More Than Just a Laugh: The Multilevel Viewpoint Structures of Reaction Memes

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Abstract

In an era where memes dominate digital communication, their significance extends far beyond humor—they serve as complex, multimodal expressions of culture, discourse, and collective identity. Yet, despite their ubiquity, the ways in which they communicate meaning are not well understood. One of the reasons is that memes require interpretation and can be understood differently by different viewers, making their meaning inherently fluid and participatory. Departing from traditional semiotic perspectives, this paper applies a construction grammar approach to in which memes are understood as emerging multimodal constructions and meaning is structured within a multi – level discourse viewpoint space. This study explores the multimodality of memes through an analysis of the multilevel viewpoint structure of reaction memes, with a specific focus on the integration of frame metonymy, meme characters, and intersubjectivity. This study confirms that memes function as multimodal constructions in which meaning is created through the interaction of text, images, and shared cultural knowledge within a discourse point of view space (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017). Analyzing reaction memes like 'This Is Fine' and 'Press X to Doubt' reveals varying degrees of intersubjectivity, with some memes relying on universally understood concepts (e.g., fire as danger) and others requiring niche framing knowledge (e.g., video game mechanics) to be fully interpreted.

Keywords: Multimodal constructions, Discourse viewpoint space, Frame metonymy, Intersubjectivity, Reaction memes

1. Introduction

Memes may predate the internet but have now reached a new position in public consciousness and as 'conduits for cultural conversations' (NY Times, 2022). For the first time this year, for example, a so-called 'meme correspondent' was hired by Instagram to cover a high-profile event, the Met Gala (NY Times, 2022). This demonstrates the

relationship between pop culture and meme creation and highlights the outstanding roles memes play in today's cultural discourse. The success of memes is attributed to various factors, including their shareability, their ability to capture and comment on people's realities, and their role in fostering a sense of community among users (NY Times, 2022). Memes can carry a variety of communication as they can be created for fun, to connect with friends, to joke or express opinions. Furthermore, they have increasingly been used to spread ideas and messages (Miltner, 2018).

A "funhouse mirror for culture and society" (Miltner, 2018, p. 413), one of their most integral elements is that they require interpretation on the part of the meme viewer, which may not always be straight forward. That is, meme viewers looking at the same meme artifacts may interpret them in different ways and thus arrive at different understandings (Jenkins et al., 2013). This paper is written to contribute to our understanding of how memes can be interpreted by applying Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2017) construction grammar-based analysis framework. Their analysis treats memes as multimodal form – meaning pairings within a broader network of related memes. Their main claim is that memes need to be understood within a so-called 'Discourse Viewpoint Space' in which meme makers and meme viewers arrive at a common understanding of the meme's meaning. They show how this can be applied to the analysis of image macro memes, and this paper will contribute to and expand their argument by applying their framework to a particular type of image macros, so-called 'response memes'.

2. Background

2.1 Internet Memes

Originally described as cultural artifacts, internet memes play a vital role in present-day online and Internet-based communication. The contemporary public domain contains vast collections of texts and images that are considered memes (Shifman, 2014). What sets internet memes apart from many other cultural artifacts is their participatory element (Moussa et al., 2020). It is through a process of appropriation, re-consumption, and adaptation that internet memes have become an essential part of online discourse. In that sense, some scholars argue for the idea of 'meme literacy' (Procházka, 2014), the ability to read and utilize memes, which Moussa et al. (2020) claim to be of greater importance than meme origins. Another element that sets them apart is their multimodality, specifically, the combination of text and images in a multitude of configurations (Milner, 2013). That is, their meaning is inferred from the combination of modes, the multiplicity of which makes memes a deeply heterogeneous phenomenon (Moussa et al., 2020). In many cases, said text is adapted and/or appropriated to create different versions of a meme, which is a crucial ingredient for memes' success formula (Shifman, 2014).

Miltner (2018) describes memes as ranging from flash mobs to videos, photos, and texts. There are many different types of memes, separated into particular sub – categories or genres. Each of these follows their own rules and adhere to their respective structures and stylistic features, having specific themes and intended audiences (Shifman, 2013a). As the same time

Shifman (2013a) has identified certain unifying features that are used in the creation of all types of memes:

- Content: ideas and ideologies expressed in the meme

- Form: format and genre-related patterns

- Stance: participants, tone, style, and type of communication

This paper focuses on a specific sub-category of photo-based memes are so-called 'image macros.' Image macros, at their core, consist of an image and some kind of superimposed text (KnowYourMeme, 2025a). Image macros are in fact older than the internet with the oldest known example dating back to 1905. Harry Whitter Frees picture of a cat in a highchair captioned "What's Delaying My Dinner?" is also considered a precursor to the so-called LOLCat memes (KnowYourMeme, n.d.). The term 'image macro' stems from a function of the comedic website *Something Awful*, on which the command [img – macro] allowed users to call up a variety of images. Since then, the term as well as actual image macro memes have spread across forums and image boards into wider online culture (KnowYourMeme, 2025a). According to KnowYourMeme.com, the most prominent examples of image macros are Demotivational Posters (images in black border and a white caption, usually depicting some type of motivational message), LOL Cats (photographs of cats with captions representing an imagined cat's monologue), Reaction Images, and Advice Animals (image macro series with archetype-like animals exploitable to achieve humorous effect). The type under investigation in this paper are so-called reaction images. Those are images (or gifs) used to portray a particular emotion in response to a previously made statement (KnowYourMeme, 2025a).

In trying to understand memes not only as a cultural phenomenon but also as a communicative tool, a central question relates to the means by which they communicate meaning to their intended audience. Different perspectives have been taken to try and bring light to the inner functions of internet memes. Internet and cultural studies consider memes to be media objects with specific characteristics and practices (Miltner, 2018). Shifman (2013b) further highlights the importance of human agency in creating as their adaptation and transformation is what creates the shared cultural experience underlying meme discourse. Taking a semiotic approach, memes are considered a system of signs (Cannizzaro, 2016), in particular, signs that communicate meaning in social discourse (Varis & Blommaert, 2015). With a similar focus on interaction, a pragmatic approach sees memes as speech acts with illocutionary force (Grundlingh, 2018). A further framework applied in the study of internet memes is Construction Grammar, as explored by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017). In line with their proposition of internet memes as multimodal constructions, I consider this the most promising framework to capture the complex ways in which form, and function of multimodal internet memes create and communicate meaning.

2.2 Construction Grammar

At its core, construction grammar is a theory of linguistic knowledge that centers on so-called "constructions" (Hilpert, 2019). While conventional theories emphasize individual items and their respective rules, construction grammar assumes all relevant details to be encoded within

the construction itself (Goldberg & Subtle, 2010). At this point, I would like to point out that there is no consensus definition of what exactly a construction is, as Hilpert (2019) explains. To remedy the lack of consensus in identifying constructions, Hilpert (2019) suggests four strategies:

1. Constructions deviate from canonical patterns

2. Constructions are utterances in which 'the whole' means more than the combination of its individual parts

3. Constructions have idiosyncratic constraints

4. Constructions have collocational preferences

There is broad agreement that constructions are best understood as form-function pairings, which are foundational to a speaker's linguistic repertoire. Construction grammar emphasizes that these pairings encompass a systematic collection of linguistic patterns, ranging from single words to complex idioms (Goldberg & Suttle, 2010). Goldberg (2006) further explains that constructions vary in complexity and abstraction, serving as the building blocks of language. To clarify this concept, Bergs (2010) provides a detailed view of form-function pairings, specifying that form encompasses surface-level features of language, such as syntax, morphology, and phonology, while function includes semantics, pragmatics, and discourse-functional properties. Expanding on this, Michaelis (2006) underscores the importance of discourse and cognitive-functional explanations in understanding how constructions convey meaning. In this framework, constructions can be thought of as containing slots that are filled by words, phrases, or even co- and contextual information (Goldberg & Suttle, 2010; Bergs, 2010). Bergs highlights that these slots are not limited to linguistic elements but can also be filled by information about the broader context in which the construction is used.

This flexibility in how constructions integrate both linguistic and contextual elements underscores their versatility. Construction grammarians examine a wide range of linguistic phenomena, with argument structure standing out as one of their primary focus areas (Goldberg, 2006; Hilpert, 2019; Michaelis, 2010). Basically, argument structure refers to the idea that constructions encode basic conceptual scenes within their meaning. Hilpert (2019) relates this to the idea of coercion, the proposal that syntactic environments determine interpretation of a verb, especially relevant to the second characteristic of constructions. That is, the interpretation of a construction requires more than understanding its individual parts but is dictated through context.

2.2.1 Internet Memes as Multimodal Constructions

Taking a constructional grammar perspective, Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) propose an understanding of internet memes as emerging multimodal constructions, a combination of image and text. As this deviates from the traditional understanding of multimodality as combining linguistic and kinesic/visual channels – such as gaze, gesture, facial expressions – they emphasize the potential of exploring "the other modality" (Dancygier, 2017) to advance

not only construction grammar but also the field cognitive linguistics. Through their analysis of selected "image macros," memes that combine images and overlaid text, they establish memes as viewpoint-driven multimodal constructions with identifiable genre-specific characteristics and constructional properties involving the importance of the image itself, frame metonymy and knowledge, and different viewpoints (Dancygier and Vandelanotte, 2017).

In establishing the degree of multimodality in their selection of image macros, Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) identify different ways in which text and image interact to create meaning. Images contribute to the meaning-making process in different ways, even within the same type of meme. In their research, they establish the different constructional roles that images play, slots they fill, and highlight the range of image macros from those in which the image is almost redundant to those for which the image is crucial in the creation of meaning.

The concept of 'viewpoints' is another integral part of their analysis, both to delineate the process of meme-making and to capture interpretation of meaning. For one, they assume that memes and communication through them are dependent on preconceived attitudes and beliefs held by the community through which they circulate. As memes differ, a multitude of configurations of such viewpoints and meme speakers and meme viewers exist but they contend that all of those are guided by a 'top – level Discourse Viewpoint Space' (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017). They explain this as a 'viewpoint construal', that the meme maker and meme viewer intersubjectively establish and that a space that embeds all other viewpoints. The final interpretation of memes can only be accomplished within this superordinate viewpoint space.

To a different degree, their interpretation of memes further draws on frame metonymy (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017). That is, frames and the knowledge they carry are crucial to successful interpretation of meaning. Through several examples, they demonstrate how elements of a meme reflect broader frames of knowledge and thus metonymically evoke rich background information for those familiar with those frames. Even limited information, such as reduced linguistic forms or artifacts like movie stills, can be channels for meme viewers to instantly access the framing knowledge required to understand a given meme. Some of the memes analyzed by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) do not involve frame knowledge, while for others it is crucial, illustrating the varying degrees to which frame metonymy contributes to meme comprehension.

The combination of all these components leads Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) to posit memes within a complex network of different viewpoints, artifacts, frames, and other memes, all of which are organized by what they call the Discourse Viewpoint Space, a mental space constructed by meme viewers through which they organize the aforementioned elements in order to successfully understand and interpret memes. That is, memes operate as structured units of meaning within a wider cognitive and discursive fabric of form and frame knowledge.

In response to Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2017) call for more detailed analysis to confirm their proposals, this study explores the extent to which these characteristics hold true for a

specific group of image macros, so-called 'reaction memes,' advancing our understanding of genre-specific characteristics. Such an analysis can add to their typology of image macro internet memes as viewpoint-driven multimodal constructions by identifying the relative importance of images, viewpoints, and frame metonymy in establishing the Discourse Viewpoint Space in which memes are understood.

3. Methodology

This paper follows Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2017) construction grammar approach to the analysis of image macros that has resulted in a presentation of memes as viewpoint-driven multimodal constructions. They state that meme analysis requires an understanding of the configuration of viewpoints and discourse spaces, that is, an understanding of how different modes of the meme are coordinated in a way that allow a final interpretation. This requires a detailed evaluation of the way in which the text and images interact to create meaning. Specifically of interest are the following questions:

1. Is the image needed to make the meaning clear?

2. Do the meme characters evoke frame knowledge?

3. Do the meme characters fill constructional and semantic roles?

4. Is meaning exploited intersubjectively?

3.1 Analysis Framework

Following Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017), such an evaluation requires an analysis of the meme's conceptualizers, conceptual frames, and discourse spaces:

- Multimodality: the extent to which images contribute to meaning creation

- Conceptualizers: this refers to the participants in each of the discourse spaces and refers to the identification of the speaker and the addressee. These can be identified in real life as the meme creator or meme viewer but also within the meme space, for example through the use of a particular meme character.

- Frame Metonymy: linguistic forms and other artifacts that trigger background knowledge required to understand the meme

- Viewpoints: perspective, attitudes, opinions based on which memes are created and understood

The elements of a meme cannot be analyzed in isolation, as a construction grammar approach necessitates a holistic perspective to understand its meaning and function. This involves identifying formal elements, such as the surface-level features of text and images, alongside conceptual structures provided by the conceptualizers, frames, and viewpoints. These components interact dynamically within mental spaces, which are co-constructed intersubjectively by the meme creator and viewer to negotiate meaning. Ultimately, this interaction culminates in the final discourse viewpoint space, where shared understanding emerges.

3.2 Reaction Memes

Reaction images originated from the use of pictorial representations of facial expressions, inspired by emoticons, with early examples appearing on platforms like Futaba Channel (2chan) and 4chan. Their popularity grew through forum games, such as "my face when," where users posted reaction faces to illustrate responses to specific events or prompts, becoming an integral part of online interactions (KnowYourMeme, 2025b). Reaction images, which evolved from early pictorial emoticons first introduced by Scott Fahlman in 1982, gained prominence on platforms like Futaba Channel (2chan) and 4chan, with iconic examples like the 'facepalm' appearing as early as 2004. Their popularity spread through forum games like "my face when," inspiring reaction face databases (e.g., MyFaceWhen.com in 2010), Tumblr pages, and fan communities, such as a Facebook page with over 68,000 likes by 2011. Three memes will be considered in this paper.

3.2.1 L.A. Noire "Doubt" / Press X to Doubt Meme

These memes are based on the Computer Game L.A. Noire, in which the player takes the role of detective Cole Phelps who works for the Los Angeles Police Department in the 1940s (https://www.rockstargames.com/games/lanoire). The meme features a screenshot of detective Cole Phelps with a disbelieving look on his face a the background image, 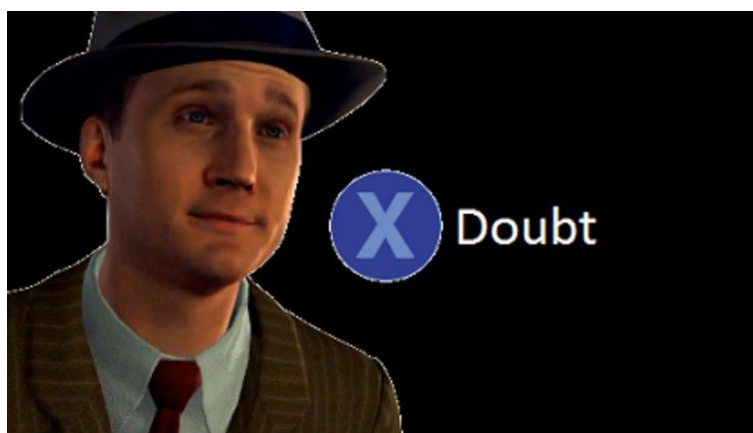an X button, and the word 'Doubt' as the superimposed text (https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/la-noire-doubt-press-x-to-doubt).

Figure 1. L.A. Noire Meme (KnowYourMeme, 2023)

3.2.2 This Is Fine Meme

"This Is Fine" is a two-pane image from K.C. Green's webcomic Gunshow (January 2013), depicting a dog calmly reassuring himself that everything is fine while sitting in a burning room (KnowYourMeme, 2025c) Originally appearing in the comic titled "The Pills Are Working," it has been widely used as a reaction meme to express denial or acceptance in hopeless situations, and has since inspired other media, including an 8-bit video game released in 2016. The meme gained popularity through platforms like 4chan and Reddit, where users adapted it to humorous or relatable contexts, such as dealing with stress or political events.

Figure 2. This is Fine Meme (KnowYourMeme, 2025c)

4. Analysis Results

For each of the memes, the aim was to understand its meaning and how this meaning is not only communicated but negotiated between meme creator and meme viewer by identifying and analyzing the memes' conceptualizers, frames. viewpoints, and mental spaces.

4.1 This Is Fine – Meme

The first meme in this analysis is a two-panel image taken from a six-panel panel comic called Gunshow comic #648. It is commonly referred to as the "This is Fine" meme in reference to the meme character's speech. In tracing the multilevel viewpoint structure of the meme, I identified two opposing viewpoints that need to be resolved in the Discourse Viewpoint Space (DVS), similar to the 'Said no one ever' meme described by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017). The analysis also revealed a high degree of multimodality, as the image is crucial to the meaning of the construction. On the other hand, the level of frame knowledge required to understand the meme is quite low, and the central belief upon which the meme is built - that fire is dangerous - can be considered universally shared. Thus, there is a low intersubjectivity between the meme maker and the meme viewer.

In their analysis, Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) describe the viewpoint configuration of their selected memes in terms of 'discourse space', 'top text', and 'bottom text', none of which seem to appropriately capture the viewpoints in this meme. Instead, I chose the term 'image space' to reflect the character of the two viewpoints. Image space 1, the first panel, shows a room on fire and with the meme character in the center. Throughout the room, flames are burning high, and smoke is collecting just below the ceiling. The meme character, a cartoon dog named Question Hound is sitting on a chair at a table in the middle of the burning room, with what appears to be a coffee mug on the table in front of him. He has an expressionless or emotionless face. In that sense, image 1, the basis of first image space is monomodal as it includes imagery only and no text, which is why it cannot be referred to as image macro. People who are familiar with the comic series may tap into specific frame knowledge of the context in which the meme was created or the character traits of the meme character. However, this knowledge is not necessary to interpret the meme fully. The frame space meme viewers need to access to understand image space 1 is that fire is dangerous. In fact, fire represent an imminent threat in need of urgent action as the longer you wait, the more permanently things will be destroyed. While it is possible to rebuild for example a room

or house destroyed through fire, it does require substantial resources. Resembling the 'said no one ever meme', this imagery leads meme viewers down a garden path of assuming the main character will react shortly and appropriately to the surrounding fire – or at the very least realize and acknowledge the danger he is in. Instead, image space 2 reveals an opposing viewpoint.

The second panel, image macro-1, zooms in on the meme character Question Hound, who, still sitting at the table, shows a slight smile and utters the words "This is Fine." A speech bubble designated the meme character as the speaker of this direct speech construction. The unspecified addressee is located in the meme-making space and could possibly even be the meme speaker himself, as he is likely speaking out loud to himself. The direct speech construction 'this is fine' suggests that the meme character does not perceive the fire around him as dangerous or threatening, an incongruence that produces a clear clash with image space 1, which quite clearly demonstrates danger. In fact, the flames in image macro 2 appear to even be somewhat closer to the meme character than they are in image 1.

The incongruence between both, a threat that requires immediate action in image 1 and the confirmation that the situation is 'fine' in image macro-1, reflects a viewpoint reversal similar to the one Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) described for the 'said no one ever' meme. Their analysis revealed a 'faux statement' which is reversed through an additional statement, creating a clash between two discourse viewpoint spaces that ultimately leads to a reversal of the initial viewpoint and to the acknowledgement of discourse space 1 as being untrue. On the other hand, the 'true' viewpoint here is given in image space 1, as fire is indeed threatening and dangerous, with the 'faux' viewpoint provided in image space 2 – a clear underreaction and denial of the situation. Another difference is that the 'said no one ever' meme creates its incongruence monomodally through two layers of text, whereas the 'this is fine' meme presents an example of multimodal viewpoint reversal, in which the image and text are at odds with each other. This positions the 'this is fine' meme somewhere between Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2017) discussion of incongruence within linguistic expression alone and Tobin and Israel's (2012) discussion of irony. This, he states, relies on an evaluation of a linguistic expression within its given context. Because the discordance in this meme is between the linguistic expression and the imagery, it falls somewhere between the two examples.

To fully grasp the meme's meaning, viewers must construct the so-called discourse viewpoint space, in which they can resolve said incongruence. By constructing a higher order mental space in which both image spaces are embedded and organized, meme viewers can meaningfully connect the two and arrive at the final interpretation of the meme as humorous reference to a strong case example (self-) denial. That is, through his speech and – to a lesser extent – through his facial expression, the meme character refers to a situation as fine despite clear evidence that it is in fact not fine at all thus denying the severity of a situation and its potential to create long-term damage if not acted upon quickly and appropriately.

The configuration of viewpoint space, image and image macro as well as the frame spaces drawn upon to understand the meme are represented in Figure 3. Image space 1 refers to the

room on fire, its understanding draws on the first image (image 1) with its meme character and the frame space in which we understand fire as dangerous. Image space 1 is embedded within image space 2, as represented through the large white arrow. Image space 2 reflects the image macro (image macro-1), which includes the meme character as speaker of the direct speech construction "this is fine" to an unidentified addressee in the meme-making space and the image macro (image macro-1) focused on the meme character. It does not draw on any additional frame knowledge. As the meaning of this meme is built upon the apparent incongruence between both image spaces, they clearly affect and interact with each other as illustrated through the two blue arrows connecting the two. This incongruence is then resolved at the top-level discourse viewpoint, in which the meme viewer can understand the meme as a (humorous) reference to denial of the dangers of a situation despite clear evidence of its severity.
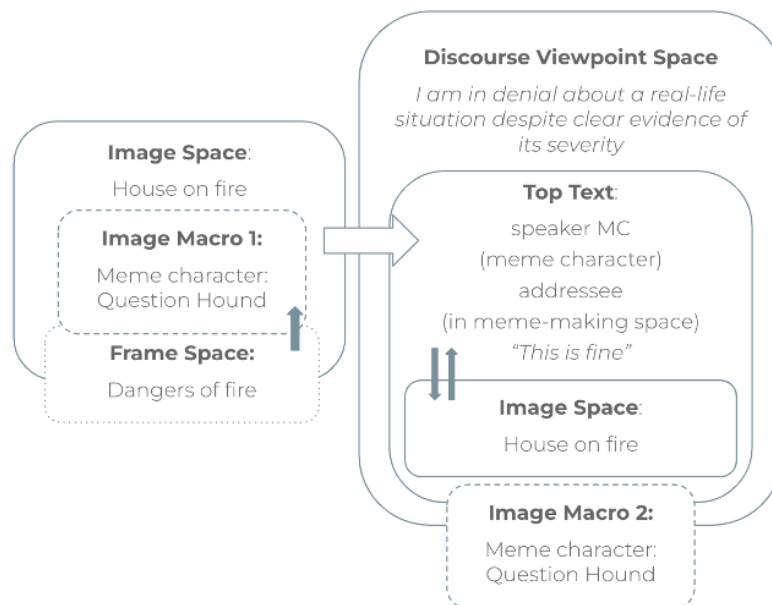

Figure 3. 'This is Fine' Multilevel Viewpoint Structure

4.2 L.A. Noire – Meme

As with the previous example, the L.A. Noire meme has a high multimodality as the image provides vital information to the meme's meaning. In fact, I argue that this meme could not function at all without its specific artifact from the L.A. Noire videogame. It differs from the 'this is fine' meme as it does not appear as a stand-alone meme but rather as part of online discourse, where it is used in response to a previous utterance, an 'in real life' (IRL) stimulus (KnowYourMeme, 2023). The analysis of its discourse level structure revealed two discourse spaces, both of which strongly rely on frame metonymy. Meme viewer s and meme maker s need to share knowledge and be familiar with not only the basic storyline of the game but also console videogame mechanics, which this is meme is characterized by a high degree of intersubjectivity. Only by accessing the shared frame knowledge are meme viewer s able to understand how the image takes the role of the subject in the subject less clause presented in the text.

This meme is an example of an image macro consisting of a screenshot and a one-word text. The first viewpoint is characterized as discourse space 1, which is constructed multimodally between then the image and the text. The image is an artifact from the videogame L.A. Noire and shows a screenshot of the game's main character Detective Cole Phelps, who works for the L.A. Police Department. Throughout the game, Det. Phelps needs to question and interrogate witnesses and suspects to solve a murder and – along the way – other crimes. The screenshot is a still from the game showing the detective's questioning face next to the word 'Doubt' with an X in a circle. The facial expression alongside the word clearly indicates skepticism or disbelief of some sort. This doubt is thus expressed by the speaker meme character towards an undefined addressee in the meme-making space.

While the image macro of the questioning or disbelieving face in connection with the word 'Doubt' already gives some meaning, we need to look toward the L.A. Noire videogame frame space to understand the nuances of discourse space 1. The screenshot of the Det. Phelps as meme character metonymically evokes and interrogation frame, at least with those familiar with the game and its storyline. Interrogations of different characters are a core feature of the game's story and the detective's investigation. As an investigator, the meme character has to evaluate crime scenes, interview eyewitnesses and suspects, analyze cues and behavior, and then make decisions based on these investigative steps. That is, the screenshot does not simply represent a single instance of doubt but elicits a much larger framework in which various pieces of information are used to reach a conclusion. Of course, the word doubt alone conveys the idea that someone may not fully believe an utterance. However, only those who have access to the investigation frame can interpret it in a more nuanced way – one that implies the need for further probing and requesting additional proof.

While discourse space 1 is mainly concerned with the meme – making space, discourse space 2 refers to the 'meme – maker as speaker' viewpoint and is thus more abstract. The linguistic input 'doubt' as itself can be considered as a subject-less clause, since it consists of only one word. Like the *when* meme (Dancygier and Vandelanotte, 2017), the L.A. Noire meme sets up a narrative space in which the meme fills the subject slot. However, unlike the when meme, where the facial expression or situation in the image itself conveys the message, viewers of this meme must rely on specific frame knowledge evoked by the image macro's character and symbol to recognize its intent. Without access to the action-adventure video game frame, they cannot fully interpret its significance. In general, when playing video games on a console, players use the different buttons to control their character and to move throughout the game. More specifically, in action-adventure games like L.A. Noire, players assume the role of the main character and navigate through the game in that persona. That is, in the role of Det. Cole Phelps players need to – among other things – question witnesses and suspects and decide whether their statements are truthful or not in their pursuit of solving the murder. The choice between "doubt", "believe", and "accuse of lying" is a key feature and decision that players must make after hearing a statement, one that significantly shapes the subsequent story. For instance, a wrong accusation of lying may anger a witness to the point that they stop cooperation. In other cases, a player may falsely believe a suspect and thereby miss important information they could have gathered had they chosen to doubt and question

them further. To make their choice, video game players on the Xbox (Note 1) use the designated buttons, A to believe, X to doubt, and Y to accuse of lying.

This highlights the importance of the meme symbol, the X button, in setting up the narrative space in which the subject is retrieved from context, drawing on the action – adventure video game frame. In that sense, the subject – less construction 'X doubt' is recognized as a representation of a subject – predicate construction, resulting in one of two readings. Taking the meme character as speaker, the fully realized construction can thus be read as a subject – predicate construction "I doubt this". However, in this context the more interesting reading results from a 'meme – maker as speaker' perspective and reads as "I press X to doubt this". This schematized subject – predicate construction is not only more complex but is also more unique to the meme due to its embeddedness into the action – adventure videogame frame. In that sense, it needs to be understood as generalizable structure "I press BUTTON to ACTION", relying on gaming conventions to communicate in real life.

For meme – viewers to arrive at the top – level discourse viewpoint space in which they can understand this meme as skeptical and doubtful response to a particular IRL stimulus, they need to establish discourse space 1 in which they draw on their interrogation frame knowledge of probing for more information, and discourse space 2, in which they rely on their video – game mechanics frame knowledge to infer the subject of the subject – predicate construction. Only through these processes can they interpret the meme's intended meaning of "I don't believe your previous statement is true (and I require more information)."
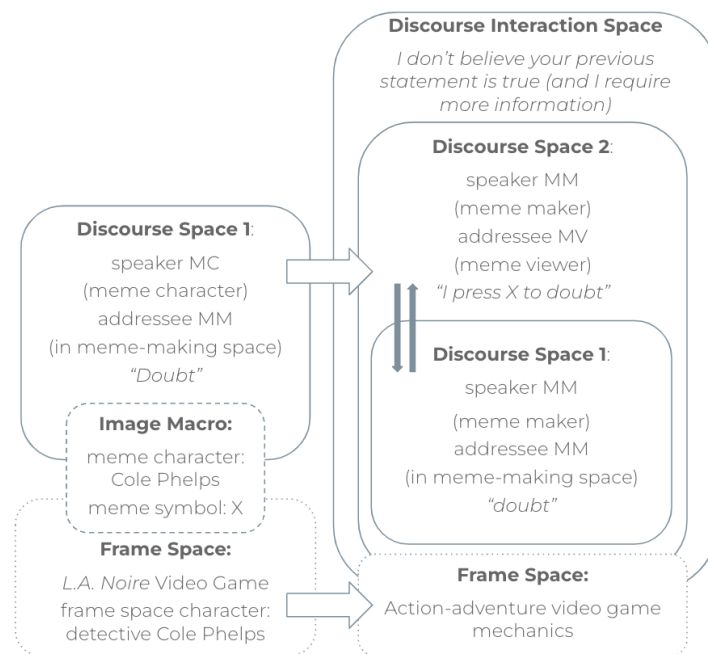

Figure 4. L.A. Noire "Doubt" / Press X To Doubt Multilevel Viewpoint Structure

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis has shown the applicability of the construction grammar-based model of memes. Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2017) multilevel viewpoint structure analysis proved powerful in understanding how images and text interact to create meaning, communicate information and opinions, and facilitate active participation in conversation. The analysis thus contributed to Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2017)'s typology of memes and confirm their understanding of memes as frame – rich constructions whose processing needs to be considered within multilevel viewpoint structures. They further provided support for the assumption that Frame semantics can develop a better understanding of the semantic, pragmatic and discourse-functional properties of constructions, the dimension that has been more difficult to capture than form (Bergs, 2010).

1. Is the image needed to make the meaning clear?

The analysis highlighted the major contribution of images to meaning – making. They contribute meaning through providing background and contextual information, through creating incongruence, and through evoking specific frames. The last part is especially prevalent in the L. A. Noire/Press X to Doubt, in which the image, a screenshot from a particular video game, allows meme – viewers with access to the required frame knowledge to understand the meme as an inquiring statement of disbelief and skepticism within a conversation. Without the image, the word 'doubt' alone would express the basic idea, but most constructional slots are provided through the image. That is, without access to this specific frame knowledge, the meme viewers do not have access to the complete semantic, pragmatic and discourse-functional properties (Bergs, 2010). For the This is Fine meme, frame knowledge is less important, but the image is not. It is through the fire depicted in the image that incongruence is created which leads to frame – shifting and the nuances of irony encoded in this multimodal construction. Without the image, meme – viewers would naturally believe that things are in fact just fine.

2. Do the meme characters evoke frame knowledge?

This difference between the two memes suggests the need for a more extensive analysis of a larger sample of reaction memes. While the meme character in the L. A. Noire/Press X to Doubt meme evokes the interrogation frame required to understand the meme, the meme character in the This is Fine meme does not function in the same way. The dog is the central element of the comic series from the meme is taken yet the meme could function in the same way with another character as well. In this meme, the frame shift is created by the incongruence between the image and the text, an ill-match that would also be apparent in another meme character. On the other hand, a different inquiring face in the L. A. Noire/Press X to Doubt meme would not evoke the interrogation frame because it lacks the clear connection to the story line.

3. Do the meme characters fill semantic and constructional roles?

Again, there is a difference between both memes when it comes to constructional roles filled by meme characters. The This is Fine meme contains a complete direct speech construction within the meme, which includes the subject and its predicates. The semantic roles contained in this image though are quite rich as the image supplies the instrument (the fire) and the meme character as the agent due to their choice to remain calm despite obvious evidence of immediate danger. Conversely, the L. A. Noire/Press X to Doubt meme character fills the role of agent as well as filling the subject slot (Dancygier and Vandelanotte, 2017).

4. Is meaning exploited intersubjectively

As stated in question 1 – 3, the contribution of frame knowledge to the memes' full meaning differs between both examples, and so does the degree of intersubjectivity. Looking at the L. A. Noire/Press X to Doubt, both meme viewers and meme makers need to be familiar with video game mechanics as well as the L.A. Noire videogame to understand for the meme to function as part of an ongoing conversation. On the other hand, the This is Fine meme requires only a common understanding of fire as dangerous, which one can assume to be universally shared.

Taking a broader perspective, this paper discusses content, form, and stance, the three key features that make a meme a meme (Shifman, 2013a). The form covers formats and genre-related patterns, which in this case relates to so – called reaction memes. Unlike memes discussed by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017), reaction memes discussed in this paper do not rely on different adaptations of texts but remain the same throughout. Stance, on the other hand, refers to participants, tone, style, and type of communication, which was shown to vary across memes of the same genre. What unites them, on the other hand, is the connectedness of the memes to an overall context, in which they are used. Lastly, ideas and ideologies form the content of a meme and thus are at the heart of any analysis.

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Note

Note 1. This differs from the PlayStation.

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