

MEDIA COMMUNICATION:

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN LINGUISTICS

COMUNICACIÓN MEDIÁTICA: DESAFÍOS METODOLÓGICOS EN LINGÜÍSTICA

Pashayeva Gunel Bakhshyish^{1*}

E-mail: gunel.pashayeva@sdu.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8854-0786>

Mahsati Asgarova Gasim²

Email: mehsetiesgerova@ndu.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0708-8772>

Eminli Boyukkhanim Ibrahi¹

Email: boyukxanim.eminli@sdu.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9338-483X>

Aynura Baghirova Siyabkhan¹

Email: aynura.baghirova@sdu.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7975-4475>

Yusifova Naila Yusif³

Email: yusifova.naila@unec.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4001-7210>

Nigar Aliyarova Namig⁴

Email: nigar.aliyarova@baau.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5580-7903>

¹Sumgayit State University, Azerbaijan.

²Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan.

³Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC).

⁴Baku Eurasian University, Azerbaijan.

*Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the relevance of multimodal analysis in contemporary media discourse research, examining how meaning is constructed through the interaction of various semiotic resources beyond verbal elements. Despite significant advances in the field over the past 15-20 years, methodological challenges persist due to the complexity of analyzing multiple modes of communication simultaneously, including the lack of standardized analytical frameworks and difficulties in interpreting nonverbal data influenced by subjective and cultural variations. This study aims to develop a comprehensive methodological framework for analyzing multimodal media discourse by exploring the typology of modes and semiotic means involved in multimodal communication, with particular attention to their interactions and transformative potential. Our findings reveal that semiotic resources interact through repetition, complementarity, and convergence, while media texts undergo processes of transduction that can be both reversible and irreversible. Furthermore, we identify that the motivation behind semiotic transformations can be voluntary or involuntary, often revealing ideological underpinnings that warrant critical examination. These insights have significant implications for understanding cross-media communication, highlighting the need for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate methods and data from linguistics, semiotics, neurocognitive studies, cultural studies, social anthropology, and information technology to fully comprehend the complexities of multimodal discursive practices.

Keywords: Linguistics, Multimodality, Media, Multimodal methodological analysis, Social semiotics, Critical discourse analysis.

RESUMEN

Este artículo aborda la relevancia del análisis multimodal en la investigación del discurso mediático contemporáneo, examinando cómo se construye el significado mediante la interacción de diversos recursos semióticos más allá de los elementos verbales. A pesar de los avances significativos en este campo durante los últimos 15-20 años, persisten desafíos metodológicos debido a la complejidad de analizar múltiples modos de comunicación simultáneamente, incluyendo la falta de marcos analíticos estandarizados y las dificultades para interpretar datos no verbales influenciados por variaciones subjetivas y culturales. Este estudio busca desarrollar un marco metodológico integral para analizar el discurso mediático multimodal explorando la tipología de modos y medios semióticos involucrados en la comunicación multimodal, con especial atención a sus interacciones y potencial transformador. Nuestros hallazgos revelan que los recursos semióticos interactúan mediante la repetición, la complementariedad y la convergencia, mientras que los textos mediáticos experimentan procesos de transducción que pueden ser tanto reversibles como irreversibles. Además, identificamos que la motivación detrás de las transformaciones semióticas puede ser voluntaria o involuntaria, revelando a menudo fundamentos ideológicos que justifican un examen crítico. Estos hallazgos tienen implicaciones significativas para la comprensión de la comunicación transmedia, lo que pone de relieve la necesidad de enfoques interdisciplinarios que integren métodos y datos de la lingüística, la semiótica, los estudios neurocognitivos, los estudios culturales, la antropología social y las tecnologías de la información para comprender plenamente las complejidades de las prácticas discursivas multimodales.

Palabras clave: Lingüística, Multimodalidad, Medios de comunicación, Análisis metodológico multimodal, Semiótica social, Análisis crítico del discurso.

INTRODUCTION

Modern interdisciplinary research in the field of language and communication has paid special attention to the phenomenon of multimodal communication in the last 15-20 years (Jiang & Hafner, 2024; Zhang & Pleyer, 2024). In a general sense, multimodal media discourse is defined as the study of how meaning is constructed through the interaction of various modes of communication in media, such as print, television, and online platforms (Wilson et al., 2023). This approach, grounded in systemic functional linguistics and social semiotics, recognizes that meaning is conveyed not only through words, but also through

images, sounds, and their interactions (Castaldi, 2024; Celeste, 2024). For example, a news video might use a reporter's voice, background music, and visual elements to shape the narrative, requiring analysis that goes beyond the spoken word. Thus, it is clear that considering verbal means as the center of communication is unlikely to help create a unified picture of real discursive (speech-thinking, cognitive-communicative meaning-making) processes.

In modern research, media discourse is perceived mainly as a multimodal discourse in which production and transmission take place. Semantic structures are achieved not only with the help of lexical (segmental) elements and their sequence, but also with the help of non-discrete sound, image and time-space means of communication (Al-Rawi & Prithipaul, 2023; Liu et al., 2024). The term multimodal has been widely used in Russian science in the last decade and refers to the English term multimodal, which denotes the features of communication based on the use of multiple modes of information reception or communication channels (in this context, researchers often use the term multichannel, which is quite synonymous).

At the same time, terminological traditions create a certain polyphony in the use of such concepts as multimodal (multichannel), polycode, hybrid, mixed, creolized, and multimedia. Thus, for example E. V. Omelyanenko and E. N. Remchukova have explained the differences between the concepts of polycode and multimodality mainly by the traditions of using terms of national schools: "in foreign studies, since semiotic codes have different modalities, mixed texts are often called multimodal (...), while in domestic studies, the tradition of the primacy of linguistic semiotic code studies still adheres to this, often speaking of multimodal texts" (Maksimenko, 2012). Sometimes the difference between the terms is described as index differences between process or outcome. However, in most cases these terms are used as synonyms, either contextually (e.g., polymorphous, hybrid, creolized and polycode terms) or absolutely (e.g., polymorphous and multimedia terms).

Researchers agree on the identification of the central specific features of these types of texts and speeches, among which, as a rule, they emphasize semiotic heterogeneity, the simultaneous multi-channel transmission of the message, the complexity of the message reception, and communicative combinatorics. As Egorchenkova (2014, p. 26) notes, "the interactive behavior of communicators is characterized by the parameter of multimodality, based on the simultaneous 'unity' of heterogeneous components that perform a communicative task", which is often understood

as the use of various sensory capabilities in the recipient's perception of the message.

As evidenced by the results of a study conducted by Egorchenkova (2014), interaction contributes to the development of communicative interaction, when using the dominant verbal elements of communication can often lead to a breakdown in communication. Kibrik & Fedorova (2018) explain that the term multimodal is "based on the concept of modality, accepted in psychology, neurophysiology, and informatics: modality is a type of external stimulus perceived by one of the human sensory organs, primarily vision and hearing".

However, despite advances in multimodal media discourse analysis, significant methodological challenges remain due to its complexity. Key challenges include managing complex data sets across different media formats (O'Halloran et al., 2021), the lack of standardized analytical frameworks leading to inconsistent interpretations, and the difficulties in interpreting nonverbal data influenced by subjective and cultural variations (Pauwels, 2012). Therefore, the effective integration of verbal and nonverbal elements is crucial, despite the difficulty involved in analyzing their interactions and mutual influences. To this end, semiotic analysis also helps uncover meanings and examine how different modes of communication interact, making it essential for understanding modern media discourse. To address these challenges, various methodological approaches are employed, and solutions include specialized training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the development of standardized coding methods. Furthermore, technological advances such as digital tools and bibliometric methods, as well as natural language processing, are transforming the field (Somandepalli et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2024), facilitating the extraction of knowledge from data as well as theoretical development. Therefore, despite the complexities, the continued evolution of methodologies offers promising directions for future research, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of multimodal media communication.

Thus, this paper seeks to establish a comprehensive methodological framework for analyzing multimodal media discourse by examining the interaction of various semiotic resources. By investigating how semiotic resources interact, the aim is to enrich the theoretical and analytical tools available for understanding multimodal discourse. Furthermore, the ideological dimensions underlying semiotic transformations are addressed and the need for interdisciplinary approaches, integrating perspectives from linguistics, semiotics, and cultural analysis, is emphasized to advance the study of transmedia communication.

DEVELOPMENT

Today, it is quite common to believe that any discourse, any communication has a multimodal structure. Kibrik & Fedorova (2018) claim: "It is becoming increasingly clear that attempts to fundamentally separate language from communication, thought and behavior are unconstructive, artificial and conditioned not by the nature of things, but only by the logic of scientific development." They also note that "there is no fundamental difference between information transmitted orally and information transmitted prosodically or gesturally. Only an approach that accepts the multimodality of communication has a chance to create a real linguistics of the future" (Kibrik & Fedorova, 2018). We adhere to the perspective expressed by these authors regarding the need for a comprehensive, multimodal analysis of communication and discourse. This position is characteristic of representatives of social semiotics and critical discourse analysis, which apply an interdisciplinary approach to interpretation of the diversity of discursive phenomena and semiotic means of communication. The research group of the Institute of the Russian Language named after V. V. Vinogradov of the Russian Academy of Sciences has achieved significant results in this area. Researchers are actively working on the development of a multimedia corpus of the Russian language.

We consider it important to draw attention to two fundamental methodological issues mentioned in the above quote from the work of Kibrik & Fedorova (2018). First, if we accept the "ontological" nature of the multimodality of any situation, operation and process that creates and transmits meaning, we can encounter the tautological nature of the use of the term multimodality. The question may arise: if any communication is multimodal in nature, why is it necessary to use the term multimodal communication? We are not inclined to exaggerate the semantic redundancy (tautology) of the terms multimodal text, multimodal communication and multimodal discourse, since here the concept of multimodal refers to the semiotic complexity, coherence and integrity of texts based on the use of various semiotic systems and we take into account the necessity of addressing the addressee as a way of addressing various sensory organs. The use of the term polymorphic to denote the subject of the study indicates that the researcher pays attention to the analysis not only of verbal or non-verbal units, but also of their sequential use.

Secondly, in the given quote there is an indirect reference to the interchangeability of semiotic means of knowledge transmission ("there is no fundamental difference between knowledge transmitted orally and knowledge transmitted prosodically or gesturally"), which allows us to formulate the methodological problem of relevance of

semiotic means of knowledge transmission: what are the conditions and limits of the harmony (integrity) of multi-form ways of using various semiotic means in the process of discursive practice? As can be seen, they not only replace each other, but also fall into the whole spectrum of various types of relationships. O. V. Poimanova (1997) defines the types of interaction of verbal and non-verbal (visual) components in mixed texts as follows: repetitive (one semiotic repeats the other semantically), additional (one semantically complements the other), emphatic (one draws attention to one aspect of the other), oppositional (one semantically contradicts the other), integrative (tools participate together in semiosis, mutually integrate).

It is obvious that such contradictions ("one medium - another medium") express not only the confrontation of verbal and non-verbal means. Diverse discursive, and above all mass media, experience convinces us that a significant amount of information can be transmitted without the use of verbal elements and that the main semiotic interaction occurs (as far as possible) between, for example, sound and image in media (often found in advertising, music or cinema). A more realistic typology of modalities/modules and semiotic tools based on differentiation of purchasing channels is perhaps this: Polymorphic discourse is carried out through a) auditory (auditory) and b) visual (visual) channels. This also includes the audio channel in oral-speech, prosodic and vocal-musical, visual-figurative-visual, ocular, kinetic, proxemic and written-speech modes. Moreover, in the modern world, where computer technologies, neuro-technologies, virtual and augmented reality technologies are intensively developing, and the interaction of new media in general is becoming increasingly important, there is reason to believe that media discursive practices are being transformed into an important mode. (For more detailed information on the method of semiotic analysis of interactive media.)

The interaction of modes and the semiotic elements associated with them can be realized as follows (Poimanova, 1997):

- (mutual) repetition (educational interaction in the terminology of O.V. Poimanova): for example, statistical data presented in infographics are descriptively identical to the information presented in the printed-oral mode; The content of the current line in the advertising message semiotically coincides with the verbal-verbal text;
- (mutually) complementarity (additive and subtractive interactions in the classification of O.V. Poimanova): for example, the use of gestural indicators in visual demonstrations of goods or facial expressions that focus attention on individual parts of oral speech);

- Convergence (integrative interaction according to O.V. Poimanova): for example, the complex use of color, logo, and visualized products in an advertising message or the simultaneous use of a photograph, commentary, and animation in a news web resource.

Of methodological importance is also the development of techniques for assessing the discursive potential of semiotic resources reaching the addressee, in connection with the possible types of interaction between modes and semiotic elements. The truth is that not every semiotic tool can participate in the above-mentioned intermodal interaction. For example, prosodic techniques cannot be used exclusively as a means of reproducing information that has already been expressed through printed oral expression. Therefore, it is not possible to convey the content of a press release with pauses and sighs or the plot of a TV series with colors and gestures. At the same time, a set of semiotic means, despite their potential "semiotic centrality" (for example, verbal means), cannot be used autonomously, without the support of other semiotic means. The word, therefore, is necessarily "realized" in non-linguistic categories: visual (font, color) or auditory (volume, timbre).

This situation allows us, first of all, to talk about the so-called "transduction" of media texts. Some original media text can be considered transductive if there is a potential possibility of its semiotic transformation, that is, recoding into another semiotic system while preserving its original semantic structure (at least denotative, at most connotative). Moreover, transduction can be both reversible and irreversible. For example, the content of infographic material is an example of reversible transduction, since we can restore the complex of meanings using the original - verbal - semiotic system. An example of irreversible transduction can be the screen adaptation of Conan Doyle's works in the Sherlock Holmes series, since the resources of the original semiotic code would not be enough to revive the semantic structure of the original literary text.

Secondly, an important research question is the motivation of semiotic transformations, which can be both voluntary and involuntary. If technically necessary conditions are met, transductive processes can only be determined by their possibility. But in other cases, we can witness arbitrary, biased, and even ideologically charged semiotic transformations in media discourse. In this context, the task traditionally formulated in the mainstream of social semiotics and critical discourse analysis becomes clear: the task of uncovering the ideological foundations of discursive processes.

Multimodality is considered in discourse analysis and social semiotics not only as an immanent property of texts to express (document) or index reality with the help of various semiotic means, but also as their “extended” capacity to organize reality. As Machin & Mayr (2014) write, “visual communication, like language, affects society as it is affected by society. Multimodal critical discourse analysis (...) is more focused not on the study of visual semiotic objects, but on their role in the implementation of power relations”. Let us add that this is, of course, not only about visual communication, but also, in a broader sense, about multimodal, and therefore different, semiotic resources and modalities.

In this regard, one can talk about the topics of critical discourse analysis and social semiotics, for example, about prosodic signs of superiority and subordination in radio communication, the proxemic constitution of inequality in Instagram channels, or the kinetic means of representing “ours” and “others” on television, etc. discursive features of various professional practices. Thus, the problem of inter-semiotic and interdiscursive compatibility, directly related to the issues of semiotic transformations, is especially important in the context of cross-media and trans-media communication. Thus, the choice of strategies and methods of storytelling in different media platforms, the search for suitable infographic tools for representing information that is difficult to perceive, or the identification of optimal models for adapting content to the semiotic expectations of the target audience, presuppose the presence of specific competencies in the field of inter-semiotic multimodal processes.

CONCLUSIONS

The interdisciplinary nature of multimodal media research is of great importance for advancing our understanding of communication. The most promising avenues of research lie not in isolated, limited studies that focus solely on one semiotic source—such as spoken language, prosodic elements, or body language—but in holistic interdisciplinary approaches. By integrating and synthesizing methodologies and data from diverse fields such as linguistics (especially corpus linguistics), semiotics, neuropsychological studies, cultural studies, social anthropology, and information technology, we can build a more comprehensive understanding of multimodal discursive practices. This integrative perspective not only enriches our analysis of how meaning is constructed in different modes of communication but also facilitates innovations that capture the complexities of modern media landscapes. Our analysis highlights that the future of multimodal research lies in breaking down academic silos and fostering

collaborative research environments where researchers embrace methodological pluralism that combines perspectives from multiple disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach will allow for a more complete understanding of how various modes interact and influence each other in the creation of meaning. Only through these integrated research efforts can we develop a truly robust and nuanced understanding of multimodal discursive practices in our increasingly interconnected world.

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