# IS1404 E-READ: Evolution of Reading in the Age of Digitization

## Position paper

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WG(s): WG2 Developmental aspects of reading

My research is primarily interested in the cognitive processes of readers of graphic narrative, i.e. comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels. I believe that empirical investigations into multimodal narratives will shed new light on established categories and theories of narratology, and build a new understanding of the relationship between reader and text. Moreover, empirical and cognitive approaches towards literature call for an interdisciplinary collaboration of academic fields such as psychology, computer science, and literary studies, all of which are present in my current PhD work. My most recent empirical survey examined focalization in graphic narrative. You can find an abstract of this survey below:

Focalization, the subjective filtering of narrative, has persisted as a controversial narratological term ever since it was first proposed. Recent discussion argues that focalization is constructed by the reader rather than being implicit in the narrative. Focalization as a construct of the mind belongs to cognitive narratology, a narrative theory that will ideally be supported by empirical investigations of reader comprehension. Meanwhile, increasing academic interest in graphic narrative has led to its own specific typology, such as distinguishing between verbal and visual focalization. (Mikkonen 2012) However, research on focalization in graphic narrative has yet to arrive at a cognitive understanding supported by empirical analysis. This paper describes an experiment testing the validity of visual focalization as a cognitive concept for the understanding of graphic narrative. In January 2016, 92 students of English language and literature at the University of Paderborn each identified ten subjective and ten objective point-of-view panels in a nine-page excerpt of David Mazzuchelli's and Paul Karasik's graphic novel adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*. Overall, the results show a gradual distribution of visual focalization for each panel ranging from "external visual focalization" to "internal visual focalization." Panels with similar formal aspects appear exclusively at either end of the spectrum. Participants labelled panels with extreme close-ups of the protagonist as internally focalized and panels with long or medium shots as externally focalized. These formal aspects are also consistent with filmic shot types and attentional categories as discussed by Cohn, Taylor-Weiner, and Grossman (2012). The results point towards focalization as a valid cognitive concept for the study of graphic narrative.

1. **Potential research contribution** in light of, or linked to

A. WG interest and Scientific programme:

- syntactic and semantic knowledge: decoding the "language" of comics → a visual "writing" system?
- digital exposure to reading: eye-tracking experiments with comic readers
- inference and analysis of text: reading and understanding comics
- differences in medium: reading text literature vs. reading graphic literature; reading print comics vs. reading digital comics

B. Action objectives (pages 7-10 in the MoU):

- to prompt systematic, empirical, interdisciplinary research transcending established boundaries between scientific disciplines involved in reading research;
- to facilitate joint scientific publications and new, radically interdisciplinary, collaborative research projects (esp. across humanities/social sciences and natural sciences);
- to establish long-term theoretically and methodologically innovative research collaboration;
- to facilitate exchange of researchers, prioritizing juniors and early career researchers;
- to provide a solid platform for strong and competitive education policies and pedagogies built on empirically derived knowledge of the effects of technology on reading.

2. Interest in

B. ~~organizing~~ and/or participating in a **Training School** of training: "Empirical Methods for Humanities Scholars" (methodological/technical)