




MULTIMODALITY & TRANSLATION

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Multimodality is the application of multiple literacies within one medium. For example, understanding a televised weather forecast (medium) involves understanding spoken language, written language, weather specific language (such as temperature scales), geography, and symbols (clouds, sun, rain, etc.). Multiple literacies or "modes" contribute to an audience's understanding of a composition. Everything from the placement of images to the organization of the content to the method of delivery creates meaning. This is the result of a shift from isolated text being relied on as the primary source of communication, to the image being utilized more frequently in the digital age. Multimodality describes communication practices in terms of the textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual resources used to compose messages.



Eija Ventola and Martin Kaltenbacher observe, although multimodality has long been ignored by scholars with an interest in reinforcing the boundaries of disciplines and research fields, it has "been omnipresent in most of the communicative contexts in which humans engage" (2004:1).

HISTORY


Multimodality (as a phenomenon) has received increasingly theoretical characterizations throughout the history of writing. Indeed, the phenomenon has been studied at least since the 4th century BC, when classical rhetoricians alluded to it with their emphasis on voice, gesture, and expressions in public speaking. However, the term was not defined with significance until the 20th century. During this time, an exponential rise in technology created many new modes of presentation. Since then, multimodality has become standard in the 21st century, applying to various network-based forms such as art, literature, social media and advertising.





MULTIMODALITY & MODES

Multimodality is typically defined from one of two perspectives: it can be described either as the coexistence of multiple modes within a particular context or as the process of decoding the coexisting modes from a viewer's or a reader's standpoint (e.g., Everett, 2015, p. 3). The latter emphasizes that coexisting modes do not actually interact unless they are being interpreted by someone; multimodality is understood as being the interaction of modes in the cognitive system of the viewer



In order to understand either of these definitions, we must reflect on what we mean by *mode*. Multimodal studies typically proposes that verbal language constitutes a mode (for a discussion of whether spoken language and written language can be understood as separate modes.

[Gunther Kress](#)'s scholarship on multimodality is canonical within social semiotic approaches and has a considerable influence in many other approaches as well ([writing studies](#)). Kress defines mode in two ways. In the first, a mode “is a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, speech, moving images are examples of different modes.”

In the second, “semiotic modes, similarly, are shaped by both the intrinsic characteristics and potentialities of the medium and by the requirements, histories and values of societies and their cultures.”



In Kress's theory, "mode is meaningful: it is shaped by and carries the 'deep' ontological and historical/social orientations of a society and its cultures with it into every sign. Mode names the material resources shaped in often long histories of social endeavor." Modes shape and are shaped by the systems in which they participate. Modes may aggregate into multimodal ensembles, shaped over time into familiar cultural forms, a good example being film, which combines visual modes, modes of dramatic action and speech, music and other sounds.



In social semiotic accounts [medium](#) is the substance in which meaning is realized and through which it becomes available to others. Mediums include video, image, text, audio, etc. Socially, medium includes [semiotic](#), sociocultural, and technological practices such as film, newspaper, a billboard, radio, television, theater, a classroom, etc. Multimodality makes use of the electronic medium by creating digital modes with the interlacing of image, writing, layout, speech, and video. Mediums have become modes of delivery that take the current and future contexts into consideration. Accounts in media studies overlap with these concerns, often emphasizing more the value of media as social institutions for distributing particular kinds of communications.




The non-verbal mode that has so far sparked the most research interest in multimodally oriented translation research is probably the still image. The role of images in translation has been examined, for instance, in print advertisements, children's picture books, comics and illustrated technical texts. Naturally, audiovisual translation is also an area of research where it is extremely interesting to consider the functions of modes and the overall modal configuration of a multimodal text. In filmic AD, for instance, visually perceived information is converted into an oral verbal form. In dubbing, the translation needs to fit into strict limitations posed by the other modes of the source text (ST; for instance, visual synchrony). In subtitling, the translation is presented as an additional mode—written text—which competes for the viewer's visual attention.




TYPOGRAPHY

Warde argues that "[t]he most important thing about printing is that it conveys thought, ideas, images, from one mind to other minds. [...] Type well used is invisible *as type*, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the translation of words, ideas" (1955: 13). Warde makes clear that she also sees typography as a conduit, by which "the mental eye focuses *through* type and not *upon* it" (1955: 16).



Warde's words echo Lawrence Venuti's discussion of the strategy of fluency (1995) as a way to de-emphasise the text's translated status. To date, typeface choice and other printing decisions have not been taken much into account by scholars of translation. This is perhaps a pity, because typography has, at different times and in different media, been quite active as a translation issue. The issue of the ideal typeface for subtitles, for example, has long been discussed in the industry; sans serif fonts are generally preferred as being easier to read (Diaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 84). Media consumers may have strong opinions about the adequacy of particular typefaces, colours, and so on; some fans draw a distinction, for instance, between the 'ugliness' of player-generated subtitles for films on DVD and the elegance of laser-engraved theatrical subtitles.



In sixteenth-century Germany Georg Rorer, who supervised the printing of the Wittenberg editions of **Martin Luther's translation of the Bible**, developed typographical 'aids' for the reader in the form of roman typeface in certain words. The idea (and we must remember the Reformation context in which this was taking place) was that roman typeface was used for negatively connoted words, while positively connoted words were presented exclusively in gothic (Flood 1993:133-135).

NEW MEDIA, NEW TOOLS

KATHARINA REISS'S TEXT TYPOLOGY:


Initial classification (1980s): “audio-medial function of language is supplementary to the:

- informative,
- operative
- expressive functions.

Later position (2000): multimedial texts must be considered a “hyper-type” which could in turn, be:


- informative,
- operative
- expressive in function.





Mary Snell-Hornby has suggested that we can define four different genres of multimodal text (2009: 44, some emphasis added):

- **multimedial texts** (in English usually called audiovisual, but not to be confused with "multimedia" in its loose everyday usage) are conveyed by technical and/or electronic *media* involving both sight and sound (e.g. material for film or television, sub-/surtitling);
- **multimodal texts** involve different *modes* of verbal and nonverbal expression, comprising both sight and sound, as in drama and opera;
- **multisemiotic texts** use different *graphic sign systems*, verbal and nonverbal (e.g. comics or advertising brochures);
- **audiomedial texts** are those written to be spoken (e.g. political speeches).



As Littau (2011) has persuasively argued, with changing media technologies (manuscript, print, changes in paper quality and bookbinding; web-based texts and hyperlinking) come changing theories of translation. It makes sense then that the saturated multimodality of many texts today would require both a new, or at least a rethought, critical and analytical toolbox, and potentially also new approaches to translation. Rick Iedema has argued that multimodality "provides the means to describe a practice or representation in all its semiotic complexity and



AGENCIES IN MULTIMODALITY

In-flight magazines: publishers, editors, sub-editors, copywriters, translators, graphic designers.

Film production: directors, censors, translators, distribution companies.

NEW PROFESSIONS DERIVATIVE OF TRANSLATORS:

Localizer adapts a product or service into the language of any region or country. Language localization aside from the translation of written text could include: multimedia and video content, voiceovers and audio, websites, video games, software

Transcreator takes a concept in one language and completely recreates it in another language; applied to the marketing of an idea, product or service for international audiences.

WORD & IMAGE

- **Paratexts** – those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs, illustrations and publisher jacket copy are part of a book's private and public history (G. Genette. Paratext: Threshold of Interpretation (1997);
- Keith Harvey (2003) supplements **Genette's notion of paratext** with his own notion of "bindings": specifically, the outward presentation of texts in the form of book covers and blurbs.
- The notion of multimodality puts in question Genette's notion of paratext, in some texts all semiotic notes are of equal importance, word and image are inseparable.



The very notion of multimodality puts in question Genette's notion of paratext, with its distinction between what is 'text' and what is on the fringe of that text. With many texts we have an intuitive sense that certain semiotic modes stand in an ancillary relation to the text, with a framing function; thus the relation between images and written text in comics seems more 'integrated,' more essential, than the relationships between images and written text on, say, a book cover or in an illustrated story for children. We can imagine the book cover or the children's book with their images excised, or replaced; we cannot imagine the comic without its essential combination of text and image.



Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge point out that "the material form of a text always signifies," quoting Jerome McGann's observation that "apparitions of text, its paratexts, bibliographical codes and all visual features [...] are as important in the text's signifying programs as the linguistic elements" (Leighton and Surridge 2008:65). Leighton and Surridge's study of illustrated serial fiction in the Victorian period persuasively demonstrates how the location of illustrations within the text interacted with the serial presentation of the text in crucial ways. Many of these texts are now read in unillustrated editions. Leighton and Surridge argue that the illustrations were not merely ancillary, but in fact constitutive of plot, and that reading in editions which lack these illustrations leads to readers "failing to generate the visual knowledge bank that would have informed and guided the interpretive strategies of Victorian readers" (2008: 97).


MULTIMODALITY IN AUDIO-VISUAL TRANSLATION

Maria Tymoczko (2007, pp. 83-90) has proposed the idea of a cluster concept as a way to make sense of all translation in an inclusive way. In her words, translation “cannot [simply be] defined in terms of necessary and sufficient features” (Tymoczko, 2007, p. 85). Translations cannot be distinguished from other products or phenomena by some characteristic that all translations would have in common, but they do have “partial and overlapping similarities” which allow us to use and understand the concept of translation (Tymoczko, 2007, p. 85). Similarly, Luis Pdrez-Gonzalez (2014a, pp. 141-142) points out that even the field of audiovisual translation on its own is so diverse that it requires multiple definitions, and he





In fact, all multimodal translations must take non-verbal modes into account to some extent, and they may introduce new challenges to the translator's task, such as modifying visual information or introducing shifts in the translation of the verbal content so as to remain consistent with the non-verbal modes. The field of multimodal translation therefore inherently encompasses many special or marginal cases of translation.



According to Matkivska, while audiovisual translation involves rendering verbal components of video, the main feature is synchronizing verbal and nonverbal components. Audio-visual translations include media, multi-medial, multimodal, and screen translations, they mainly include rendering verbal messages into visual and auditory messages and vice versa with the help of gestural and digital images. Matkivska singled out G. Gottlieb's categorization of **four main channels of information** that must be taken into account while translating:

- (1) verbal audio channels;
- (2) nonverbal audio channels;
- (3) verbal and visual channels;
- (4) nonverbal visual channels

ACCESSIBILITY

- One of the major fields of multimodal research in translation studies has been that of accessibility, particularly the accessibility of multi-medial experiences (e.g. museums — Soler Gallego and Jimenez Hurtado in this issue) and entertainment products, e.g. films (Romero Fresco, Maszerowska in this issue), television (Cambra in this issue) and live performing arts (Oncins *et al.* in this issue).
- By definition, the multimodality of these texts places specific demands on the translator, but also creates a need for certain forms of access translation, in the form of audiodescription for spectators who are blind or partially sighted as well as subtitles





MULTIMODALITY AS CHALLENGE AND RESOURCE

— In subtitling, the multimodality of the audiovisual text is both a challenge and a resource for subtitlers. The image may impose severe challenges on the translator, e.g. through instances of verbal/visual puns, but through verbal/visual redundancy the other modes of the audiovisual text can also provide sufficient context to make certain verbal elements redundant, and thus make it easier to condense the text.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN MULTIMODAL TRANSLATION STUDIES

- As is the case with Translation Studies generally, it is impossible to delineate a single, coherent methodological framework for multimodal translation studies. In other words, both Translation Studies and multimodal translation studies are also cluster concepts in a methodological sense. Different types of multimodal translation may form interdisciplinary connections in different directions—audiovisual translation with film studies, technical translation with technical communication and videogames with human computer interaction

A crumpled yellow paper ball is positioned on the left side of the frame, partially overlapping the text. Below it, a simple line drawing of a lightbulb is visible, with the yellow ball acting as the bulb and a few lines representing the base.


Let's revise

- 1. What is multimodality?



2. The phenomenon of multimodality has been studied since

- the 5th century BC
- the 4th century BC
- the 20th century

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- A crumpled yellow paper ball is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially overlapping the text. Below it, a black line drawing of a lightbulb base is visible, extending from the bottom left corner.
- The phenomenon of multimodality has been studied since
 - the 5th century BC
 - **the 4th century BC**
 - the 20th century




3. What is *mode* according to Gunter Kress?

A crumpled yellow paper ball is positioned on the left side of the image, partially overlapping the text. Below it, a simple line drawing of a lightbulb is visible, with the yellow ball acting as the bulb. The background is a plain, light gray surface.

According to Gunther Kress, a mode is a resource for meaning-making, one used for representation and communication.

A crumpled yellow paper ball is positioned on the left side of the image. Below it, a hand-drawn lightbulb is visible, consisting of a curved line for the base and a small vertical line for the filament. The text is written in a simple, black, sans-serif font.

4. Four genres of multimodal text according to Mary Snell-Hornby are...

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- A crumpled yellow paper ball is positioned on the left side of the image, partially overlapping the list. Below it, a simple line drawing of a lightbulb is visible, with the bulb part being the yellow crumpled paper and the base being a simple line drawing.
1. ***multimedial*** texts
 2. ***multimodal*** texts
 3. ***multisemiotic*** texts
 4. ***audiomedial*** texts



• 5. Who defines modes in two ways and states that “mode is meaningful”?

a) Gunther Kress

b) Theo van Leeuwen

c) John A. Bateman

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- A crumpled yellow paper ball is positioned on the left side of the image, partially overlapping the first two list items. Below it, a hand-drawn outline of a lightbulb is visible, consisting of a curved line for the base and a small dot for the filament.
- a) **Gunther Kress**
 - b) Theo van Leeuwen
 - c) John A. Bateman
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A yellow crumpled paper flower is positioned on the left side of the slide. Below it, a black line drawing shows the stem and leaves of a flower.

6. Who supplements Genette's notion of paratext with his own notion of 'bindings'?

- a) Lisa Surridge
- b) Keith Harvey
- c) Mary Elizabeth Leighton
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a) Lisa Surridge

b) Keith Harvey

c) Mary Elizabeth Leighton

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A crumpled yellow paper ball is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially overlapping the text. Below it, a simple hand-drawn outline of a lightbulb is visible, consisting of a curved line for the base and a few horizontal lines for the bulb's body.

7. Why can multimodality be both a challenge and a resource for translators?



THANK YOU

FOR

ATTENTION!