Multimodal Social Semiotic Theory: Origins and Developments

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Introduction

This article provides a synopsis of the Multimodal Social Semiotic theory and its underpinnings in semiotics and social semiotics. It outlines the development of Multimodal Social Semiotic theory, tracing the broader theoretical structure from which this approach originates to enhance the understanding of its foundational principles and evolution. Given that the theory is primarily social-semiotic, this study discusses the constituent parts of the theory, starting with social semiotics. The starting point is with the objectives of social semiotics and its foundations in Functional Linguistics. Next, a discussion of the essential problematic issues in semiotics in contrast to social semiotics is tackled. Kress and Van Leeuwen's model of visual grammar is then recapped. What follows is an outline of the main assumptions and concepts of multimodality. Thereupon, social semiotics is discussed by showing its development as an approach within multimodality concerning its main concepts.

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Social Semiotics

Objectives and Conceptual Origins

Social semiotics is an interdisciplinary field that offers insights into how meaning is constructed in society. Bezemer and Jewitt (2009) state that social semiotics involves meaning-making and meaning-makers. Thibault (1991) notes that the primary concern of social semiotics is to originate analytical and theoretical frameworks that can account for meaning-making in a social context. Jewitt et al. (2016) explain, “The aim of social semiotics is to understand the social dimensions of meaning, its production, interpretation and circulation, and its implications” (p.58). Thus, social semiotics explores the social dimensions of communication and meaning-making by examining different practices and the social contexts in which they occur.

Social semiotics was first introduced as a concept in Halliday's work (1978), which put its conceptual foundations in linguistics. Halliday's seminal work in linguistics presents social semiotics as a concept used to refer to language. Halliday (1978) claims that language and society are interrelated, describing language as a "meaning potential" that evolves according to the requirements of a society at a particular time (p.34). He proposes that language is a social semiotic system that does not exist in isolation but is shaped by social processes, including culture, ideology, and interpersonal relationships. In Halliday’s Functional Linguistics (1978), language is a product of social processes, and it must be interpreted "within a sociocultural context" (p.2). The concept

of meaning potential implies that linguistic signifiers have signifying potentials rather than specific meanings and need a social context (Van Leeuwen, 2005). In summary, language is deeply intertwined with social and cultural factors.

Social semiotics employs Halliday's assumption that language results from social processes (Adami, 2016; Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016). Hodge and Kress (1988) examine how semiotic systems are used in social practice and endorsed Halliday's assumption about "the primacy of the social dimension in understanding language structures and processes" (p.vii). Halliday's social semiotics is chiefly functional: "Language is as it is because of what it has to do" (Halliday, 1978, p.19). Halliday (1994[١٩٨٥]) names four types of meaning potential as the metafunctions of language: experiential, logical, interpersonal, and textual functions. He maintains that every sign performs three functions simultaneously: ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The ideational metafunction expresses something about the world, the interpersonal metafunction positions people with each other, and the textual metafunction organizes and orchestrates semiotic choices.

A central premise of social semiotics is that there is a wide range of cultural resources for meaning-making in which language constitutes only one part. Halliday and Hasan (1989) state that there are other modes of meaning along with language bearing meaning and constituting society and culture. The notion of social semiotics “drifted away” from Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics and expanded its vision from

language to semiotic systems (Andersen et al., 2015, p.17). Adami (2016) emphasizes that the view of language as socially framed was then developed to include all semiotic resources. The dramatically changing media environment led to the flourishing of new multimedia forms, which entail a multimodal approach to studying different semiotic modes (Hodge, 2016). Recently, social semiotics was expanded to include all types of signs that can be used for communication, not only language. It has been developed as a multimodal sign-making theory. Traditional semiotics has dramatically influenced the development of social semiotics. Although social semiotics draws on semiotics in the concept of sign, the view of sign differs in both fields. The following part describes the disputed points between semiotics and social semiotics. The shift from semiotics to social semiotics starts with the concept of sign.

Sign

In the 80s, social semioticians agreed on the centrality of the sign concept to social semiotics (Jewitt et al., 2016). “The word “semiotics” derives from the Greek “semeion” – “sign” – the smallest unit of meaning as a combination of form and meaning" (Gualberto & Kress, 2019, p.1). Halliday and Hasan (1989) define semiotics as ‘’the general study of signs’’ (p.3). They note that the concept of semiotics derives originally from the concept of the sign. According to Hodge and Kress (1988), a social account of semiotics has several prominent features. They argued against some of Saussure’s principles on

semiotics. It is necessary to identify the different views of signs in semiotics and social semiotics to explain the shift from semiotics to social semiotics.

According to social semioticians, Saussure's contribution to semiotics, although vital, was largely problematic as he places greater emphasis on the structural aspects of language and signs. In Saussure's model, the sign involves two main elements: the signifier – the form –and the signified, the concept to which the signifier refers. Saussure contends that the relationship between the two parts of a sign - a signifier and a signified- is arbitrary. Saussure (2011) explains arbitrariness as the absence of the "natural connection with the signified" (p.69). In other words, their relationship "is established by systemic, rather than naturalistic, criteria." (Thibault, 1997, p.278). Saussure (2011) proposes that their relation is maintained through convention or "collective behavior" (p.68). It means that the relationship between a signifier and its signified is not inherently connected or natural; instead, it relies on a convention or an agreement within a specific culture or language community.

Arbitrariness indicates the presence of strong social power, which can tie any form to any meaning; convention points to the effect of social power in keeping signs stable over time (Kress, 2010). Saussure (2011) claims that the concept of convention involves that meanings are immutable. In traditional semiotics, the relevant meanings are "frozen and fixed," to be decoded with "reference to a coding system that is impersonal and neutral, and universal" (Kress & Hodge, 1988,

p. 12). Although Saussure argues that fixed conventions in a given community determine meanings, Barthes argues that conventions are not static entities but dynamic products of collective social practices (Yan & Ming, 2015). Barthes (1968) built upon Saussure's concept of convention and emphasized its significance in highlighting language's social nature and culture's role in shaping meaning. He affirms that these products emerge through shared understandings among members of a given culture or society (Yan & Ming, 2015). According to Barthes, meaning is not given or inherent in signs but is constructed and affected by social and cultural factors. Barthes' expansion on Saussure's structuralist framework moved semiotics towards social semiotics.

Using the term ‘arbitrary’ prompted Hodge and Kress (1988) to interpret the bonds between signifier and signified in semiotics as subject to the "whims of an inscrutably powerful collective being, society." (p.22). This relation is contingent on agreed-upon social and cultural conventions in which an individual has no choice. Individuals cannot directly affect and change the language system; conversely, they are connected to the community's conventional social-semiological relations and practices, so they cannot participate in meaning-making in their community (Thibault, 1997). Saussure (2011) claims that once a sign has become established in the linguistic community, the individual has no power to change it in any way. Thus, individuals of a culture cannot create meanings; on the contrary, they must learn pre-existing cultural codes.

Interpreting these codes requires familiarity with the sets of codes currently in use to communicate meaning.

While Semiotics ignores the agency of individuals, social semiotics stresses their role as sign-makers (Kress, 2010). Social semiotics strongly emphasizes the concept of the motivated sign and the sign maker's agency. Kress (1993) emphasizes that in all human semiotic systems, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is always motivated and never arbitrary. Their relationship is motivated by the interest of the sign-maker, who chooses an apt signifier to express the meaning of the signified (Gualberto & Kress, 201٩). It refers to the purposeful creation of signs by sign-makers. The notion of convention in semiotics is opposed to motivation in social semiotics, whereas arbitrariness is opposed to the sign-makers interest (Kress, 2010). Thus, in social semiotics, sign-makers interests shape the newly made signs in specific social environments.

Another significant aspect of Saussure's semiotics is that meaning is made through sign systems (systems of codes). Traditional semiotics conceived semiotic systems as codes or sets of rules for linking signs and their meanings (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). This view of semiotic systems assumes that language and other semiotic systems are entirely stable and that people have a passive role in producing meaning (Jewitt, 2017). “Once two or more people have mastered the same code, it was thought, they would be able to connect the same meanings to the same sounds or graphic patterns and hence be able to understand each other.” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001,

p.134). In other words, in semiotics, we read signs using a system of codes that are exclusive to our culture. These codes are culturally driven to make a specific signifier have a particular meaning.

The social semiotic view of the sign differs from that of traditional semiotics, that is, a social system of meaning (Halliday & Hasan, 198٩; Hodge & Kress, 1988). While traditional semiotics focuses on signifying systems, social semiotics seeks to explore the use of signs in certain social situations (Chandler, 2007). Halliday (1978) argues that signifying systems "are not sets of rules but resources for making meanings" (p.192). Semiotic resources provide a different starting point for considering semiotic systems and sign makers' role in making meaning (Bezemer& Jewitt, 2009). For Halliday, language is shaped to express and institute social roles and values (Adami, 2016). He viewed language as a resource in which meaning is determined by the language system's choices rather than the structures. Therefore, social semiotics prefers the term resource to sign.

A basic premise in social semiotics is that meanings originate from social action and interaction, with semiotic resources as tools (Jewitt et al., 2016). Social semiotics prefers resources to signs because it avoids the impression that "what a sign stands for is somehow pre-given, and not affected by its use" (van Leeuwen, 2005, p.3). These resources are "constantly remade" and "never fixed" (Kress, 2010, p.8). Social semiotics conceives signs as made with various means and modes. In their description of Saussure's social devotion, Hodge and

Kress (1988) claim that Saussure "affirmed the social over the individual" but the abstract, immobilized form of the social order (p.17). According to Halliday and Hasan (1989), semiotics sees the sign as “an isolate, as a thing in itself, which exists first if all in and of itself before it comes to be related to other signs” (p.3). In contrast, social semiotics sees the sign as socially situated (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Hodge and Kress (1988) assert that “the social dimensions of semiotic systems are so intrinsic to their nature and function that the systems cannot be studied in isolation” (p.1). social semiotics emphasizes that the creation and interpretation of meaning are not isolated but are interconnected with social interactions and cultural contexts,

The primary difference between social and traditional semiotics is context (Höllerer et al., 2019). Thibault (1997) describes structuralism as a theory of ‘’abstract and decontextualized systems of signs’’ (p.5). The concept of semiotic resource looks differently at semiotic systems and the sign-maker's role in making meaning. Semiotic resources are inseparably connected to the context in which they are produced and received. Social semiotics is interested in inventorying how resources “are used in specific historical, cultural and institutional contexts” (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 3). In social semiotics, the sign is not ready-made or a pre-existing conjunction of a signifier and a signified in the way signs are usually used in semiology (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 20٢٠). Understanding semiotic resources is closely tied to their use within specific cultural and communicative contexts.

Conversely, the signifier and the signified are relatively independent until the sign-maker combines them in a newly made sign (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 20٢٠). Halliday (1978) regarded the relationship between signifier and signified as motivated by cultural, social, and contextual factors. Social semiotics holds that social, cultural, and contextual factors shape the "interests" of the sign-maker (Kress et al., 1997, p.269). Social semiotics stresses the role of sign-makers who have socially shaped interests with socially made resources during social interaction. The focus on agency and social context in social semiotics required a further social account of signs than traditional structuralist semiotics gave (Jewitt et al., 2016). In sum, social semiotics account for meaning in context. It grants the sign-makers great individuality and agency to use the available semiotic resources in the context to make meaning according to their needs and interests. The form and meaning of these signs stand in a motivated relation. They express the interest of individuals who use culturally available resources to represent their meanings. Social semiotics, on the other hand, emphasizes the sign maker's agency in developing the concept of the motivated sign. The following section presents Kress and van Leeuwen's visual design model, in which they expanded the scope of semiotics beyond traditional linguistic signs to include visual and multimodal forms of communication.

Visual Grammar

In an attempt to explain multimodal texts and realize that meaning is not limited to language, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) designed the visual grammar model. Visual grammar is set as a model of social semiotic analysis. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) developed a visual grammar that can be deemed a contemporary approach to meaning-making in visual texts. Moerdisuroso (2014) views that the study of visual arts entails visual grammar to play a more critical role amid the currently increasing visual culture that characterizes today's society. Kress and van Leeuwen's metafunctions of visual design are derived from Halliday's three metafunctions of verbal language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual, and were renamed as representational, interactive, and compositional. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) adapted Halliday's three meta-functions to describe the meaning of images and their combined use with writing (Adami, 2016). Visual resources are considered from a functionalist approach; they perform several metafunctions jointly to convey meaning like any semiotic resource (Stoian & Timişoara, 2015). Visual grammar provides a systematic way to analyze how visual elements are structured and combined to create meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen identified critical visual design elements, such as modality, framing, and vectors.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that visual grammar is "an account of the explicit and implicit knowledge and practices around a resource, consisting of the elements and rules underlying a culture-specific form of visual

communication" (p. 3). They note that this approach starts from the social aspect. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that social norms, values, and conventions shape the meaning of visual designs. This perspective aligns with the core principles of social semiotics, which focus on how signs are used within specific social and cultural contexts to convey meaning. It allows social semiotics to address better the complexities of contemporary communication, where visuals play a prominent role. Its emphasis on the visual aspect of communication has dramatically enriched the field of social semiotics. What follows is an account of the development of visual grammar to multimodality

Multimodality

Multimodality is defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) as "The use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event" (p. 20). Kress (2008) remarks that multimodality refers to "all the modes available and used in making meaning, in representation and communication" (p. 91). Multimodal research assumes that any interpretation of meaning nowadays cannot rely only or primarily on language; instead, it relies on a multiplicity of modes that have been socially developed as meaning-making resources (Adami, 2016). Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) work on mode and multiple modes led to an expansion of multimodality (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016). Multimodality examines each mode's meaning potential, accounts for each mode and how it has been shaped historically in different societies and cultures to fulfill

particular tasks, and describes the intermodal meanings in multimodal ensembles (Adami, 2016). Multimodality provides a framework for understanding how different modes work together to convey meaning, considering historical and cultural factors.

The attempt to shift the analytical lens of a social semiotic approach to multimodality from identifying and explaining the resources of specific modes to the semiotic principles that function within and across modes was a crucial advance in the early 2000s (Jewitt et al., 2016). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) state: "We move away from the idea that the different modes in multimodal texts have strictly bounded and framed specialist tasks . . . Instead we move towards a view of multimodality in which common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes" (p. 2). Iedema (2003) claims that multimodality requires considering semiotics other than language-in-use, such as music, image, and gesture. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) note that language is no longer a complete means of making meaning; it is one means among others. Considering semiotics other than language-in-use within the context of multimodality is fundamental to grasp the complexities of contemporary communication.

Over the years, there has been a growing emphasis on multimodality. This term became an important concept when the emphasis shifted to the collaboration of modes rather than the study of isolated modes. In 1998, Kress began to consider the change in many domains of public communication as a consequence of the simultaneous development of the potential

of electronic technologies. This change involves an increased use of visual modes of representation as a rival to language. Van Leeuwen (2017) describes multimodality as the study of how meanings are made in specific contexts through different semiotic modes – whether articulated with the body or with the help of tools and materials as it covers contemporary digital media, face-to-face communication, and non-digital types of text. In conclusion, multimodality is an area of study that explores how communication is conveyed through various channels, such as physical gestures and virtual platforms.

As mentioned earlier, interest in multimodality has arisen due to considerable societal changes. Contemporary society has become more networked by digital technology. It led to an explosion of multimodal studies. The study of multimodality has developed speedily due to the ubiquity of digital technology, which pervaded many monomodal areas and provided them with multimodal text design (Gualberto & Kress, 201٩). Online platforms contributed to the visibility of multimodality to an unprecedented extent by helping sign-makers publish their multimodal texts and disseminate them to various audiences (Adami, 2016). With technology advancements, we now have more opportunities to utilize multimodal texts than ever before.

Before multimodality, there were different monomodal approaches to meaning-making; some depended only on language when interpreting texts and practices, and others depended on visual meaning away from material manifestation (Iedema, 2003). In that period, different semiotic systems, such

as visual and verbal language, were viewed as separate systems capable of making meaning independently and side by side (Höllerer et al., 2019). The distinction between visual and verbal language was recognized as distinct systems of meaning. Then comes a stage that can be described as more polymodal, with a growing interest in the interaction between different semiotic modes viewed as more or less separate and affecting each other in complex ways (Höllerer et al., 2019). This stage entails intricate interactions between various semiotic modes that exert complex influences on each other. The dominant view now is multimodal, where meaning-making systems collaborate in complex combined acts of meaning (Höllerer et al., 2019). Understanding these stages and the concepts proves how multimodality is a dynamic field that continues to evolve.

The emergence of mode and multimodality concepts challenges the heretofore-settled notions of language (Kress, 2010). Multimodality emphasizes that language is just one resource among many resources for making meaning (Kress, 2013). It cannot provide a complete account of meaning but a partial one. The "partiality of language" implies that language plays the role of a partial bearer of meaning in a textual/semiotic whole since all modes in a multimodal ensemble contribute to the meaning of that ensemble (Kress, 2013, p.38). Texts are multimodal; therefore, language alone cannot adequately describe their meaning. This fact has been more apparent in recent years due to the social impact of digital technology on text production.

As a field of research, multimodality conceives representation and communication as depending on multiple modes that have been socially developed as resources for making meaning (Adami, 2016). This field has the potential to describe semiotic resources for meaning-making and inter-semiotic relations, develop research tools, and apply them successfully across a range of topics and contexts (Jewitt, 2017). The claim that norms can be understood only with respect to sociocultural context is supported by multimodal studies (Zhao et al., 201٤). A clear example of a new area in multimodal research is the multimodal facilities of digital technologies that significantly enable sound, movement, and image to join the communicational landscape (Jewitt, 2017). Multimodality emphasizes the diversity and richness of communication by using a wide range of modes to convey and interpret meaning. It highlights the importance of understanding these modes within their cultural and social contexts, which can lead to more effective communication.

Different theoretical perspectives exist on multimodality (Jewitt, 2017; O'Halloran, 2٠٢٣). Nevertheless, Jewitt (2017) states that all multimodal studies are based on four primary interconnected theoretical assumptions: first, meaning is created and received using multiple modes, not only through language; second, meaning is shaped through cultural, social, and historical means along with being contextually driven; third, people select and combine different modes to create meaning; and fourth, modes are social, where meanings are shaped by previously established norms and rules in various

social contexts. Jewitt (2017) offered a brief explanation of the assumptions underlying multimodality. It will be included in the following lines.

The first assumption central to multimodal research implies that communication involves using multiple modes, such as images, speech, gestures, and writing, relying on the fact that all communication is multimodal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). All modes have equal meaning potentials, including spoken and written language, part of a multimodal ensemble. Meanings are made and remade through various modes, not just through language. In line with this assumption is the notion that intermodal relationships contribute to meaning-making. The second assumption underpinning multimodality is that each mode in a multimodal ensemble realizes different communicative work. According to multimodality, all modes have been shaped through their social, cultural, and historical uses to realize functions. These modes adopt specific roles in a specific context and time. The third assumption underlying multimodality is about the selection and configuration of modes by people to orchestrate meaning. The interaction between modes is part of the production of meaning. Finally, multimodality assumes that signs' meanings are social. They are shaped by the norms operating during sign-making and influenced by sign-makers interests in specific social contexts. In summary, the appearance of multimodality in human communication can be attributed to a combination of evolutionary factors that have led to various communication modes that individuals use to convey information and connect

in various contexts. The social semiotic analysis in this study employs concepts derived from its perspective on meaning-making and multimodality. These concepts are discussed below.

Mode

Mode is a primary concept in multimodality. The multimodal nature of all discourse makes defining the concept of mode necessary. Kress (2010) defines mode as “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning” (p. 79). Jewitt et al. (2016) claim that a mode is a group of meaning-making semiotic resources that are socially organized, such as image, speech, writing, and layout. There are two modes: linguistic modes, in which language conveys meaning (e.g., spoken or textual), and nonlinguistic modes, in which communication does not rely on language (e.g., color or gesture). According to Kress (2010), the mode concept encompasses its social shaping and material anchoring as they result from a historical and social shaping of materials selected by society for representation.

Kress (2010) remarks that modes are shaped and reshaped over time and that each mode conveys only a part of the text's overall meaning and describes this process as the "division of semiotic labor" (p.1). Each mode has its potential, affordances, and limitations; each meaning is used for a specific purpose. Kress (2010) refers to this feature as "the semiotic reach of modes," which varies from culture to culture in a way that "What may be done by speech in one culture may be handled

by gesture in another" (p.83). Each culture has modal preferences; all modes are shaped as one field in a multimodal approach, and they are treated as one joint cultural resource for meaning-making by social group members at a particular moment (Kress, 2013). Halliday's metafunctional theory has played a significant role in defining modes (Höllerer et al., 2019). All semiotic modes can realize the three metafunctions and serve as a whole communication system (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010). Multiple modes of communication collectively contribute to the shared understanding and meaning-making within a given society or social group.

Multimodal Orchestrations and Ensembles of Meaning

The concepts of orchestration and ensembles are connected and yet distinct. Multimodal orchestration is collecting, organizing, and designing several signs in different modes into a specific order to form a coherent arrangement to meet the interest of the sign maker and take the shape of an ensemble through the design process (Kress, 2010). Thus, multimodal ensembles name the outcomes of these processes of design and orchestration. The multimodal ensemble is a term that refers to mutual relations between co-present modes and includes a variety of modes, such as written text with accompanying images and sound in a multimedia presentation (Lyons & Hua, 2015). Kress (2015) calls it "a designed complex of different modes" (p.57). Modes involved in the multimodal ensemble

have been selected with "rhetorical intent for their affordances, and the orchestration has been designed with the characteristics of the specific environment" (Kress, 2010, p.161). It means that these ensembles depend on the interest of the sign maker. In conclusion, multimodal orchestration produces multimodal ensembles. This product can be described as combinations and interactions of different modes within a specific communicative context.

Intersemiotic Relations

The relationships between and across modes in multimodal texts and interaction are central to multimodal research. Multimodal research tackles the interplay between modes and how each mode interacts with and contributes to other modes in the multimodal ensemble (Jewitt, 2017). This term may be helpful when considering how designed resources are used and examining the dynamics of the interaction between modes in a text or interaction. The following section considers Multimodal Social Semiotic Theory and its main concepts.

Multimodal Social Semiotic Theory

Multimodal social semiotics explores how various modes make meaning in a culture (Kress, 2005). The social semiotic approaches to multimodality have commenced by extending the social interpretation of language to the range of representation and communication modes employed in a culture (van Leeuwen, 2005). “The central point for the theory is: the social is the motor for communicational/semiotic

change; for the constant remaking of cultural/semiotic resources; and production of the new." (Kress, 2010, p.35). A social semiotic view of multimodality is an approach to human communication, representation, and interaction that embraces communicative modes other than language (Jewitt, 2017). Multimodal social semiotics is an approach to multimodal discourse analysis that considers all discourse as multimodal and discourse production as influenced by the context in which it is produced.

Multimodal social semiotic theory provides conceptual frameworks for the complex array of semiotic resources used to create meaning and specific procedures for analyzing the meaning emerging from the combined use of such resources in communicative artifacts and events (Liu & O'Halloran, 2009). It emphasizes the sign-makers and their choices in addition to the context that shapes the available resources for meaning-making and how these resources are selected and designed (Jewitt, 2017). Adami (2016) argues that social semiotics is interested in uncovering social values, ideologies, identities, and power roles expressed in texts and how individuals defend, validate, contest, and challenge them through sign-making choices. To conclude, social semiotic multimodal analysis outlines how people use modal resources in a given social context. The main concepts of the social semiotic approach to multimodality are discussed below.

Semiotic Resources

Semiotic resources in multimodal social semiotics refer to the various signs and symbols used across different modes of communication to convey meaning. Semiotic resources comprise systems of meaning that fulfill different functions, and therefore, meaning depends on choice and how different choices across various semiotic resources are combined in multimodal phenomena (Jewitt, 2017). Semiotic resources have meaning potentials arising from their materiality and the history of their uses in society (Adami, 2016). They are the product of the potentials latent in the material, of a society's preference for these potentials, and the over-time social shaping of the selected features (Jewitt & Kress, 2017). Understanding how these resources interact and are shaped by cultural and social contexts is essential for analyzing and interpreting multimodal texts in contemporary communication.

Semiotic resources have histories as they were invented with specific interests and purposes in different contexts (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). "Semiotic resources are the actions, materials, and artifacts we use for communicative purposes" (van Leeuwen, 2005, p.285). They are socially made and constantly remade (Kress, 2010). The diverse 'metafunctional configurations' of semiotic resources are neither universal nor inherent in their nature; instead, they are the outcome of their uses in society and their related values (van Leeuwen, 1999). Semiotic resources are the activities, products, and artifacts we employ for communicative purposes and the

organizational possibilities for these resources (Lyons & Hua, 2015). One of the central premises of social semiotics realized by Hodge and Kress (1988) is that there is a broader range of cultural resources for making meaning than language. Jewitt and Henriksen (٢٠١٦) state that the selection of meaning from a system is always socially located and regulated.

Modal Affordance and Meaning Potential

A social semiotic perspective sees the sign-making process as constantly dependent on the aptness of the available modes (Jewitt et al., 2016). The aptness of the chosen modes is crucial for effective communication, and the ever-changing dynamics of society and culture can influence this aptness. The concept of "modal affordance" refers to the idea that various modes offer various potentials for meaning-making (Kress, 2010; Jewitt et al., 2016). Affordances relate to the "potentials and constraints for making meaning" inside of modes (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 237). Meaning potential refers to introduced meanings in society, regardless of whether they are recognized, while affordance includes undiscovered meanings in objects. (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Affordances of modes are constantly reshaped according to the social needs expressed by those who make meanings; however, not all the potentials latent in the materiality of a mode are employed as affordances of that mode in a specific culture (Jewitt & Kress, 2017).

Van Leeuwen (2005) states that observers might notice affordances differently, depending on their interests and needs and the situation. Modal affordances influence a sign maker's

selection of a mode so that the social work that a mode has been utilized for in a particular context is linked to both the material and social histories of the mode (Kress, 2010; Jewitt et al., 2016). Different factors shape the affordance of a mode: first, by what it offers materially; second, how it has been repeatedly used to mean; third, in part by its provenance; and finally, the social conventions of using it in context (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016). Understanding modal affordance is crucial as it helps make informed choices about which mode or combination of modes to use when conveying information or ideas.

Motivated Sign

According to social semiotics, signs are always newly made and shaped by the interests of the sign makers in a specific environment (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2009). Therefore, the sign maker and the context of communication shape signs and meanings. Seeing that sign-making is motivated and transformative justifies the individual's choice of one semiotic resource over another (Jewitt et al., 2016). “Signs are made – not used – by a sign-maker who brings meaning into an apt conjunction with a form, a selection/choice shaped by the sign-maker’s interest” (Kress, 2010, p. 62). Jewitt et al. (2016) note that the term motivated sign expresses the aptness of fit between the meaning signified and the form signifier and that the sign maker’s interest at the time of making the sign determines the judgment of aptness of fit

Interest

Interest is an essential element of a social semiotic approach, acknowledging the agency and intentionality of the sign maker (Jewitt et al., 2016). The interests and intentions behind a person's selection of one semiotic resource over another are highlighted by viewing signs as motivated and continually being remade (Kress, 1993). The sign makers' interest provokes their choice of resources, seen as appropriate in the social context of sign production (Jewitt et al., 2016). According to Halliday (1978), the social functions that individuals use language to make meaning shape their semiotic resources (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2009).

Interest refers to how someone feels about an object or event and how they express and act on those feelings in a specific social setting. Other factors influence it in the situation that the individual considers essential. (Kress, 1993, p. 174). The interests of humans arise during their engagement with the world and each other through socially made resources. The choice of resources is influenced by the sign maker's interest, which is considered appropriate in the social context of sign production. Sign makers combine and connect the available semiotic resources to express the meaning they wish to convey at a particular time.

Design

Design is a way to express ideas in a particular communication setting (Kress &Van Leeuwen, 2001). Design highlights the interest of individuals in their world (Kress,

2010). In social semiotics, the term design describes the contextual process in which a sign maker selects semiotic resources and potential configurations for semiotic entities to be produced to serve specific social functions or purposes (Jewitt et al., 2016). Kress (2010) explains how each mode has a specific function in modal ensembles, which are based on designs that involve selecting and arranging resources for making a specific meaning about a particular issue for a particular audience. According to Kress (2015), design involves making interconnected choices based on assessing the communication environment.

Provenance

This concept focuses on the cultural, historical, and social contexts that shape communication practices. Adami (2016) notes that when sign-makers use a semiotic resource to create a sign, they reconstruct it by furnishing it with the meanings related to its provenance by their social group. A social semiotic multimodal approach investigates texts and representational practices as culturally and socially shaped. It uses this investigation to understand society and social groups, mainly how they form power relations and cultural values (Adami,2016). In multimodal social semiotics, communication often involves using multiple modes, such as language, images, gestures, and music. Provenance helps analysts understand how these different modes of communication are used, where they come from, and what cultural or social factors influence their meaning.

Findings

Social semiotics is a theoretical framework that explores how meaning is created and communicated through various cultural and social systems, including signs, language, and symbols. It seeks to understand how signs and symbols are used in various contexts and how they contribute to constructing meaning. Multimodality refers to using multiple modes of communication, such as text, visuals, gesture, and sound, to convey meaning. It implies that communication goes beyond just language and incorporates diverse semiotic resources in the process of meaning-making. Multimodal social semiotics build on social semiotics and multimodality principles and explore meaning-making processes in multimodal texts within cultural and social contexts.

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