Carmen Daniela Maier* & Anthony Baldry*

Transcription and Analysis of Multimodal Texts

The use of new technologies and innovative combinations of semiotic resources in the various fields of contemporary communication has brought multimodality into focus as an approach that can provide the tools for investigating complex texts. Multimodal research advances knowledge of semiotic resources such as language, images, sound, etc. and the ways in which their complex interplay creates meaning in a variety of texts that use different media. This thematic section of *Hermes: Journal of Language and Communication Studies* includes five articles which systematically use multimodal approaches to face up to the challenges posed by the transcription and analysis of these complex texts.

The section opens with Anthony Baldry and Paul Thibault's article, *Applications of Multimodal Concordances*, which continues and extends their long-standing work in developing new approaches to the transcription and analysis of visual texts and interactive digital sites insofar as it sketches out proposals that attempt to bridge between theoretical and applicative perspectives in multimodal corpus linguistics. It does so with particular reference to the development of the conceptual and software tools required to create and concordance multimodal corpora from the applicative standpoint and as such is designed to underpin the study of texts at universities in foreign-language teaching and testing cycles. One branch of this work relates to *multimedia language tests* which use concordancing techniques to analyze multimodal texts in relation to students' understanding of oral and written forms of discourse in English. Another branch is the exploration of *multimodal tests* concerned with the *explicit* assessment of students' knowledge of the principles and/or models of the textual organization of multimodal

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* Carmen Daniela Maier
Aarhus School of Business,
University of Aarhus
Fuglesangs Allé 4
DK-8210 Aarhus V
cdm@asb.dk

* Anthony Baldry
Dipartimento di Storia e Comparazione
degli Ordinamenti Giuridici e Politici
Università degli Studi di Messina
IT-98122 Messina
anthony.baldry@gmail.com

texts. As the two types of test are not mutually exclusive, a third branch of research thus relates to the development of *hybrid tests* which, for example, combine a capacity to analyze multimodal texts with an assessment of students' language skills, such as fluency in speaking and writing in English or which ascertain the multimodal literacy competencies of students and the differing orientations to meaning-making styles that individuals manifest. The paper considers these different applicative perspectives by describing the different categories of concordance achievable with the *MCA* online concordancer, by defining their relevance to multimodal discourse analysis and by illustrating the use of meaning-oriented multimodal concordances in the creation and implementation of *multimodal tests*. It concludes by suggesting that the re-interpretation of the nature and functions of concordances is long overdue and that the exploration of new types of concordance is salutary for linguistics and semiotics in general.

In the second article, *First Steps towards Multimodal Functional Concordancing*, Francesca Coccetta describes a pilot project set up at the University of Padua which uses the *MCA* online concordancer to make a small corpus of film texts accessible to language learners. The project allows students to investigate how the same language function is enacted by a set of different language forms while at the same time providing access to the *multimodal context* in which they are produced. The article illustrates some of the benefits that this approach brings to language learning and gives examples of teaching materials based on the film corpus which are designed to promote language learners' communicative competence.

The third article, *Multimodal Communication of Specialized Knowledge across Hypertext Innovation and Generic Tradition*, highlights the importance of detecting the kind of multimodal meaning-making structures that can be established when communicating specialized knowledge in a hypertext environment.

In this article, which also draws on a multimodal theoretical framework, Carmen Daniela Maier explores knowledge communication in interactive educational texts. The analytical focus is first on how specialized knowledge is multimodally constructed inside the generic framework of traditional lessons through different types of interactive exchanges and across several semiotic modes. The analysis also dis-

cusses how the linear reading path imposed by the generic structure of traditional lessons is disrupted by hypertext's meaning-making pathways. The article concludes that the stable generic structure of lessons combined with the openness of hyperlinks can be and, to some extent, is being exploited in websites to enhance the process of progressively acquiring, producing and exchanging specialized knowledge across several semiotic modes.

In the fourth article, *Engaging with children's graphic ensembles of an archaeological site: A multi-modal social semiotic approach to learning*, Sophia Diamantopoulou uses social semiotics and multimodality as tools to introduce a different perspective when it comes to building a descriptive and an interpretative framework for the analysis of children's production, which is taken to be representative of their learning. The article presents two examples from children's multimodal production as an opportunity to engage critically with what learning in an archaeological site means. The insight into the children's work is based on the assumption that learning can be multimodally mediated through a particular pedagogy and made accessible to us through the material realisation of children's production across multiple modes. The paper explores the implications of this position for generating knowledge about children's learning. Furthermore, it also discusses the importance of anchoring multimodality, as an analytical perspective, onto a theory with its own descriptive and interpretative language – in this case social semiotics and discourse theory.

In the last article, *Multimodal Literature 'Moves' Us: Dynamic Movement and Embodiment in VAS: An Opera in Flatland*, Alison Gibbons uses cognitive findings in order to analyze the expressive synthesis between word and image in multimodal fiction. Focusing on the 'image-text novel' *VAS: An Opera in Flatland*, written by Steve Tomasula and designed by Stephen Farrell (2002), this article uses cognitive-poetic analysis to explore multimodal printed literature. The examination of the visual elements is supported by theories from visual perception and multimodal research based on cognitive and perceptual methodology which is, in turn, strengthened by reflection on recent findings from neuroscience. The article thus presents a fresh approach to multimodality, which in keeping with the work of other multimodal researchers, considers all modes of meaning-making to be on an equal but collabo-

rative footing but which also considers the neurological and embodied aspects of a multimodal literary experience.