Multimodal Analysis in Academic Settings. From Research to Teaching.

Edited by Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli and Inmaculada Fortanet-Gomez.

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This volume, which was published first in 2015 and now has appeared in paperback format, is interesting in at least two ways that make it relevant to write a review of it today, despite the fact that the content is not new. Mainly, it takes on a topic not often treated in depth in the field of studies of academic communication, viz., oral communication. Furthermore, and not least important, due to the number of studies on different aspects of oral academic communication, it is an interesting example of the variety of ways in which multimodal studies based upon systemic-functional analysis approache this complex object of research.

The book consists of an introduction followed by ten chapters. The first six take on the study of conference contributions, while the last four deal with multimodal/oral communication in or for the classroom. All of the chapters fall within a well-defined frame of interest and form a coherent whole, but are sufficiently different to render a diversified picture of the common topic. In what follows I want to highlight this coherent diversity.

The chapter by Zuocheng Zhang ("Disagreements in Plenary Addresses as Multimodal Action") aims to "explore how disagreements are accomplished by plenary speakers at academic conferences". It analyses the multimodal meaning-making devices involved in presenting four types of disagreement in two plenary talks. The focus of analysis is set on modalities such as spoken language, hand movement, head movement, facial expression, posture, and gaze. The study identifies individual systems in combining these modalities when performing the disagreement characteristic of professional academic practice.

The chapter "Contrastive Multimodal Analysis – Conference Plenary Lectures in English and Spanish" by Noelia Ruiz-Madrid and Inmaculada Fortanet-Gomez, analysing various semiotic systems, intends to demonstrate "how the relationship among them adds a particular pragmatic value to the linguistic message conveyed". Focus is upon the study of asides, starting from a linguistic analysis and moving on to paralinguistic (voice quality, voice

differentiator) and kinetic (gestures, head movement, facial expression, gaze) resources. Two plenary lectures (one Spanish, one English) are examined, containing 25 and 39 asides, respectively. One rich aside sequence is selected from each talk for deep analysis of the multimodal interaction. Conclusions are mainly methodological and concern the usefulness of this type of analysis for describing complex communicative processes of this sort, with a focus on didactic settings.

In the chapter "Intensifying Adverbs in Academic Spoken Discourse", Miguel F. Ruiz-Garrido examines in presentations the most common intensifiers used to modify adjectives and their accompanying paralinguistic (pitch, silence, syllable duration) and kinesic (hand movement, head movement, body movement) features. Four presentations by female presenters are studied (two Spanish and two English). Paralinguistic and kinesic resources support linguistic intensification, but no deep systematicity is found. However, it is suggested that it would be sensible to explore this phenomenon further in order to find common patterns and apply these in teaching.

The chapter by Giuliana Diani ("Visual Communication in Applied Linguistic Conference Presentation") investigates types of visuals (i.e. slides) in PowerPoint conference presentations as well as the relations between the macro structure of the presentation and the IMRD structure of research articles. She investigates 56 PPT presentations from three conferences and categorises the slides into scriptural, numerical, figurative, and graphical. The vast majority (75 %) are scriptural, whereas the rest are evenly divided. The structure found generally deviates from the IMRD sequence, due to differences in the communicative situation.

In her chapter "A Multimodal Approach to Persuasion in Conference Presentations", Julia Valeiras Jurado uses ethnographic methods to study the use of semiotic modalities for making conference presentations more persuasive. She analyses one conference presentation delivered by two presenters and investigates the following modalities: verbal text, paralanguage (intonation, pauses, non-verbal vocalizations), kinesics (gestures, body posture, head movements, gaze), visuals on screen, and written text projected on screen.

The chapter by Christine Räisänen ("There is more to Multimodality Than Discourse Features and Nonverbal Behaviors") is different from most of the others in that it does not rely upon an empirical study. Instead, it is a

theoretical contribution proposing that we should include not only modalities which communicators control (internal modalities), but also modalities with power to influence communication without communicators governing them (external modalities). Along this line of thought, she proposes to include the matter around the communication (e.g., artifacts and spatial layout) in her multimodal analysis. Hence, she proposes to proceed in the ethnographic direction, especially visible in Valeiras Jurado's contribution.

The chapter "Elaborating Explanations During OpenCourseWare Humanities Lectures" by Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli, investigates the interplay between the linguistic expressions of explanation and the co-occurring non-verbal signals in humanities lectures from Yale University's OpenCourse website. Five lectures are analysed. The verbal expressions of explanation (dominantly: argumentation) are taken as a basis and supplemented by an analysis of the co-occurring features 'prosodic stress', 'outward gaze', and 'gesturing'. The finding is that nonverbal signals are used to reinforce verbal meaning and promote an atmosphere that facilitates learning.

Juan Carlos Palmer-Silveira's "Multimodality in Business Communication" analyses three student presentations from a training course in this genre and delves into body language as a visual aid. Different from the other empirical chapters in the volume, this chapter studies communicative instances from the normative point of view of the course: Have the students acquired the intended skills? The chapter thus appears to have more of a didactic than a research orientation. The features analysed are 'stage', 'hands', 'eye contact', and 'head movement', which interweave in an encompassing picture of the interaction of body language constituents in such presentations, together with a number of normative utterances on the desirable use of those constituents' (*students should* …).

The chapter "Assessing Multimodal Listening" by Mari Carmen Campoy-Cubillo and Mercedes Querol-Julián resumes the didactic focus. It does not contain an empirical analysis but presents instead a theory-based suggestion of a set of criteria for assessing listening tasks based upon videotexts in foreign language teaching. Apart from verbal aspects, extralinguistic features (visual context, visual information, aural information, kinesics, proxemics) and paralinguistic features (qualities, qualifiers, differentiators) are proposed.

Finally, Silvia Bruti's chapter "Teaching Learners How to Use Pragmatic

Routines Through Audiovisual Material" is also a proposal for a didactic approach, in which multimodal analysis and especially multimodal transcription may be used in order to teach the pragmatic features of conversational interaction. Two examples are presented of the relevant insights that may be obtained from a multimodal transcription of two different film clips. In addition to modalities such as kinesics and proxemics, others more akin to film semiotics are studied, such as shot description (medium shot, close-up shot, etc.) and audio track and music. This choice of features to include in the transcription appears broad, if the goal is to let students become aware of features of conversational interaction.

Looking at the volume as a whole, two characteristics are prominent. The first, more methodologically oriented, is the implicit ideal of most contributions to render system-based insights on the genres or linguistic varieties studied, preferably in the form of generalisations. There is a methodological challenge hidden here: the number of possible modalities to study is by definition unlimited in the field of Multimodality Studies (cf. Räisänen's suggestion of including the agential role of non-human agents). In order to make this approach viable, the studies in the volume therefore sensibly limit the number of modalities included, typically to paralinguistic and kinetic features, but still keep a considerable number of analytic dimensions. Furthermore, they restrict the number of communicative instances studied to between one and five, hence dominantly following an ethnographic and qualitative approach (one exception is Diani's study of a total of 1680 slides). However, although many authors explicitly describe the limited size of their communicative samples as both a characteristic and a limitation, this fact does not prevent them from making such claims as "Our findings have shown that certain intensifying adverbs are quite frequent in academic spoken English and Spanish, …" (p. 78), based upon two Spanish and two English conference contributions. Consequently, although the authors show a clear awareness of the need to limit the object of study in order to cope analytically, there is still a wish to give a 'big picture' of academic spoken discourse from a multimodal standpoint.

Interestingly, the second characteristic actually points in the opposite direction, towards a more qualitative than quantitative approach. All the chapters comment upon the didactic use of their findings, but regularly not in the form of systems of characteristics deduced from the studies. Rather, they suggest that students use the same approach in their study of communicative instances as in this study and thus become able to perceive

the interaction between verbal and para- or non-verbal modalities. This is a sensible way to control the high number of interacting factors (i.e.. the different features studied in the chapters).

It has been a pleasure to read this book, which I can recommend to everyone interested in how to investigate and teach multimodal communication in the academic field.

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