

Research Article

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Introduction and contents for special issue of Multimodal Communication 10 (1)

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Abstract: In this article we introduce this special issue of Multimodal Communication. We briefly describe the founding of the Multimodal Research Centre and the journal Multimodal Communication before introducing each of the articles featured in this issue.

Keywords: introduction; multimodal; special issue

1 Introduction

The AUT Multimodal Research Centre was founded by current director Professor Sigrid Norris in 2009 as a home base for theoretical and methodological developments in multimodal research, and a training ground for early career academics. An international conference in 2019 commemorating the 10th anniversary of the centre brought together researchers exploring new developments in multimodal research. This special edition of the journal Multimodal Communication contains a selection of five papers from this conference which raise particularly relevant questions. The timing of this publication also marks 10 years since the founding of the journal Multimodal Communication.

As the first research centre dedicated to multimodality the AUT Multimodal Research Centre represented an international turn towards multimodality in communication and interaction. This collective shift in research attention from language as a primary focus towards multiple modes has resonated throughout disciplines concerned with social interaction. A central stream of Norris's work (2004, 2011, 2019, 2020) has developed multimodal (inter)action analysis as a methodological framework for systematic analysis of multimodal data. The framework is applied widely, and PhD students and visiting scholars at the centre can now be found working in fields including linguistics, organisation studies, communication studies, creative writing, and deaf studies.

Researchers working in and visiting the centre have published several key articles over the past 10 years in the journal Multimodal Communication. Theoretical pieces highlight the primacy of action in determining the experience of space (Geenen 2013), this theme of action and identity is carried on through Norris and Makboon's (2015) analysis of objects and frozen actions in identity construction. Building on this work, Matelau-Doherty (2019) shows how artists express a fluid ethnic identity in their actions and frozen actions. Looking more closely at dyadic interaction, Pirini (2016, 2017) applies the mediated action to explore the key notions of agency and intersubjectivity in tutoring sessions. Expanding upon this focus on education, Bernad-Mechó (2017) shows the role of metadiscourse in the structuring of online lectures. A multimodal approach has proven especially useful for work with Deaf communities, and Tapio (2014) shows how semiotic practices of deaf communities have been marginalised. The journal Multimodal Communication with its highly respected editorial board continues to provide a venue for studies that apply a multimodal approach.

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In this first special edition of the journal *Multimodal Communication*, we publish five papers selected from the 2019 conference for their relevance to contemporary questions in multimodal theory and methodology. We briefly introduce each of these papers, highlighting their links to current questions.

Ferré conducts a multimodal analysis of video data selected from AphasiaBank, a multimedia database of aphasic and non-aphasic speakers, to compare the gestures performed by aphasic and non-aphasic people, and to examine the way in which people with aphasia develop their discourse. Using ELAN multimedia file annotation software (Sloetjes and Wittenburg 2008), Ferré coded gestures performed during personal narratives and found that the ratio for gesture-to-speech was higher for people with aphasia (PWA) than for non-aphasic people (NAP). Ferré's results confirm that gestures performed by PWA can serve two functions: to compensate for lexical deficiencies and to facilitate the retrieval of words. Ferré concludes with recommendations in relation to speech and multimodal therapies.

Examining speech development of children, Geenen uses multimodal (inter)action analysis to analyse the child directed interaction strategies (CDIS) within video-conferencing data samples to highlight the connection between CDIS and the development of certain socio-cognitive pragmatic abilities. Geenen shows that the child directed showing of material objects, facilitated by adult interlocutors, can support the progression of other spoken language communicative strategies, such as topic introduction. Furthermore, using scales of action (Norris 2019) as an analytical tool, Geenen illustrates that when children choose to engage in the 'showing,' this action brings multiple experiences into the immediate site of engagement, facilitating retrospection for the interlocutors, both adult and children. As such, these strategies can lay the foundations for further pragmatic development of communicative strategies.

With a shift in the type of data being analysed, Castaldi explores the effects of integrating Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies with Audience Research to analyse media. He raises questions about the illuminating effect of methodologies, and how to include aspects of the word that fall outside of that illumination. In this case, he adds the response of the audience to the text to his analysis. He conducts a case study using the documentary *Burma with Simon Reeve* (2018), and builds an analysis based on Audience Research combined with a critical discourse analysis of the portrayal of the actors and processes associated with the Rohingya crisis. The Audience Research consists of a pre- and post-viewing questionnaire and an interview with an individual viewer of the documentary. Castaldi shows that the documentary confirms some pre-existing ideological positions of the viewer, and also modifies some. Although the case study cannot indicate whether stable changes in ideology result, Castaldi points towards longitudinal studies that can track the changing or developing ideological positions of viewers. His work highlights limitations in a strictly text based multimodal analysis, including motivational and ideological reasons for interacting with a text, and his case study proposes a possible solution.

Continuing with an examination of audience reception, Blasch identifies multiple conceptualisations of authenticity circulating in political social media. Staying or being 'authentic' is a central pre-occupation in politics, as authenticity provides important social capital. However, with the support bases of politicians often deriding politicians and supporters from other parties, Blasch argues that markers or indicators of authenticity are different for different groups. That which might be seen as vulgar by one group is taken as a marker of authenticity and 'anti-establishment' by another. She argues that the social positioning of politicians as 'authentic' is dependent upon the interpretative repertoires of social actors. Going beyond an analysis of imagery alone, Blasch reveals the explicit positioning of politicians as authentic by campaign managers and their awareness of the semiotic tools to achieve authenticity for a target audience. Her work highlights the hyper manipulative political media landscape and some of the underlying contrasts in interpretive repertoire between different groups.

De Groot also raises questions of trust in his examination of WeChat payments in service encounters. De Groot combines mediated discourse analysis and multimodal (inter)action analysis to examine the way in which digital technology shapes face-to-face service encounters. With a focus on the communicative modes used to perform the lower-level actions that make up WeChat payments in supermarkets in China, De Groot highlights the potential consequences these encounters may have on the ways people share their personal information. De Groot argues that the use of WeChat payments in service encounters resemiotizes texts

and semiotic artifacts within the interaction. Digital mediation shapes and disperses interaction at these sites of engagement. Furthermore, the implications of using multi-service, super-sticky applications (like WeChat) to perform digital payments means that more information about the individual is being recorded, including the digital practices people engage in. How this information is utilised is unclear, prompting questions around privacy and disclosure of personal information.

The multimodal turn solidified the importance of taking the body, space, place, and history into account to understand and construct meaning. Ferré and Geenen illustrate the positive effects that a multimodal perspective can have on understanding language acquisition and language therapy. These two papers illustrate a more mature perspective on multimodal research. The difficult task of demonstrating the centrality of multimodal perspectives has arguably been completed many times over. The more difficult task remains to show how this perspective can and is being usefully applied in practice. One of many challenges facing researchers is a methodological one, and Castaldi's case study addresses the thorny question of the primacy of media or audience in multimodal critical discourse analysis, and he shows how integrated methodologies could address limitations. Lastly, Blasch and De Groot ask important questions about interpretive repertoires and ubiquitous social/digital media. What effects do these technologies have on political and retail behaviour? In summary, this collection of articles represents the sharp end of multimodal theory and methodology applied to central questions for society. We have been honoured to bring these articles together, and to commemorate both the AUT Multimodal Research Centre and the journal *Multimodal Communication*.

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