, art has always helped express emotions in different ways. Many civilizations, including Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, Persia, Ancient Greece, Rome, Maya, and Olmec, had their own distinct artistic styles that served as the foundation for their growth through a combination of cultural, social, political, and religious influences (Adhikari, 2022). Some of these styles were even transmitted to other cultures over time. Therefore, probably the most important aspect of art is that it preserves human cultures around the world. Ancient monuments, designing patterns and even scripts add on to such preservations. They help humans understand their past and help the new generation familiarise themselves with the roots of human civilization (Adhikari, 2022).

Gradually with time, art expression has evolved into many forms. From concrete and realistic artworks, human beings have evolved to abstract and surrealistic forms of art. One such surrealistic form that is quite in vogue these days is cartoon drawings. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, cartoons were first designated as designs, drawings or paintings made by an artist as a model for the finished work. So, probably, like Coca-Cola, which was invented by a pharmacist as a nerve tonic and headache remedy but came out to be a popular fizzy drink of all times, cartoons too became the word for the drawing itself derived from the word initially signifying the material based on

which a drawing is made. With the advent of the creative renaissance, the bimodal form of visuality, which includes both cartoons and texts, began to grow; comics and other visual narratives are probably the most modern forms of visual arts that generally have a sequential (sometimes situational) way of conveying messages; the history of visual narratives has taken many paths in different parts of the world. Instances of such early sequential art forms can be found in Egyptian hieroglyphs, Greek friezes, and Rome's Trajan's Column (110 AD) (Trajan's Column, 2018). Certain Biblical sequential art forms were also discovered through some Christian manuscripts (Lyttle, 2015).

Again, manga and manhua are based on Chinese characters. The first manhua dates back to 900 years ago in the Northern Song Dynasty of China. The story portrays a bird named Manhua that catches fish with its beak sticking in the water. This influence has blended traditional Chinese brush paints and American, Japanese and Korean comics (Yan, 2019). Similar sequential ways of art were also found to be popular in West Bengal, India as Patua paintings through the origin of the Patua tradition in the 18th century CE though some claim that the oral form goes back to the 10th or 11th century CE. The stories were often sung by performers along with the display of the sequential paintings, rendering it a film-like look of old times (Ahire, 2020). These Patua artists are found in very small numbers nowadays; they are almost disappearing. The artists narrate stories from epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Puranas, religious texts such as the Mangal Kavyas, Behula and Lakhinder, renunciation of Chaitanya, Krishna Leela and many more (Ahire, 2020). The very first manga in Japan appeared in the 12th and 13th centuries, in a series of drawings featuring frogs and rabbits titled Choju-giga i.e., scrolls of frolicking animals or Emaki scroll paintings (Widewalls Editorial, 2016). This early type of visual storytelling established the basis for Japan's rich narrative art legacy. Similarly, in the 17th and 18th centuries, caricaturing and satirising political and social issues through art began to develop, mirroring a long-standing tradition in Britain

dating back to the political and social shifts of the Enlightenment; prints contained several images presenting multiple scenes of a narrative (Bury & Mellon, 2022). Later, in the twentieth century, newspapers across different cultures initiated a trend of satirical drawings through cartoons and written languages (Leon, 2017): 'Truly, there seems to be an intuitive link between comics and language in the minds of the creators- a belief shared by several researchers of language who, with growing frequency, are discussing properties of comics in a linguistic light' (Cohn, 2012). It seems that comics and other visual narratives do what exactly any other language would do- convey messages. But these visual narratives convey messages in a way impossible for our physical states (in a more exaggerated manner); something that belongs to the imaginations of our minds: if someone is angry, probably their head would be on fire and similarly if someone were in love, their eyes would reveal it by presenting them in the form of hearts. So, in this way, the visualities of comics and other visual narratives turn out to be more prominent with a hyperbolic atmosphere, and probably that is why these are also full of 'superheroes' portraying the fantasy world to us. It expresses our thoughts in the crudest forms possible. It is more illustrious as it comes with written languages, offering it a bimodal outlook that gives a sequential sense in our cognitions and helps us perceive it through the structure and grammar that is embedded within and gradually reveals the narrative.

We experience stories told in our brains just through visualisation. A connection can be drawn between graphic storytelling and sequential story visualisation, reinforcing Chomsky's (1968) concept of the 'innate ability' for sequential visualisation. McCloud (1993) in his 'Understanding Comics' states that visual narratives are a part of our historical tradition that gives an in-depth look at the overall formal aspect of comics. He further discusses that the fundamental vocabularies and theoretical ideas constitute comics as a form of art and a medium to convey ideas and thoughts. He also talks about comics as an ancient way of conveying messages, which now has a very modern outlook

in the present time. Eisner (1917) was among the first to regard comics as a serious art form. He talks about crafting the basics of comics and how to construct a visual narrative that can eventually lead to the field of Linguistics- no wonder why the most prestigious awards in the field of visual narratives are named after him!

In this research paper, I looked into how communication works through the visual narratives of different structures, grammars, functions and social contexts with the help of the speech act theory in two different cultures. To illustrate my point, I have taken a few examples from 'Hada Bhoda' (Bengali comics) and 'Doraemon' (Japanese manga) for the cross-cultural notions of visual narratives and how it could be a universally applicable mode. By analysing individually, the speech acts of the two already mentioned models of visual narratives, I have shown how the different communicative visual methods use similar communicative features. With these examples, I want to show how visual narratives could be a universally applicable mode of communication despite their cultural bounds.

Speech Act in Visual Narratives

Speech act theory is arguably the most popular among general theories of language usage (Levinson, 1983). Psychologists suggest that the acquisition of the concepts underlying speech acts may be a prerequisite for the acquisition of language in general (Bruner, 1975 and Bates, 1976). Literary critics have turned to speech act theory for illumination of textual subtleties or an understanding of the nature of literary genres (Ohmann, 1971 & Levin, 1976). In this theory, anthropologists found some account of the nature of magical spells and rituals in general (Tambiah, 1968) whereas the philosophers have seen potential application to the status of ethical statements (Searle, 1969). Linguists, on the other hand, see the notions of speech act theory as variously applicable to the problems in syntax, semantics, second language learning and elsewhere (Levinson, 1983). In linguistic pragmatics, speech acts remain along with prepositions and implicature, in particular,

one of the central phenomena that any general pragmatic theory should account for.

There is a vast literature on the subject and in this study, all the relevant works cannot be reviewed. However, what is attempted here is a brief sketch of the philosophical origin of the speech act theory and a few related to visual narratives. Speech act theory is a subfield of pragmatics that studies how words are used, not only for presenting information but also for carrying out actions. J. L. Austin, an Oxford philosopher, first proposed this speech act theory in 1959, and J. R. Searle, an American philosopher, expanded on it in 1969. In the early 1930s, the new theory of logical positivism rose to prominence (Levinson, 1983). According to logical positivism, a sentence can be verified (tested) for truth or falsity; truth and falsity have long been key topics of study. Later, Wittgenstein (1921) vigorously attacked in his "Philosophical Investigations" with the famous slogan 'meaning in use' and emphasised that utterances are only explicable about the activities or language games in which they participate. During this particular period, Austin (1959) proposed his theory of speech acts. Wittgenstein's emphasis on language usage is strikingly similar to Austin's assertion that 'the total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating' (1962). Austin expanded on Wittgenstein's discoveries by emphasising on the performative aspect of language. He stated that many utterances serve a performative role, meaning that they not only describe or report on something, but also perform an action or achieve a goal. For example:

- i) I sentence you to ten years of hard labour.
- ii) I give my word.

These sentences are not just statements of intention but also commitments to perform (Levinson, 1983).

Searle (1969) built on Austin's work and developed a systematic theory on speech acts. He argued that utterances consist of three dimensions of meaning: the propositional content, the illocutionary force (speaker's intended meaning or function) and the perlocutionary effect (actual effect on the listener).

He also introduced the concept of speech act types such as requests, commands, promises and apologies which are universal across languages and cultures. In general, the philosophical background of speech act theory could be seen as a shift away from traditional views of language as a static system of meanings towards a more dynamic and contextual understanding of language (Levinson, 1983).

People are familiar with speech acts when studying pragmatics. Human beings often express their ideas through utterances. There are various types of utterances, including directive utterances (Anwar, 2012). Directive utterances are speech acts used by speakers to persuade one or two others to do something. There are several types of directive utterances, including commanding, ordering, requesting, proposing, and banning. In general, directive utterances can be found in everyday speech or in literary works such as novels, short stories, films, and comic books (Anwar 2012).

Speech acts in comic books or other visual narratives include various linguistic and visual features used to convey information, express emotions, and proceed the story along. Comics contain both textual and visual narration, which enables for multiple types of narration to occur inside a single comic panel (Tang, 2016). Textual and visual narration kinds collaborate to tell a story in comics. An outward narrative point of view in images is often combined with an inside story. This gives us a clear invisible camera view of a scenario. A visual external view of a character's actions can be paired with a textual internal insight into the character's mind to provide both external and internal narrative perspectives in tandem (Tang, 2016).

Though McCloud claims that comics are composed of 'images in deliberate sequence', his ensuing explanation and examples reveal that he sees narrative as the primary sequential organising element (Pratt, 2009). Characters cannot see speech balloons, but they can hear the words inside, and each character is likely aware of the contents of his or her own thought balloons. When there are

sound effects, characters can hear them, although the sounds heard within the diegesis may not be identical to the sounds represented in words (Pratt, 2009).

Speech acts in visual narratives can be conveyed not only verbally and contextually but also culturally along with visual cues. Characters use facial expressions, gestures, and body language to indicate their intents, feelings, and attitudes, essentially conducting speech acts with the bimodal usage of texts and images. The arrangements of visual elements within the narrative context affect the comprehension of speaking acts, as viewers derive meaning from image sequences, scene framings and cultural contexts.

Methodology

To accomplish the goal of this study, a content analysis methodology was used. According to Neuendorf (2017), content analysis is defined as the objective and systematic quantitative analysis of the characteristics of a message. Krippendorff (2004) rightly pointed out that ‘all reading of text is qualitative even when certain characteristics are later converted into numbers’ (p. 16). Fraenkel & Wallen (2006) defined content analysis as a method used by researchers to examine human behaviour indirectly by analysing their communications.

The primary goal of content analysis is to study social behaviours and experiences without influencing them. This could be accomplished by examining any form of visual or written human communication, such as items appearing in television commercials, novels, newspapers, magazines, television, speeches and many others (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). My study employed a qualitative content analysis. The qualitative factor allowed me to analyse the voices of the readers of the two selected visual narratives through the artist's or the writer's perceptions; I have analysed it with the help of the speech act theory.

Objective

This paper demonstrates through a few carefully chosen visual narratives, ‘Hada Bhoda’ and

‘Doraemon’ from two different cultures, Bengali and Japanese respectively. With the help of the speech act theory which is discussed in Section 2, this study determines the communicative intent of the visual narratives through the texts and images. This paper indicates how picture stories serve as a type of speaking act, transmitting meaning in the conversations present in the visual narratives and also prompting responses from viewers.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, I have used a few selected visual narratives for my dataset from the two visual narratives, ‘Hada Bhoda’ and ‘Doraemon’, respectively, as my stimuli. The study adopted a qualitative research technique, emphasising the understanding of the underlying meanings, interpretations and cultural nuances of the data over numerical analysis or statistical measurements. In this study, I used content analysis methodology for analysing the selected visual narratives, with a particular emphasis on the speech act theory seen in the bimodal form of visual narratives, which integrate text and visuals. To sum up, the study used a qualitative content analysis methodology, applying McCloud's (1993) framework to the various types of transitions to understand how speech act theory is portrayed and understood across narrative sequences using visual storytelling techniques within the selected visual narratives.

Findings

The first nine pages of Scott McCloud's (1993) “Understanding Comics” are devoted to the definition of comics as a medium. He developed the very definition by putting visual narratives as sequential art- a collection of still images placed sequentially to construct a story or to convey emotions. A typical visual narrative page will consist of multiple panels arranged in a grid-like structure. They can vary in size and be according to the artist's choice; this whole narrative structure helps in establishing a narrative flow and a rhythm of the whole picture story. The bimodal form of visual narratives i.e., the visual and verbal methods used to create visual narratives like comics and

manga form the grammar of picture stories. Panels, gutters, speech bubbles, captions and other visuals are used together to portray a tale or narrative. Panels are discrete frames, generally square or rectangular; gutters are the gaps between panels; speech bubbles convey character conversations; and captions or text boxes provide additional texts to narrate or describe the scene in a visual narrative.

McCloud (1993) describes the lexicon of comic books as consisting of words, images and icons. He views the 'icon' as the most essential component of the comics lexicon. McCloud (1993) again uses the expertise of semiotics which has long examined signs and what they mean to lay the foundation for the language of comics. If we compare it to Linguistics, we can observe from the study of language in speech act theory that visual narratives also have their building blocks which go beyond merely words and visuals alone; these are the basic building blocks in language. The way words are related to one another in phrases and sentences is basically how written and spoken language conveys meaning; therefore, forming the conception of syntax and semantics. McCloud (1993) categorizes the changes between panels as part of the grammar of visual narratives. These changes help the readers to shift semantically from one panel to another, thereby forming the narrative comprehensively.

'Hada Bhoda' or often known as 'Handa Bhonda' (Bengali:হাদা-ভোদা) is a Bengali comic strip, later compiled into a comic book. This comic book originated in West Bengal, India and was created by Narayan Debnath. The comics was originally serialized in the monthly children's magazine, 'Shuktara'. It was also made into a television series that aired for a brief time. Narayan Debnath was himself very fascinated with visual arts; coming from a family of gold retailers, art was always a part of his life in the form of designing patterns for gold jewelry (Shome-Ray, 2013). He entered the world of comics in 1962 with 'Hada Bhoda', a time when Bengali culture was still not in the world of visual narratives (Shome-Ray, 2013). Hada and Bhoda are two young boys in the comic series who reside with their fraternal aunt and

uncle. Hada happens to be more mischievous and causes problems for others, particularly his brother, Bhoda. In most series, Hada is found to be punished for his misbehaviours.

On the other hand, 'Doraemon' (Japanese: ドラえもん) is a Japanese manga series created by Fujiko. F. Fujio. It was serialized first in 1969. Similarly to Narayan Debnath, Fujio is also considered to be one of the greatest manga artists in Japanese history. This beloved manga character, Doraemon was created shortly after the Second World War in Japan (IGN staff, 2012). It later became even more popular in different parts of Asia with the rise of television anime series. Doraemon is a raccoon dog-looking cat robot from the future who can talk with humans and possesses the magical ability to pull anything fictional or nonfictional from a pouch in his belly called the miracle pocket (IGN staff, 2012). Doraemon is also considered as the first anime cultural ambassador in Japan (McCurry, 2008). This robot cat came from the future to help a boy named Nobita. Doraemon uses different gadgets to solve problems for Nobita and sometimes his friends (Shizuka, Suneo, Gian and others) who all are equally mischievous like Hada, Bhoda and their friends.

Having been created as comics and manga, respectively, 'Hada Bhoda' and 'Doraemon' are both products of the 20th century. These two visual narratives have brought out the two societies in front of us through their visual cultures. Also, coming from a Bengali family myself, I could relate to many instances present in 'Hada Bhoda'. I could, as a result, analyse well and bring out the cross-cultural notions through the two visual narratives of 'Hada Bhoda' and 'Doraemon'.

As mentioned earlier, McCloud (1993) classifies the transitions between panels as the grammar of comics. I have examined each of McCloud's six transitions with the help of the two visual narratives, 'Hada Bhoda' and 'Doraemon':

- (i) **Moment-to-Moment:** In this transition, very little variation exists between the two panels. It consists of one single action which is portrayed in a series of moments (Fig. 1).

The transition that occurs is the smallest here with barely any time passing between panels; as if time were moving slowly. It is provided typically to employ in-depth attention to a definite narration or

topic or to a specific area of that topic. A transition from one moment to the next could, for instance, concentrate on a face or a hand and then project a slight change in expression or gesture.

Figure 1

A Moment-to-Moment Transition from Fujiko F. Fujio's Doraemon Volume 1 (1974, p. 52)



When we look into speech act theory, 'moment-to-moment' refers to the continuous shift of communicative acts and conversations between the speakers present in the visual narrative. Each moment involves in the execution of speech acts such as affirmations, requests, or promises, which eventually shape the process of meaning and comprehension.

Here, in Figure 1., 'I'll use a pencil.' is an assertion according to the speech act theory. This is because it provides a statement of intent or declares what the speaker wants to accomplish. The speaker, here, expresses his plan to utilise a regular pencil rather than using the magical pencil that Doraemon has given him.

In the same picture, 'I won't use it!' is not a statement; it is a negation or denial. According to

speech act theory, it is classified as a performative utterance, especially a refusal or a declaration of the purpose not to use the magical pencil given by Doraemon.

(ii) Action-to-Action: In this transition, a single subject's action or series of actions is displayed (Fig. 2).

This is usually the most common panel-to-panel change that occurs in visual narratives. Even though there is just one subject in the centre of attention, time moves faster while the reader follows that subject as they go through a series of events. While the scene may shift a little, it will be one scene or location where the same subject performs many different acts or gestures.

Figure 2

An Action-to-Action Transition from Narayan Debnath's Hada Bhoda Samagra (1962, p. 318)



In Figure 2., Bhoda has been given some work to do but a fly keeps on disturbing him in different panels, depicting different scenes. According to speech act theory, 'action-to-action' is a sequential narrative approach in which the reader is allowed to follow a single subject through a sequence of consecutive acts or gestures. Even though the scene changes, the attention remains on the same subject who performs certain acts or gestures in the same scene, adding proper consistency and coherence to the narrative.

The scenes are full of exclamatory expressions of surprise and astonishment like, 'What a nasty fly! Goodness!' In speech act theory these utterances by

Bhoda can be classified as expressive utterances, conveying the speaker's emotional reaction rather than a statement or declaration about a fact or intention.

(iii) Subject-to-Subject: It is a transition between various subjects in the same scene; it is a series of different changing subjects within a single scene (Fig. 3).

The scene itself does not change while the reader experiences several subjects that make it up. It is a useful transition to show people in a conversation with their reactions to what is being said or even to lay the ground for a definite setting.

Figure 3

A Subject-to-Subject Transition from Fujiko F. Fujio's Doraemon Volume 1 (1974, p. 83)



In the case of speech act theory, 'subject-to-subject' refers to the dynamic conversation of several speakers or subjects within a communicative context or scene. In scenes with multiple speakers, there are often complex exchanges of speech acts. These are generally actions accomplished by speeches, such as making a request, delivering an order, asking a question, or making a declaration.

Similarly, here in Figure 3., we notice multiple speakers with complex exchanges of speech acts: firstly, when Nobita says, 'I, I don't have skis.' it is a straightforward statement of fact or belief and therefore, it is considered an assertion in speech act theory.

Again, in this picture, we notice a directive in Shizuka's speech. Directives in speech act theory come in different forms such as requests, commands, suggestions or recommendations. These generally aim to influence the listener's behaviour. So, 'You should ask your parents.' is a directive that encourages the listener to perform a specific action.

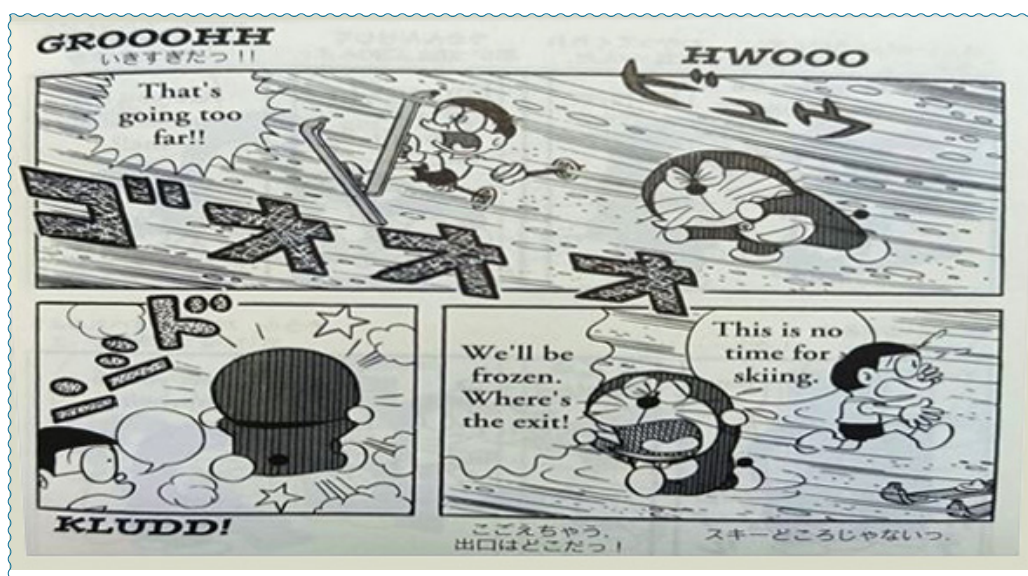
Suneo's comment, 'Haha, I see!' is an expressive speech act because it expresses the speaker's reaction rather than making a claim or statement about what is going on.

Lastly, Gian's speech, 'You can't ski, so you don't need them.' is an assertion. The speaker is presenting his view that because the listener cannot ski, i.e. they do not require skis.

- (iv) Scene-to-Scene: It is the transition that takes us or transports us across significant distances of time and space (Fig. 4).

Figure 4

A Scene-to-Scene Transition from Fujiko F. Fujio's Doraemon Volume 1 (1974, p. 92)



In speech act theory's context, 'scene-to-scene' refers to the transitions or changes between distinct communication circumstances or settings-transitions or changes. It indicates that the readers can infer or presume that certain activities or exchanges occurred in certain scenes, even if they are not explicitly represented or written.

Here, in Figure 4., the speaker is making a declarative statement by stating, 'That's going too far!'. This is a statement all about the circumstance, giving their opinion of whether the conduct is proper or acceptable. It is a declaration of opinion as opposed to a request, command or query.

Doraemon's speech, in the same picture, 'We'll be frozen. Where's the exit!' is a statement that

This transition is not very common; it is useful in advancing the visual narrative without spending a lot of time on a specific narration or its details. The reader is allowed to assume that a certain event has occurred between that time span that passes between a few panels. Nevertheless, there is a logical relationship established by the preceding panels.

combines an assertion and a question together within the context of speech act theory.

Again, Nobita's comment, 'This is no time for skiing.' can be considered an assertion. It is a statement of belief or evaluation about the timing, contextually.

- (v) Aspect-to-Aspect: It bypasses time by transitioning from one aspect of a place, idea or mood to another (Fig. 5).

This is a non-temporal transition that can be employed in dream or fantasy sequences or telephonic conversations as it depicts a single scene or subject in many ways.

Figure 5

An Aspect-to-Aspect Transition from Narayan Debnath's Hada Bhoda Samagra (1962, p. 225)



In speech act theory, ‘aspect-to-aspect’ refers to the analysis or portrayal of a particular situation from multiple perspectives or dimensions during a discourse. This is a common notion, used to deepen the reader’s understanding of a specific scenario by investigating several features. In the context of a telephonic conversation, it entails evaluating the discourse from multiple angles, such as perspectives, tones, emotions, non-verbal cues, etc.

Here, in Figure 5., the speeches are mainly assertions of two different dimensions at the

same time: Hada and Bhoda having a telephonic conversation with their uncle.

(vi) **Non-sequitur:** This transition provides no logical relationship between panels (Fig. 6).

Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that although there does not seem to be a connection between the panels right at the moment, it might develop as the storyline or narration proceeds further.

Figure 6

A Non-Sequitur Transition from Narayan Debnath's Hada Bhoda Samagra (1962, p. 488)



In the context of speech act theory, ‘non-sequitur’ refers to a statement or utterance that does not

follow any logic or a coherent progression from the preceding context or conversation.

The statement uttered by Hada to the pet dog, here, in Figure 6., ‘Such a great hattrick, Bhonta! First, you ate chicken, then cake, and now such a big piece of meat to have it roasted!’ can have multiple speech acts being performed. We can break it down into assertion, praise and expressive statements, respectively.

This panel is followed by a totally different panel with little or no logic to the previous panel. Here Hada is seen getting roasted instead of the big piece of meat and he is screaming, ‘Oh no! I’m dead.’ Which is again an expressive statement. However, the narrative becomes coherent as the panels flow in semantic order.

Figure 7

A Functional Aspect of Visual Narratives from Fujiko F. Fujio’s Doraemon Volume 1 (1974, p. 111)



In Figure 7., the functional aspect of visual narrative can be seen. The functional aspects here acknowledge that communication occurs through multiple modes including texts, images and other semiotic resources. The bimodality here, or rather the multimodality is very crucial as it combines visual and textual elements to convey meaning. The ideophones used here along with the facial expressions uncover the vertical sequential layer of meaning in which different semiotic resources contribute to the narrative.

In speech act theory, onomatopoeic words or ideophones, which are not explicitly classified as speech acts, can play an important role in communication by replicating sounds associated with specific actions, objects or phenomena. Although they do not transmit propositional information in the same way that assertions or questions do, yet, they add to the overall expressive complexity of language and its perlocution.

The ideophones, here in the same picture, such

as, ‘Poik’ and ‘Rubba Rubba’ similarly add to the expressive complexity of language. Even though certain panels do not have speeches, yet speech act plays a role through the sounds associated with the subjects and the objects. These onomatopoeic words also bring up the culture-specific influences on how sounds are perceived leading to variations in the vocabularies of different linguistic communities. Certainly, words like, ‘Poik’ and ‘Rubba Rubba’ are more explicitly understandable in Japanese than in any other language.

Visual narratives can reflect the cultural and historical backgrounds in which they are produced. As a reflection on society, they can offer insights into social, political and cultural issues of a particular period and place. Visual storytelling frequently alludes to ideas from other pieces of visual art, writing or popular culture, which makes it very culture-specific; especially if the reader is familiar with the content, they can intensify the reading experience through the allusions, homages or parodies.

Figure 8

A Contextual Aspect of Visual Narrative from Narayan Deb Nath's *Hada Bhoda Samagra* (1962, p. 256)



In Figure 8., the contextual aspect of visual narratives could be seen to reflect cultural and historical backgrounds. Ghosts play a significant and fundamental role in folklore, especially in the geographical and ethnolinguistic region of Bengal, which currently includes Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal (Day, 1883). Like humans, ghosts too have culinary likes, dislikes and idiosyncrasies in Bengal (Chatterjee, 2022). In this figure, we see culture-specific dishes mentioned like 'patishapta', which is a sweet delicacy in Bengal. Similarly, we also see that the ghost is cooking fish offering it to the two kids (here, Hada and Bhoda) along with ripe mangoes; these are very contextual and culture-specific. Anybody who can grasp the content will understand the visual narrative correctly.

In the case of speech act theory, cultural folklore can influence the usage and comprehension of speech

actions in communication. Folklores refer to the collection of traditional beliefs, stories, customs, and behaviours that have been passed down through a culture. These elements can influence how people use language, express themselves, and perceive their surroundings. Folklores typically include narrative traditions, which influence how people build and interpret messages. Cultural narratives, myths, and legends serve as frameworks for understanding the world around us that can shape the structure and content of conversations. These narrative patterns may influence how speech acts are framed and interpreted in a given cultural setting.

Discussion

The examples presented in this paper through the visual narratives of 'Hada Bhoda' and 'Doraemon' are evidence in support of Austin's Speech Act Theory (1959). It is possible to have a greater

knowledge of the communication dynamics, intentionality and impacts of language and speech within the visual narratives by analysing locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in picture stories. It reveals character motivations, underlying meanings and the overall effect of speech act on the reader and the whole narrative.

Locutionary acts in visual narratives can be seen as literal portrayals of the speech or the text that appears in the panels or the story that we create in our minds through visuals. It involves the linguistic components of the speaking act such as the characters' choice of words, sentences and phrases. In visual narratives, locutionary behaviour is often found in speech bubbles, captions or text boxes.

The uses of words along with facial expressions and gestures conveying intents, attitudes, demands, promises, suggestions and other communicative functions can be seen in visual narratives as illocutionary acts; facial expressions, body language and other visual components help to convey meaning.

Perlocutionary acts in visual narratives can be seen through the responding characters in conversation or readers' reactions on some emotional, cognitive or behavioural level. The readers' interpretations and comprehensions of the speech act and how it affects their perception, involvement or reaction to the narrative are all in support of the perlocutionary act in visual narratives.

Visual storytelling frequently uses symbols, metaphors, and visual motifs to express thematic messages, emotional subtext, or abstract ideas. These visual elements may appear repeatedly throughout the story, establishing links between distinct story parts and strengthening readers' comprehension.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to show that Austin's Speech Act Theory (1959) plays a crucial role when it comes to visual narratives; it allowed a more holistic understanding of the language and meaning-making processes of visual narratives

under the light of linguistics. The viewer's subjective experience with the narrative is influenced by the visual perspectives and framing techniques used in the narratives. Visual tales can elicit empathy, suspense, surprise, or other emotional responses from the viewer by switching between multiple points of view. Similarly, techniques like visual metaphors, visual puns, visual symbols, and visual motifs heighten the narrative's impact and engage readers' imaginations. These technologies enrich the storytelling process by adding layers of significance and complexity, allowing readers to evaluate and analyse the story on several multiple levels.

By analysing the two visual narratives, 'Hada Bhoda' and 'Doraemon' of two different cultures (West Bengal and Japan), I have come to the conclusion that the character of visual linguistics is profoundly universal regardless of specific cultural or linguistic contexts. Visual narratives can vary greatly in terms of content, style, and cultural references, nevertheless, speech act theory provides a framework for investigating the communicative intentions and effects buried within them. While my data is limited for this paper, more research could be done to provide more validated insights. More such researches are anticipated to continue refreshing the discussion on visual narratives from a linguistic point of view.

References

- Adhikari, S. (2022). *The 10 oldest ancient civilizations that have ever existed*. Ancient History Lists. <https://www.ancienthistorylists.com/ancient-civilizations/10-oldest-ancient-civilizations-ever-existed/>
- Ahire, D. (2020). *Endless scroll – The genesis of Bengal's Pattachitra art*. The Sarmaya Guide to Bengal Pattachitra. <https://sarmaya.in/guides/endless-scroll-the-genesis-of-bengals-pattachitra-art/>
- Anwar, S. (2012). *A pragmatic analysis on directive utterances used in Donald Duck comics manuscript*. Unpublished Research Paper. Surakarta: Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

- Austin, J. L. (1959). *How to do things with words*. The William James Lectures: Harvard University.
- Bates, E. (1976). *Language and context: The acquisition of pragmatics*. Academic Press.
- Bruner, J. (1975). The ontogenesis of speech acts. *Journal of child language* 20(1), 1–19. <https://sites.google.com/mtroyal.ca/wordsandpictures/references>
- Bury, S. J. & Mellon, A. W. (2022). *British visual satire, 18th-20th centuries*. <https://sites.google.com/mtroyal.ca/wordsandpictures/references>
- Chatterjee, P. (2022). *What do ghosts in Bengal eat?* Scroll.in.
- Chomsky, N. (1968). *Language and mind*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Cohn, N. (2012). *Comics, linguistics, and visual language: The past and future of a field* (pp. 92-118). *Linguistics and the Study of Comics*.
- Day, L. B. (1883). *Folktales of Bengal*. London. Macmillan & Co.
- Debnath, N. (1962). *Hada Bhoda*. Sera Handa Bhonda Samagra.
- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2006). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Fujio, F. F. (1969). *Doraemon*. Shogakukan English Comics.
- Harari, Y. N. (2015). *Sapiens*. Harper: New York, NY.
- IGN. (2012). *Doraemon creator dies*. IGN. <https://www.ign.com/articles/1996/10/02/doraemon-creator-dies>
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to Its methodology*. Sage.
- Leon, L. (2017). The evolution of political cartooning in the new media age: Cases from Australia, the USA and the UK. In: Milner Davis, J. (eds) *Satire and politics*. Palgrave Studies in Comedy. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56774-7_6
- Levin, S. R. (1976). Concerning what kind of speech a poem is. In Van Dijk (ed.), *Pragmatics of language and literature*. John Benjamins. Amsterdam–Philadelphia, 141-160.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics: Cambridge, UK.
- Locke, J. (1689). An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. In Ott, W. (Ed.), *Modern philosophy*. BCcampus Open Publishing. <https://opentextbc.ca/modernphilosophy/chapter/john-lockes-1632-1704-essay-concerning-human-understanding-1689/>
- Lyttle, Z (2015). *Sequential art in the seventeenth century: an analysis of Wenceslaus Hollar's etchings of genesis* 12-14 (pp. 87-88). MTh(R) thesis. University of Glasgow. <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/5980/>
- McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. Kitchen Sink Press: New York, NY.
- McCurry, J. (2008). *Japan enlists cartoon cat as ambassador*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/20/japan>
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The content analysis guidebook*. Sage: Cleveland State University, USA.
- Ohmann, R. (1971). Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature. *Philosophy & rhetoric*, 4(1) 1-19.
- Pratt, H. J. (2009). Narrative in Comics. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 67(1), 107-117.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shome-Ray, A. (2013). 'Handa Bhonda' creator Narayan Debnath gets Sahitya Akademi Award: A look at the life and works of the comics writer. Lifestyle. <https://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/report-handa-bhonda-creator-narayan-debnath-gets-sahitya-akademi-award-a-look-at-the-life-and-works-of-the-comics-writer-1884322>
- Tambiah, S. J. (1968). *The magical power of words*. Man (pp. 175-208).

Tang, A. (2016). *Narration and speech and thought presentation in comics* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Huddersfield).

Visual Arts Cork. (2018). *Trajan's column*. Visual arts cork. <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/antiquity/trajans-column.htm>

Widewalls Magazine (2016). *Japanese manga: An overview of its history*. Widewalls. <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/japanese-manga-comics-history>

Yan, J. (2019). *A Peek into Chinese comics (Manhua)*. MR Comics. <https://medium.com/mrcomics/a-peek-into-chinese-comics-manhua-efa6a6d911b9>



