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Multimodal Discourse offers a theoretical framework for the study of communication in the modern world of multimedia. The book helps students of linguistics, cultural studies, and communication as well as journalists, photographers, designers, and others who work practically in the field of communication and design, to understand and differentiate the distinct levels of mass communication and their interaction. The authors also give an overview of the development of communication and discourse and show how this development is influenced by overall changes in society and social life. All the definitions of theoretical concepts and notions are further explained and illustrated by a great variety of examples. Linguists have shown that discourse is not only used and expressed in and/or by language; Kress & van Leeuwen also apply the term to music, architecture, and many other domains of culture. The notion of modes, however, is explained only in a very abstract way as “semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realization of discourses and types of (inter)action” (p. 21). Media, on the other hand, are described as the material resources being used for the production. Examples of modes mentioned by the authors are music, language, and images. The medium is supposed to be the material, such as a book (6).

In the first chapter, four different levels of communication that contribute meaning are introduced and defined: discourse, design, production, and distribution. The authors explain their concepts of multimodality (language, images, and sound can be used for the same discourse), stratal configurations (the division of labor and the different levels), and experiential meaning potential (“the idea that material signifiers have a meaning potential that derives from what we do when we articulate them” [22]; a singer may use a special sound quality, for example). The last term defined is “provenance”: “Signs may be ‘imported’ from one con-
text... into another, in order to signify the ideas and values associated with that other context by those who do the importing” (23); an example of provenance is to name a perfume “Paris” (23). The authors argue against the traditional linguistic assumption that meaning is made only once by stating that multimodal texts make meaning in multiple articulations within a single instance. Discourses are defined as “socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality” (4) that do not apply to linguistic expressions alone. They depend on specific social contexts and the interests of social actors in these contexts.

Design is supposed to stand between content and expression. It is a sketch or a blueprint of the expression of a discourse. However, they do not predetermine the materialities in which the discourse will be produced. The “actual material articulation” (6) takes place at the level of production. At this level, a medium – such as oil paint, speech, or music – has to be chosen. What might follow is the distribution, the “technical ‘re-coding’ of semiotic products and events” (21). As examples of distribution, the authors mention recordings of concerts. They make the important point that, nowadays, discourse, design, production, and distribution are often separated. Later on they refer to the work of Erving Goffman, saying that their concept of discourse is equal to his idea of the “principal”; the design is made by the “author,” and the “animator” produces it. However, specialists who work on one of those levels are expected to know the other levels, too. An architect has to know whether it is possible to produce the house that she has designed. Moreover, digital media can reunite distinct levels. In radio stations, for examples, sound programs are used to record, edit (design), and distribute speech and music. The first chapter is summarized in definitions of all the important terms and concepts introduced by the authors.

The second chapter explains the authors’ notion of discourse in greater detail. English and French home-and-lifestyle magazines serve as examples. Unfortunately, all illustrations are in black and white, although the authors stress the importance of color, which can function as a mode “and is used to articulate aspects of a course of living” (25). Colors, gestures, textures, objects, and so on add to the modes of speech and writing and can, according to the authors, often be more powerful than language. In the second part of this chapter, Kress & van Leeuwen show how changes in discursive practices are caused by changes in economic and social practices. They point out the “shift from a social organization around class to a social organization around lifestyle” (35) in Western society. This change causes the emergence of new modes for the articulation of discourse. It is very hard, incidentally, to follow the authors’ distinction between mode and media throughout this chapter and the whole book. First, “media” is defined as material and instruments, then color and texture are mentioned as examples of “modes.”

The third chapter is concerned with the concept of design. The general interest in design is an effect of multimodality. The question is “What mode for what purpose?” (46) This question can be asked because, today, more and more pro...
professionals are expected to be able to use more than one mode with the help of
digital technology. Thus, they have a choice and are not bound to one mode.
Moreover, a single person – in the field of journalism, for example – can report,
write, edit, do the layout, and publish, no longer dependent on other specialists.
What the authors do not mention is that nonprofessionals also have access through
professional modes like digital technology. It is necessary to examine how these
“hobby journalists” influence professional standards. This phenomenon can be
recognized in many other kinds of communication as well. On the other hand, the
question has to be raised whether it is desirable to have multi-skilled profession-
als. One cannot expect somebody to be an expert in an unlimited number of
modes. How does open access affect the quality of products? In other words, how
do professional and amateur communication influence each other?

In the fourth chapter, the authors describe production as “the communicative
use of media, of material resources” (66). A medium can be the body, the voice,
tools, or materials. Musical instruments, pens, and wood serve as examples. Kress
& van Leeuwen show that production does not just realize design but also adds
meaning. The same design can be realized with different materials. Thus, the
choice of the medium plays a role. A piece of music can be either sung or played
by an instrument, or both.

The fifth chapter focuses on distribution, which is generally explained as “re-
production” of an original and is often accompanied by a “sense of loss” (89)
when familiar contents are re-produced in new media. The authors describe the
transformation of distribution instruments into production instruments. This is
most prominent in the production of mixes and sampling in modern dance music.
Again, Kress & van Leeuwen do not mention that this also gives, in this case,
“non-musicians” access to the field.

In the last chapter, the authors recapitulate and suggest further research topics.
Discourse, design, production, and distribution are once again described and ex-
plained in relation to another example. Kress & van Leeuwen compare an adver-
tisement for a product for babies with a text from a magazine for parents. The
authors make the distinction between grammaticalization and lexicalization and
draw a connection between these two and producer and consumer. Generally, it
can be said that producers more often know the grammar (the rules) of a mode,
whereas consumers cannot recognize those regularities and thus have only lexi-

Multimodal discourse helps readers to understand the different levels of mass
communication and their development over time. It is very useful that Kress & van
Leeuwen explain all their concepts and terms with so many examples. However,
it might have been better if they had applied all terms to a limited set of examples, so that it would be easier to recognize the interplay of the different levels of communication. Moreover, the authors should have gone beyond defining the concepts. How can we make use of these terms and our knowledge about them?

Another thing that the book leaves out are the consequences of multimedia and multi-skilling. Although the authors write about the relation between social changes and multimodal discourse, they do not write much about the effects of multimodal discourse on society and the professions. *Multimodal discourse* makes students of communication and sociolinguists aware of the different levels of communication, but it does not deal with the questions that build around those concepts and their change and development over time.

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This volume of 12 individual essays is an important step forward in the literature on child language development. As the title hints, the book follows *Talking to children* (Snow & Ferguson 1977). Both volumes focus on input and language acquisition. *Talking to children* demonstrated the importance of phenomenon of baby talk and dealt with the nature of speech addressed to young children and different parental conversational styles. The title *Talking to adults* gives an impression that this time, more attention will be paid to speech used by children to adults, but that is not what it seems to be. Rather, the contributors here focus on how children participate in discourse with participating structures more complex than dyads – that is, when the audience is “larger” than just the child’s own mother, and when simplified registers are not necessarily used. The pioneering *Talking to children*, in contrast, was concerned mainly with dyadic interaction with a primary caretaker. The papers in *Talking to adults* aim to show that child’s participation in such multiparty talk seems to contribute greatly to the pragmatic development of children. The 12 chapters give an overview of empirical research concerning the acquisition of various discursive skills: explanations and narratives, control talk, affect, humor, telling a joke, telling lies, and bilingualism.

One common characteristic of the articles collected in this volume is that all pay much attention to the contexts, both cultural and interactional, in which lan-