

## **Illusions of simplicity: frames, constructions, and simulation in concrete poetry**

In this paper, I will extend the discussion of cognitive mechanisms which integrate visual and language forms (cartoons, comics, etc.) to explain concrete poems in which linguistic forms themselves are treated as a source of visually prompted meaning. Among others, I will argue that these poetic forms rely on a particularly compact interaction of conceptual simulation, frame evocation, and blending. Specifically, these brief and misleadingly simplistic poems appeal to the reader/viewer by employing language forms themselves as prompts for visual evocation of frames, without necessarily communicating any propositional content.

For example, one very brief poem by bpNichol (1990) consists simply of the word *em ty* in the middle of an otherwise blank page. The removal of the letter 'p' contributes to the evocation of 'emptiness', as the graphic form correlates with the word's semantics. At the same time, the sound of the word is also evoked through an attempt to read its incomplete graphic form, which assumes mental scanning of the word's linear shape. Also, the word's spatial arrangement on an almost blank page evokes the standard typographic conventions whereby pages are filled with print. Therefore, this poetic mode adds meaning through the visibility of its words and surrounding spaces, and ascribes meaning to the often ignored materiality of the written word and the page on which it resides. Together the 'empty' page and the 'empty' word do not simply refer to 'something empty', but prompt a simulated sense of emptiness as their primary meaning. While the poems I will be examining are far more complex than this, the example does serve to illustrate the complexity of the interaction between visual, verbal, and simulated aural prompts. This type of poetry is often multimodal and relies on the materiality of both the page and linguistic signs through manipulations and evocations of space, arrangement, typography, artistry, and spelling.

In my analysis of this seemingly simplistic type of poetry, I will rely on Fillmore's frame semantics (1982), Talmy's fictive motion (1996), in particular the concepts of demonstrative and access paths, frame-relative motion, and the connection between vision and language. I will further relate this discussion to the work on embodiment (cf. Gibbs 2003, 2005, 2006) and on simulation (Matlock 2004), to examine how this poetry engages the embodied mind. I will argue that this style of concrete poetry relies on the assumed sense of meaning-emergence mechanisms used in the processing of constructions, while broadening the scope of what counts as an element of a construction and downplaying the need for a construction to carry referential meaning. Instead, the focus is on frame-evocation and simulation.

My analysis will reveal the complexity of this poetry's misleadingly simplistic style and propose a framework which puts this literary mode in a broader linguistic context. I will also try to show how the framework may be extended to link concrete poetry to other multimodal forms of expression, such as advertising or graphic novels.

## References:

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