# Analyzing Multimodality in Specialized Discourse Settings

# Innovative Research Methods and Applications

# Edited by

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# **Foreword**

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The volume presented here offers new insights on the intersections between specialized discourse and multimodality. It brings together two fields of study—discourse and multimodality—that are increasingly illuminating each other. The growing awareness that communication is multimodal has led to the development of tools for the analysis of multimodal meaning, but the different strands of research have often kept the verbal and non-verbal elements of communication somewhat separate, with discourse studies often limiting their attention to the verbal component and multimodal studies often centering on the need to develop tools for the analysis of the visual component. It is high time that we looked at communication—and specialized communication in particular—in a more wholistic perspective, whether in spoken or written forms, especially now that digital communication has created so many environments capable of combining freely elements of written and spoken discourse with audio and video elements.

Digital technologies play a key role in the studies presented in this volume, both as tools for analysis and as the actual object of language investigation. In this latter perspective, the texts analyzed in the volume include websites and different types of videos (from forms of public communication to OpenCourseWare delivered by educational institutions). Digital forms of communication offer new challenges and new possibilities for communication research, combining different forms of multimodality and interactivity in the creation of new communicative formats and in the development of those traditional genres that have migrated to the Web. The digital transformation has contributed greatly to widening the spectrum of communicative forms in different fields of specialized communication as well as in educational settings. The rapidly changing formats of computer-mediated communication include websites, electronic books and journals, video-channels and many other formats, with their different affordances (Boyd, 2010) and medium factors (Herring, 2007), including the opportunity to combine text with image and/or video.

In particular, the Web has greatly increased the communicative tools available for mediating specialized knowledge to lay audiences (Garzone, 2019; Herring et al., 2013; Miller & Kelly, 2017). The transfer of knowledge to a wider audience or to other professionals is felt to be an important driver of the socioeconomic development of contemporary society, at a time when the whole

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knowledge system seems to be influenced by a number of changes, not only technological, but also economic and distributional (Cope & Kalantzis, 2014). In a knowledge-based society, great attention is paid to making research relevant to society at large and to transferring knowledge within and across communication settings in ways that involve active learning processes, so that knowledge can be used to favor personal growth or to change practices or viewpoints.

The present volume manages to cover a wide range of communicative situations centering on how the construal of meaning goes hand in hand with using multimodality in order to re-contextualize information for the purpose. Whether we are talking about political communication, corporate communication, health communication or academic discourse and educational settings, multimodality is an essential element of knowledge sharing. Digital formats have increased the possibility of integrating different semiotic systems as meaning-bearing resources (Jewitt et al., 2011; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020), thus also increasing the communicative power of texts and allowing for different kinds of interpretative tools on the part of users.

The literature on popularizing discourse has long paid attention to writer-reader relations (e.g., Calsamiglia & Ferrero, 2003; Myers, 1991, 2003) and to communicative strategies such as definitions, exemplifications, repetitions, reformulations, analogies and metaphors (Calsamiglia & Van Dijk, 2004), leading up to a focus on the processes of recontextualization and reconceptualization of knowledge (Bondi et al., 2015). The main purpose of this volume is to improve our understanding of the role played by multimodality in knowledge dissemination, by analyzing a wide enough range of contexts that can illuminate the main principles involved in the different contexts, from public communication to education.

From a methodological point of view, while keeping in mind issues of multimodal transcription (Baldry & Thibault, 2005) and a focus on multimodal genres (Bateman, 2008), different approaches are explored in the volume: multimodal social semiotics, multimodal discourse analysis, multimodal critical discourse analysis and multimodal interaction analysis. Most studies involve different digital technologies, from corpus tools to multimodal annotation tools. A particularly interesting area they contribute to is the educational perspective. Most chapters reflect—in different degrees—the need to develop an awareness of the role of multimodality so as to build comprehension skills using this awareness to achieve a fuller understanding of multimodal texts.

Multimodal research has long emphasized the need to teach multimodal literacies (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Cope & Kalantzis, 2020; Jewitt, 2008; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kress, 2003, 2010), but the systematic attempt to define a *Common Framework of Reference for Intercultural Digital Literacies* (CFRIDIL) (Sindoni et al., 2019) is much more recent and still needs to be implemented widely. The

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present volume offers a small but significant contribution in this direction, showing not only how multiple semiotic resources contribute to meanings and therefore how multimodality supports the process of knowledge communication, but also how the process of understanding can be supported by a heightened awareness of the role of multiple meaning-making modes, and by developing multimodal literacy skills in students and citizens in general. The opening chapter of this volume, for example, presents a well-structured model of corpus-assisted approach to online multimodal discourse analysis, reporting on teaching that was offered to different groups of undergraduate students to develop their digital and multimodal literacy in a study of health communication. Along similar lines, but with a specific focus on educational materials, Chapter 3 offers an insightful study of forms of engagement in OpenCourseWare published by Yale University.

The different sources involved in knowledge dissemination inevitably influence the purposes and the formats used. Different organizations will be interested in the role that websites can play in knowledge dissemination (see Chapters 5 and 6 in this volume), while universities and researchers may acknowledge the need to see dissemination as a strategic mission participating in the production of OpenCourseWare (Chapter 3) and general outreach activities (e.g., Talks at Google, Chapter 4), or in the promotion of individual studies (Chapter 2). Institutional communication is particularly interested in mediating expert knowledge to citizens, for example at critical times (cf. Chapter 7). In matters of heath or social care, the process also involves social campaigns and communication with or between individual citizens, patients and their families (cf. the variety of materials used in the study presented in Chapter 1).

The volume is the result of intensive work carried out over the past few years by the Pisa research group as part of a wider project on knowledge dissemination ('Knowledge dissemination across media in English: continuity and change in discourse strategies, ideologies, and epistemologies' PRIN 2015 no.2015TJ8ZAS). As coordinator of that project, I am particularly happy to be able to present this volume, which witnesses constructive collaboration between different universities and between scholars at different stages in their academic career, and can thus be seen as an important example of dialogue across institutions and across generations. As Founding Director of the interuniversity research center called CLAVIER (Corpus and LAnguage Variation In English Research) I am also happy to see yet another book that springs from the intense activity of the CLAVIER group, currently linking researchers with a focus on corpus linguistics and language variation in a discourse perspective at the Universities of Bari, Bergamo, Calabria, Florence, Milan, Modena and Reggio Emilia, Pisa, Rome "La Sapienza", Roma TRE, Siena

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and Trieste. It is our belief that the complexity of contemporary specialized communication requires constant collaboration and openness to new perspectives, like those offered here.

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# **Preface**

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The analysis of specialized discourse has close ties to traditional functional approaches to language study that highlight variation determined by situational and social factors of communication, as well as the topic and community of users involved (Gregory & Carroll, 1978). However, interest in specialized discourse among both language researchers and practitioners has been on the rise since the 1990s following Swales' (1990) notion of genre analysis for applications in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). With this approach, texts are analyzed according to recurring linguistic and rhetorical features, with particular reference to communicative purpose and the shared knowledge and experiences of discourse community in which they are used. A similar emphasis on the nexus between language and practice can be seen in Lave and Wenger's (1991, p. 85) concept of *community of practice* within learning environments in which "language is part of practice, and it is in practice that people learn".

Gotti's (2003) definition of specialized discourse brings together the approaches described above and further elaborates some key factors related to its sphere of application. Specifically, he characterizes specialized discourse as:

[...] the specialist use of language in contexts which are typical of a specialized community stretching across the academic, the professional, the technical and the occupational areas of knowledge and practice. This perspective stresses the type of user and the domain of use, as well as the special application of language in the setting. (p. 24)

With reference to the level of specialization of the discourse participants, Gotti (2008) further described two different communicative situations that can be broadly characterized as expert-to-expert vs. expert-to-non-expert. The first involves specialists addressing other specialists to report information or debate issues within a context of their shared knowledge and expertise. However,

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specialized discourse can also refer to situations in which specialists address non-specialists, typically in educational settings in order to explain specialized terminology, for example. While the first case entails "exposition" and the second case entails "instruction", both reflect a "specialist use of language" (Gotti, 2008, p. 27), and thus can be considered instances of specialized discourse.

It is also important to note the multifaceted nature of specialized discourse (Gotti, 2008), which is not limited to merely lexical variation linked to different content areas or disciplines but also encompasses particular morphosyntactic, textual, semantic, and pragmatic features. Moreover, for a comprehensive understanding of specialized discourse, the analysis should include non-verbal elements that may contribute to its distinctiveness. For example, in the specialized discourse associated with scientific communities, non-verbal semiotic resources (e.g., diagrams, graphs, tables) have been shown to be distinguishing features that support the interpretation of the verbal text. (Lemke, 2002).

The contribution of non-verbal forms to meanings in specialized discourse is likely to assume an increasingly prominent role thanks to ongoing technological advances that facilitate the creation and reproduction of multimodal texts across domains of usage. Indeed, contemporary society has witnessed radical changes in the field of communications concerning the ways in which the dissemination and distribution of messages and meanings occur (Castells, 2010; Iedema, 2003; Kress, 2010). Digitalization and the Internet have signaled an exponential rise in the circulation of multimodal texts in which semiotic resources are orchestrated to construct meaning in all areas of social life, across languages and cultures, and in diverse specialized discourse domains. This has foregrounded the need to examine the semiotic functions, the affordances, and the issues at stake in a range of multimodal discourse types (Jewitt, 2015), while simultaneously highlighting the importance of critical multimodal literacy in audiences and learners (Kalantzsis & Cope, 2013; O'Halloran et al., 2015). Specifically in the context ESP, multimodal texts offer a wealth of pedagogical opportunities that go beyond mere linguistic competency (Ackerley & Coccetta, 2007; Bonsignori 2016, 2018; Knight, 2011; Querol-Julián, 2010). Thus, the everexpanding variety of multimodal resources in specialized discourse settings, require further and deeper exploration. Yet, as observed by Belcher (2006), Prior (2013), and Plastina (2013), the role of multimodality in ESP settings remains a relatively underexplored area of research.

This volume comprises a selection of papers presented at an international conference held in Pisa in November 2019 entitled *Knowledge Dissemination* 

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and Multimodal Literacy: Research Perspectives on ESP in a Digital Age. 1 The conference brought together scholars from various countries who shared their research focusing on multimodality in the context of ESP in higher education settings. Specific conference themes included: research-informed analyses of multimodal/multimedia genres for ESP; corpus-assisted approaches to multimodal discourse analysis for ESP; multimodal corpora for ESP: design, methods, and applications; multimodal critical discourse analysis for ESP; and innovative multimodal ESP materials/methodologies for professional and linguistic development. The seven studies selected for this volume reflect these themes by offering innovative perspectives on research methodologies for increased multimodal understanding and/or applications across a variety of specialized discourse domains of interest to scholars and practitioners alike. The volume thus offers a glimpse at future directions in this dynamic and everevolving area of investigation that focuses on the synergy between verbal and non-verbal modes of communication in specialized discourse in the digital age. Each chapter explores an original domain of application and/or discourse genre; academic, economic, scientific, marketing, legal, medical, and political. The contributors approach multimodality from a range of theoretical and methodological viewpoints including synchronic and diachronic corpus-based and corpus-aided studies, critical discourse analysis, and systemic functional linguistics. Analytical tools such as multimodal (critical) discourse analysis, multimodal transcription, and multimodal annotation software capable of representing the interplay of different semiotic modes (i.e., speech, intonation, direction of gaze, facial expressions, hand/arm gesturing, and spatial positioning) of interlocutors are employed.

The volume opens with Chapter 1, "Corpus-assisted approaches to online multimodal discourse analysis of videos", where Anthony Baldry and Deirdre Kantz report on the nascent field of student-led construction and annotation of online video corpora. This chapter describes the cross-degree participation of students from medical and language-related degrees in the construction and exploration of a corpus of videos on the theme of Community Health Services. It reflects on the changing identity of healthcare services in English-speaking countries and reports on the contribution that this approach has made when stimulating students' awareness of such services made possible by corpus-based comparisons of online videos. As such, the chapter describes the benefits for different groups of undergraduate students who, in the wake of Covid-19,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The conference was organized under the auspices of the interuniversity research project "Knowledge dissemination across media in English: continuity and change in discourse strategies, ideologies, and epistemologies', financed by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (PRIN 2015 no.2015TJ8ZAS).

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need to gain as wide a vision as possible of the communication challenges raised by public health issues. More generally speaking, the chapter reflects on: key issues in multimodality such as the tools and methods used in the construction and annotation of searchable online video corpora; the value of learner analytics in allowing students, besides teachers, to search for and manage corpus data within a formative approach to self-assessment; promotion of students' digital and multimodal literacy and critical appreciation of service-oriented teamwork. Ultimately, the chapter is a reflection on the changing role of learner-centered and student-as-researcher methodologies in online pedagogical practices.

In Chapter 2, "Video abstracts in EMP: A corpus-based approach to the analysis of rhetorical structure in multimodal medical genres", Francesca Coccetta investigates the genre of video abstracts as a form of knowledge dissemination, that is, as an example of how researchers transcend the confines of research articles and reach an audience extending well beyond the members of their own research community. Yet this comes at a price for both researchers and ESP analysts: the former need to acquire specific competences to produce texts that make full use of a range of semiotic resources deployed in such media, while the latter need to develop methods for analyzing them for both research and teaching purposes. So, this chapter focuses on the video abstract, a four-to-five-minute film giving a snapshot of a research article by presenting the study's background, methods used, results, and implications of the research using the affordances provided by the film format (e.g., images, animations, sounds, oral and written discourse). In particular, the study investigates a corpus-based method of analysis of the video abstract genre to gain insights into the construction of this emergent genre.

Research on the interpersonal features of lecture discourse has shown that lecturers' use of the personal pronouns *I* and *you* are important linguistic means of establishing and maintaining rapport with student audiences, while rendering largely monologic discourse more dialogic in nature. Therefore, in Chapter 3, Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli's study "The *I-you* connection in Humanities and Social Sciences lectures: Multimodal insights" builds on this knowledge by expanding the analysis of the *I-you* connection in university lectures in humanities and social sciences disciplines to encompass the nonverbal dimension. *I-you* patterns were investigated in a dataset of six videorecorded lectures by integrating corpus methods and multimodal annotation software. Results showed that lecturers used *I-you* patterns (e.g., *I want you, I'm going to tell you*) to engage with the audience towards enhanced understanding and overall lecture experience. The verbal production of *I-you* patterns also cooccurred with other semiotic resources (e.g., prosodic stress, gaze direction, and hand gestures) in rich multimodal ensembles to shape and reinforce

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interpersonal meanings. No clear discipline-related trends in the lecturers' use of *I-you* patterns were detected. The findings can be applied in EAP/ESP settings to help L2 students to improve their lecture comprehension by becoming more aware of how disciplinary experts convey interpersonal meanings, also in the context of the specialized discourse communities to which they aspire in their post-academic careers.

Chapter 4, "Using Google Talks in ESP educational settings: A multimodal approach" by Elisa Mattiello, analyzes a small specialized corpus consisting of 10 Google Talks in the domains of business and economics from a multimodal perspective. It investigates how different (verbal and visual) semiotic modes are combined in Google Talks and, therefore, how these videos can be used as multimodal ESP materials for linguistic improvement and professional development. Drawing on the notion of intersemiotic complementarity, the study shows how verbal features can be integrated with still and moving visuals (charts, images, photographs, videos) and hand gestures (iconics, deictics, metaphorics) either to represent concrete data and figures, to explain more abstract concepts, or even to provoke the audience's emotional reactions. The study demonstrates that, although each mode has its specific affordance, in Google Talks different modes synergistically concur to meaning-making and successful communication. Therefore, in ESP educational settings, they can be employed to develop students' multimodal awareness in meaning-making processes, as well as to teach them how to exploit modes beyond verbal language to produce effective domain-specific text.

In Chapter 5, "Representations of the ideal workplace in multimodal texts: Employer branding on the Career pages of corporate websites", Costanza Cucchi and Francesca Seracini investigate Corporate websites as sophisticated tools targeting multiple addressees through different channels. This study aims to determine how multimodal texts available on the Careers section of corporate websites use presentation and involvement strategies to attract and inform the viewers and to communicate corporate values. The research was carried out on the Employer Branding Multimodal Corpus, which comprises both texts in which the companies describe themselves and state their values, and employee testimonials. The broad framework for the analysis of websites devised by Pauwels (2012) was applied and a corpus-assisted discourse studies approach (Partington et al., 2013) was used to analyze the corpus. The study also considered the visual component of the webpages, focusing on the ideational function realized by the images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Results shed light on the involvement devices used by the companies on their websites, and reveal that values such as positive interpersonal relationships, learning opportunities, creativity, innovation and inclusiveness are emphasized both through linguistic and visual elements.

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Chapter 6, "'What are Miranda rights?': The case of video FAQs on a criminal law firm website" by Gianmarco Vignozzi, aims to identify the specific linguistic devices and semiotic means that distinguish a peculiar popularizing genre that is often embedded in law firm websites, i.e., the video FAQs (frequently asked questions). Specifically, this paper is a case study of the video FAQ section of the website of an American law firm specializing in criminal law. The analysis shows that these expert-to-non-expert short videoclips in which lawyers answer set questions about crucial legal issues are rather unique as the specialized and professional knowledge they disseminate primarily has a promotional and engaging function. In fact, legal facts tend to be verbally and nonverbally popularized to reach the audience effectively.

Finally, in Chapter 7, "'As my Right Honourable Lady knows...': A multimodal critical discourse analysis of Prime Minister's Question Time comparing Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May", Veronica Bonsignori and Denise Filmer present the preliminary results of a pilot study on the multimodal construction of meaning in Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQs) during the premierships of Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May. The analysis focuses on two significant moments: May's last PMQs, a week before her resignation (22nd May 2019), and Thatcher's PMQs held one month before her resignation (18th October 1990). Extracts drawn from original television recordings are examined, accounting for verbal and non-verbal cues using the multimodal annotation software ELAN (ELAN, 2020). The multimodal critical discourse analysis framework (Machin & Mayr, 2012), and the discourse-historical approach (DHA, Reisigl & Wodak, 2001) provide the theoretical backdrop necessary to address the following research questions: 1) In which ways do semiotic and verbal resources work together to produce meaning (Jewitt, 2014; Kress, 2013) in PMQs featuring Thatcher and May? and 2) How do these women leaders compare in terms of communicating political messages and disseminating "knowledge" in the context of the predominantly male parliamentary culture? Initial findings indicate that, despite occasional similarities regarding the employment of rhetorical strategies for persuasion, the two women leaders have very different ways of delivering their message, both on the verbal and non-verbal levels, thus producing an altogether different effect on their interlocutor and audience.

The contributions presented in this volume develop and extend pioneering research on the intersections between specialized discourse and multimodality. The diversity of research strands contained in the volume illustrates just some of the vast areas of multimodal specialized discourse that are still unmapped. As a cornerstone of communication, multimodality needs exploring in all its facets. This volume aims to further that cause.

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# PAGES MISSING FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

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