

Multimodal discourse analysis

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- **Multimodal discourse analysis** considers how text draw on modes of communication such as pictures, film, video, images and sound in combination with words to make meaning.
- It has examined print genres as well as genres such as **web pages, film and television programs**. it considers how multimodal texts are designed and how semiotic tools such as color, framing, focus and positioning elements contribute to the making of meaning in the text.

Background to Multimodal discourse analysis

- Much of the work in multimodal discourse draws from Halliday's social semiotics approach to language, a view that considers language as one among a number of semiotic resources such as (**gesture, images, music**) that people use to communicate, or to make meaning, with each other.

- Halliday (2009a) describes Three types of social meanings, or functions that are drawn on simultaneously in the use of language.

- **Ideational** (what the text is about)
- **Interpersonal** (relationship between participants)
- **Textual meaning** (how the message is organized)

(Paltridge 2012)

- The use of multimodal discourse both establishes a **‘proximity’** to the events and **engages people in the events**. it compresses distance and brings images and experiences into people’s homes. This moves the viewer from a position of **‘spectator’** to a position of **‘witness’** of the events.

- The multimodal use of discourse is as much a feature of print genres as it is of television genres. The presentation of Women in magazines, for example, relies not just on words on the pages but as much on the image that accompany the words.
- Machin and Thornborrow argue that print genres, such as magazines, are not just selling magazines to their readers. It also about selling values of independence, power and fun.

(Paltridge 2012)

Example of multimodal discourse

- The social relationship between an image and its viewer is strongly influenced by whether the subject in the image established eye contact with the viewer or does not. Each of possibilities could be seen as an example of *mood* where the eye contact could suggest a demand, whereas no eye contact might suggest an offer.

- The **point of view** , or **perspective**, of the image is also relevant. For example, a horizontal image suggests involvement as the viewer is on the same level as the subject of the image. A high angle shot might suggest superiority and low angle shot may suggest respect.

- Time magazine's picture of **Michelle Obama**
- She looks straight at the camera, establishes eye contact with the reader.
- Her face occupies the whole page providing closeness.
- The shot is horizontal, suggesting the reader is on the same level as the subject of the image.

- The **layout** and the placement of the image is also significant in that they each convey a certain information values well as communicate salience of the message to the reader.
- The image of Michelle Obama is **centrally placed** on the page so as to be most-eye catching.
- **Occupies the whole page**, dominating it in away gives weight to the image.
- **Centrally framed** with the text, showing how they belong together ‘**The meaning of Michelle.**’

JUNE 1, 2004



Joe Klein on
The Right Way
To Try Terrorists

China's New Deal:
Building Its Way
To Greatness



Remember Em?
Eminem: New
Album, Old Tricks

TIME

The Meaning Of Michelle

BY NANCY GIBBS
AND MICHAEL SCHERER

WWW.TIME.COM

Genre, speech act and multimodality

- Van Leeuwen discusses the relationship between speech acts and genre in relation to multimodality, using these two notions to capture the ‘**how**’ vs the ‘**what**’ of multimodal communication.
- A key point drawn from speech act theory is both (illocutionary act and perlocutionary act)

Advertisement: Illocutionary act



NEW *Fair & Lovely*

Our Best Ever Formula
for Our Best Ever Fairness Treatment

Before After

Creative Visualization. Results for treatment in the course of time. Results

The advertisement features a woman's face split vertically down the middle. The left side is labeled 'Before' and shows a slightly darker complexion, while the right side is labeled 'After' and shows a noticeably lighter, more even skin tone. The woman is wearing a white headband. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with pink and white stripes. The text 'NEW Fair & Lovely' is prominently displayed in the upper right, with 'NEW' in a red box and 'Fair & Lovely' in a red script font. Below this, the slogan 'Our Best Ever Formula for Our Best Ever Fairness Treatment' is written in red and black. At the bottom right, there is a small red circular logo and a line of fine print.

- An advertisement may aim to persuade a person to buy a particular product (**the illocutionary act**)
- If the person is convinced by the advertisement and buys the product , this is the effect, or **the perlocutionary act.**

Advertisement: perlocutionary act



Multimodal and news paper genre

- Image nuclear news stories:
 - stories comprise just a photograph and a heading and/or a caption
- Newsbites: online newspaper texts which comprise a headline and an image with hyperlink to a full story.

Image nuclear news stories



White House denies FBI boss loyalty vow

The press secretary also refuses to comment on if Mr Trump is making surreptitious recordings.

Multimodal and film trailers

- ❑ Implicitly promotional : relates to information that is part of the story of the film (diegetic information).
- ❑ Explicitly promotional : they often mix together information about the story of the film and information that is not part of the story of the film (non-diegetic information) such as **voiceover commentaries**, **evaluations** and **recommendations**.



Limitations of multimodal discourse analysis

- The amount of time it takes to do this kind of analysis
- The analysis at some stages can be quite technical, it can also be very interpretative.
- Multimodal analysis less often looks at readers' or viewers' readings of texts
- Less attention is given to the aspects of language
- The issue of how the analyses can be linked to wider social issues

Reference list:

- PALTRIDGE, Brian(2012). *Discourse analysis*. 2nd ed., London, Bloomsbury academic.