
Between truth and imagination. The case of celebrity gossip headlines in weekly magazines

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Gossiping is a conversational activity that deviates from the Gricean maxim of quality in that it may involve speculation, exaggeration, or falsehoods, without losing interest to the listener. It seems that as long as listeners can integrate the contents of the gossip somehow into their narrative of the target person, they will not have a problem with the potential untruthfulness of gossip. However, they probably would lose interest in the gossip if they knew for sure that its contents were false, or essentially unreliable (Adler 2007).

While the concept and the practice of gossip(ing) is a recurrent research topic in various disciplines such as ethnography (Bergmann 1987), moral philosophy (Holland 1996), or social psychology (Franks & Attia 2011), the linguistics of gossiping is still underexplored. In my talk, I will approach the meaning and functions of gossip based on a case study of celebrity gossip headlines in selected German weekly magazines, cf. (1) and (2).

- (1) Welche Rolle spielte Barbara bei der Trennung? (Bunte, 7.6.2018)
'What role did Barbara play in the separation?'
- (2) Herzogin Kate: Hat sie genug vom Mutterschaftsurlaub? (Gala.de, 10.7.2018)
'Duchess Kate: Is she fed up with maternity leave?'

(1) and (2) trigger readers to seek for evidence in the accompanying text (and pictures) as to Barbara's role in the separation of Boris and Lily Becker, or as to Duchess Kate's being fed up with maternity leave. Upon close reading, however, it will often turn out that the article does not really answer the question posed in the headline. Nevertheless, questions such as (1) and (2) are commonly accepted means to frame gossip, stimulating cognitive processes of assessing the target person's behavior against the value system of the reader.

Against the backdrop of an analysis of selected gossip headlines, the talk will discuss the concept of gossip(ing) more broadly in the light of truth-telling, narration, and the Gricean maxim of quality.

References: • Adler, J. 2007. Gossip and truthfulness. In J. Mecke (ed.), *Cultures of lying*, 69–78. Berlin: Galda+Wilch. • Bergmann, J. 1987. *Klatsch. Zur Sozialform der diskreten Indiskretion*. Berlin: de Gruyter. • Franks, B. & S. Attia. 2011. Rumours and gossip as genres of communication. In D. Hook et al. (eds.), *The social psychology of communication*, 169–186. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. • Holland, M. 1996. What's wrong with telling the truth? An analysis of gossip. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33, 197–209.