

Multimodal (Inter)Action Analysis

Multimodal (inter)action analysis, which grew out of mediated discourse analysis (Scollon, 1998, 2001), Sociolinguistics (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1974; Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1984), and Kress and van Leeuwen's early thoughts on multimodality (1998, 2001) has evolved into a firm methodology with a multitude of heuristic tools and strong theoretical underpinnings.

In this presentation, I first discuss three main foci which build an important aspect of the theoretical underpinnings of the method. One, I discuss the focus on various levels of action from lower-level to higher-level as well as actions that remain embedded in the world in frozen form. Lower-level actions are the smallest meaning units in a particular mode such as a gesture or an utterance; higher-level actions are made up of (or make up) a multitude of lower-level actions such as a conversation or a class; and frozen actions are those actions that are often embedded in objects found in the environment, such as the action of painting may be embedded in a painting on an easel or the action of playing chess can be embedded in the particularly arranged chess pieces on a board. Two, I discuss the focus on social actors. In multimodal (inter)action analysis, social actors with their histories, their levels of attention and their thoughts and feelings are always at the centre of analysis. Third, I discuss the focus on mediation. All actions are mediated and mediation can be viewed as the glue that binds social actors with the actions that they perform.

Further, I explicate some methodological tools that build the modal density foreground-background continuum of attention/awareness of a social actor using diverse examples. Here, I illustrate how we can analyse those aspects that have usually been termed 'context' in discourse analysis. Social actors usually pay attention to (and are aware of) several higher-level actions at a time. For example when you are conversing with another social actor and you are having dinner, you are not only aware of the action of conversing, but also of the action of eating; and if you are at a restaurant, you are also aware of the action(s) that the waiter(s) perform and are aware of the actions of people around you. While you pay more attention to some actions, you do pay some attention to many others. As social actors, we are also quite good at knowing what others pay focused attention to and what others pay little attention to. In multimodal (inter)action analysis, the heuristic tool of modal density foreground-background continuum of attention/awareness helps us understand what social actors in (inter)action pay how much attention to.

In short, this presentation will cover the notions of (inter)action, foreground-background continuum of attention/awareness, modal density, modal configurations as well as historical body, and thoughts and feelings.