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KOMUNIKACIJOS PROCESO MULTIMODALUMAS

Multimodality in Communication

SUMMARY

Multimodality as a measure to communicate the information is widely discussed by researchers who agree on its great importance. Multimodality can exploit different forms: verbal, visual, audial, etc. Researchers agree that nowadays verbal form of communication has lost its weight as the key way to deliver the information. Other ways – visual, audio, spatial, gestural – have earned the attention and play an important role in the communication process. The concept of multimodality encompasses a variety of interpretations. It is understood with respect to different perceptions and labelled as a literacy, meaning, mode, etc. With respect to the visual mode the researchers analyzed the three meaning functions. Researchers call them representational (includes vectors and participants), interactive (includes facial expressions, gestures and perspective) and compositional (includes information value, visual salience and framing).

SANTRAUKA

Multimodalumas kaip informacijos perdavimo priemonė laikomas svarbia sėkmingo komunikacijos proceso dalimi. Komunikacijoje multimodalumas gali įgauti įvairias formas. Tai gali būti žodžiu arba raštu pateiktas tekstas (verbalinė forma), paveikslėliai ir kita ne teksto forma pateikta informacija (vizualinė forma), muzika ir kita garsinė informacija (audio forma) ir pan. Sutariama, kad šiuolaikinių technologijų pasaulyje verbalinė komunikacijos forma prarado savo kaip išskirtinės informacijos perdavimo priemonės vaidmenį. Komunikacijos procese vis dažniau naudojamos įvairios vizualinės, audio, gestų ir pan. informacijos perdavimo formos, kurių derinys vadinamas komunikacijos multimodalumu. Nors multimodalumo sąvoka suvokiama panašiai, ją apibrėždami mokslininkai vartoja skirtingus terminus ir pateikia skirtingas interpretacijas. Straipsnyje pateikiamas įvairių autorių požiūris į multimodalumą komunikacijos procese.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: multimodalumas, komunikacija, raiškos forma, daugiaplanis, vizualinė raiška.

KEY WORDS: multimodality, communication, mode, multi-literacies, visual design.

INTRODUCTION

With the increase of the use of different media technologies communication of information started exploiting a variety of modes to achieve the maximum effect of information delivery. This variety of modes today is called multimodality and it helps to express the information in diverse shapes: written and spoken texts, images, sounds, etc. The decorative part of information transfer – images, sounds, etc. – serves as a separate source which enriches the content that has to be communicated.

Linguists agree that multimodality is a certain view to texts which emphasizes the combination of different modes

(verbal, visual, etc.) to make meaning and reach the audience. This is a relatively open field of study because the terminology has been used very loosely, for instance, *“language and other resources which integrate to create meaning in ‘multimodal’ phenomena (e.g. print materials, videos, websites, three-dimensional objects and day-to-day events) are variously called ‘semiotic resources’, ‘modes’ and ‘modalities’ (O’Halloran, 2011: 120). The theoretical assumptions suggest the following types of modes distinguished in the available research: linguistic (speech and writing), visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustative.*

THE CONCEPT OF MULTIMODALITY

The concept of multimodality was coined at the end of 20th century. It started with the definition of multiple communication channels, which later were identified as multimodality. The linguists who attributed themselves to New London Group wrote the paper entitled *“A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures”*, where they specified that *“the multiplicity of communications channels <...> in the world today calls for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches”* (Cazden, Cope, Kress, et al., 1996: 60).

According Djonov and Zhao the term multimodality goes back to the 90s and consists of two directions. The first involves *“mapping the history and unique meaning-making potential of individual se-*

miotic recourses (...), while the second concentrates on theorizing and Cazdenanalysing the interaction between different semiotic recourses in multimodal communication” (Djonov and Zhao, 2014: 2).

The concept of multimodality encompasses a variety of interpretations. It is understood with respect to different perceptions and labelled as a literacy, mode, etc. For instance, Meex and Wermuth state that multimodality consists of five multi-literacies – audio design, spatial design, gestural design, visual design and linguistic design (Meex, Wermuth, 2013: 10) (Figure 1).

Audio designs apply to music and sounds, rhythm, pitch, silence and noise. Spatial designs refer to directions of objects in space. Gestural designs mean movements of body, facial expressions,

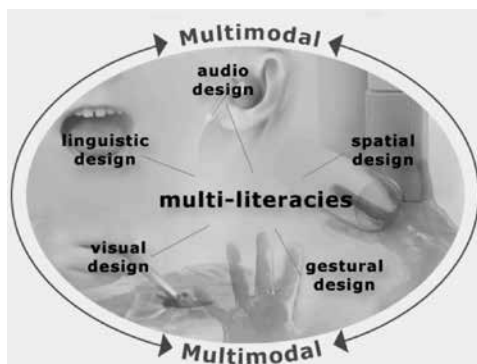


Figure 1.

and position of body. Visual designs assign all images (moving and still), their colours, formats, sizes, angles, layouts, etc. Linguistic designs are associated with written and spoken language and their linguistic features. The author specifies that the multimodality can be identified when two or more literacies get the expression.

The understanding of the concept of multimodality also goes through the understanding of the concept of mode. As indicated by Bateman, “most discussions of multimodal analyses and multimodal meaning-making still proceed without an explicit consideration of just what the ‘mode’ of multimodality is referring to” (Bateman, 2011: 17)

Bezemer and Jewitt describe mode “...as an organizing principle of representation and communication...” (Bezemer and Jewitt, 2010: 183)

The authors develop their approach on the basis of two arguments. The first argument explains that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which contribute to meaning, which focuses on the analysis of all meaning-making resour-

ces employed while producing some communication. Moreover, multimodality assumes that all forms of communication (modes) have, like language, been shaped through their cultural, historical and social uses to realize social functions and it can be established that different modes shape the meanings to be realized in mode-specific ways; as a result, the meanings are in turn differently realized in different modes. The other argument worked out by the authors is that the meanings realized by any mode are always interwoven with the meanings made with the other modes involved in the communicative event; thus, one mode influences and shapes others modes, which are included in the same communicative event as well. The authors refer to social-semiotic approach and it is evident that they point out multiplicity of modes, which are shaped by cultural, historical and social influences as well as by their own interaction. Later Jewitt noticed that multimodality is “an inter-disciplinary approach drawn from social semiotics that understands communication and representation as more than language and attends systematically to the social interpretation of a range of forms of making meaning” (Jewitt, 2013: 250)

Many discussions also occur while trying to answer what constitutes a mode. Despite the fact that Jewitt clearly names such modes as *writing, image, moving image, sound, speech, gesture, gaze and posture in embodied interaction* (*ibid.* 253). Kress, for instance, argues whether *font and layout* can be considered as modes and whether speech and writing can be labeled as one mode of language (Kress, 2010: 86, 88-92). Stöckl claims that

“there is justification to subdivide visual, auditory (or audial), tactile, olfactory and gustative sign (-mode)”; however, language can be medially realized as either speech or writing and, therefore, the classification of modes according to sen-

sory channels is not always appropriate (Stöckl, 2004: 11). Jewitt also notes that modes are dynamic, new modes constantly enter the communicational landscape and, therefore, it is hard to establish a well-developed classification.

VISUALITY IN MULTIMODALITY

Modern technologies have significantly influenced all areas of our lives, including the process of communication. Language is now not the main way to reach the audience. Ventola, Charles and Kaltenbacher point out that *“the kind of text where the “language” can be excised as an independent unit is, in many, areas, fast becoming the exception rather than the norm”* (Ventola et al., (2004: 2). Verbal information is often complemented with various pictures, images, photographs, music, videos, gestures, gazes, facial expressions, etc., in order to transmit certain information. This means that the analysis of language alone is not enough, and in order to understand more accurately what message is conveyed in a multimodal text, other ways of transferring information also have to be looked at. As Fei states, *“academic disciplines that focus on monomodality, such as linguistics, must come into dialogue with other fields of research, for instance, visual communication studies and media studies, to facilitate the interdisciplinary nature of multimodal research”* (Fei, 2004: 52).

With reference to Halliday’s metafunctions Kress and van Leeuwen looked into the essence of the visual mode. Halliday identified three metafunctions: ideational (ability to articulate the con-

tent), interpersonal (ability to construct social relations) and textual (ability to create coherence). Kress and van Leeuwen applied a slightly different approach and differentiated representational, interactive and compositional functions. In multimodality these three *“meaning functions are applied to all modes to better understand their meaning potential – ‘what can be meant’ or ‘what can be done’ with a particular set of semiotic resources – and to explore how these three interconnected kinds of meaning potentials are actualized through the grammar and elements of their different modal systems”* (Jewitt, 2013: 256). With respect to the visual mode the researchers analyzed the three meaning functions (representational, interactive and compositional).

For example, Hofinger and Ventola state that the **representational** meaning *“is reflected in the way pictures capture our interest and involvement with the depicted subject(s)”* and the main hallmarks, which constitute narrative images, are vectors and participants (Hofinger and Ventola, 2004: 195). Jewitt and Oyama present vector as *“a line, often diagonal, that connects participants”* (Jewitt and Oyama 2002: 141). A vector not only connects participants but also, as Kress and van Leeuwen state, by the usage of vec-

tor two objects may be [visually] represented as involved in a process of interaction. In other words, vectors are visual elements that realize an action. Vectors in the pictures may take the form of lines, visible or otherwise, created by, for example, a gaze, the pointing fingers or extended arms.

The usage of this visual element helps to define whether the picture is static or dynamic because the *“vector expresses a dynamic, “doing” or “happening” kind of relation”*. Moya and Pinar state that *“when participants are connected by vectors of motion (actional) or by eyelines (reactional) <...> they are represented as doing something to or for one another”*. As a result, the picture, which does not involve any vectors, is considered to be static. Conversely, the picture which provides vectors is treated as dynamic.

The usage of vectors shows the participants' relations. Kress and van Leeuwen suggest two types of participants: the actors and the goals. The actor, according to them, is an active participant in an action process and is the participant from which the vector emanates or which is fused with the vector, whereas the goal is the passive participant in an action process and is the participant at which the vector is directed. Participants and vectors, realized by specific visual techniques, present actions, events, process of change, spatial arrangements and determine whether the image is static or dynamic.

Interactive meaning is revealed through the facial expressions, gestures, perspective and the usage of long or short shots. Facial expressions, for instance, act as the indicators of emotion-

al activity. Gunes, Piccardi and Jan summarize psychological studies and identify six principal emotions that are universally associated with different facial expressions: happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger, and disgust. Feng and O'Halloran developed a system that is capable of describing and comparing complex facial expressions. This proposed system divides face into main three areas: forehead/eyebrows, eyes, and lower part of face which includes nose, cheeks and mouth. While analyzing the choice of these elements in visual mode, the representation of emotions can be looked at. For example, Feng and O'Halloran acknowledge that anger in images is represented by the eyebrows (inner corners are lowered) and the mouth (tensed and open). In comparison, happiness is showed by the mouth; however, in case of happiness the corners of the mouth are up. In addition, the eyes are narrow or closed.

Gestures are also used to convey the interactive meaning. Gunes, Piccardi and Jan define five different kinds of gestures which are the following: gesticulation (spontaneous movements of the hands and arms that accompany speech), language-like gestures (gestures which are involved in speech in order to replace a particular spoken word or phrase), pantomimes (gestures which depict objects or actions with or without accompanying speech), emblems (familiar gestures, for instance, “thumbs up” or assorted rude gestures, which are often culturally specific), and sign languages (certain well-developed linguistics systems used by certain groups of people who have some kind of disabilities).

Perspective is another indicator of the interactive meaning. This element is a *“way in which images bring about relations between represented participants and viewers”* (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 129). It is related to *“the ‘truthfulness’ or subjectivity of the image – the ‘attitude’ of the graphic relative to the viewer”* (ibid.: 508). In other words, the choice of perspective conveys certain point of view adopted by the viewer.

The analysis of **compositional** meaning with respect to visual mode involves the study of visuals in relation to each other through the main principles of composition, namely, the distribution of the information value, visual salience and visual framing. Kress and van Leeuwen define the information value as *“the placement of elements <...> with the specific informational values attached to the various ‘zones’ of the image: left and right, top and bottom, centre and margin”* (ibid.: 177). The authors describe the opposition between elements which are placed in different sides of the page: left and right. They suggest considering the images on the left as being *“Given”* (*“something the reader is assumed to know already”*) and those on the right as *“New”* (*“the issue”*). However, Bateman, Delin and Henschel criticize this claim and state that *“the analytic procedures for establishing to what extent this could be a reliable property of layout rather than an occasionally plausible account are unclear”*, despite the fact that this kind of analysis *“provides a ready vocabulary for reading more out of page design than would otherwise be possible”* (Bateman et al., 2004: 66). According to the authors this kind of classification of *“Given/*

New” forms assumption, that people read pages in a linear manner though other alternative sequences may occur as well.

Another visual aspect of compositional meaning is visual salience. Kress and van Leeuwen state that visual elements aim to attract viewer's attention to a different degree and this can be achieved by using such elements as, for instance, the placement of background and foreground, size and colours.

Colours as another aspect of visual salience are used to convey certain meanings and can be analyzed in greater detail. Kress and van Leeuwen state that *“colour clearly can be used to denote people, places and things as well as classes of people, places and things, and more general ideas”*. This means that certain colours are used for certain reasons. Machin adds that a colour is an *“important semiotic resource that can be studied systematically”* (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 229). This means that there are certain systems which can help to understand what kind of message colours convey. In addition, Kress and van Leeuwen suggest six different scales which can help to understand the meaning of colours in the multimodal text. They are value, saturation, purity, modulation, differentiation and hue. According to these six scales suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen, pictures in a multimodal text can be described and evaluated in a more accurate way. In addition, scales of value, saturation, purity, modulation, differentiation, and hue help to understand the message which is conveyed through the usage of certain colours. Colours can create positive or negative

effects or carry certain meanings which can be decoded by using these scales.

The last element of compositional meaning is *framing* (Ibid: 177). Kress and van Leeuwen acknowledge that the presence or absence of framing devices disconnects or connects elements of the image, signifying that they belong or do not belong together in some sense. The

sense of disconnection can be created through many ways, for example, thick or thin framelines, empty space between elements, contrasts of colours or forms. The connection can be achieved in the opposite way, namely, by highlighting similarities of colours and forms, and the absence of framelines and empty spaces between elements as well.

CONCLUSION

Multimodality can be viewed as the measure for strengthening the information that has to be communicated to the audience. The delivery of information can take different shapes from written and spoken texts, images, sounds, etc. Though researchers describe multimodality using different terminology, in essence they focus on very similar issues that encompass audio, spatial, gestural, visual and linguistic matters. The concept of multimodality is also understood as a certain mode. Modes can include writing, image, moving image, sound, speech, gesture, gaze and posture in embodied interaction. They have been shaped through

their cultural, historical and social uses and they realize a variety of social functions. Verbal information is often complemented with various pictures, images, photographs, music, videos, gestures, gazes, facial expressions, etc. Visuality in multimodal text can be analyzed while taking into consideration the representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning. The representational meaning includes such aspects as vectors and participants. The interactive meaning is created through facial expressions, gestures and perspective. The compositional meaning involves information value, visual salience and framing.

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