

BOOK REVIEW

Multimodality in Higher Education
Arlene Archer and Esther Odilia Breuer
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Multimodality in Higher Education, by Archer and Breuer (2016) deals with multimodal writing practices and pedagogies in tertiary education. With the boost of new technologies in the field of education, studies on modes of communication (e.g. writing) have focused on their evolution throughout the years, particularly in the learning process.

This book is aimed at educators and researchers who are interested in the writing communication practices required in a variety of domains, namely architecture, engineering or cultural studies among others. It is true that Multimodality has become quite complex in the past few years given that writing is regarded as a means of knowledge even in practical fields, such as science and media production. In this sense, this volume could be used as a resource book for those educators who want to reflect on the relevance of multimodal competencies when conveying a message, especially when they want to suit students' needs in the near future. At the same time, the content of the book is precise and easy to follow as it includes interviews and pictures that can help readers understand the changes that have taken place in the communication landscape.

Within the introductory chapter, Bezemer and Jewitt (2010: 180) state that the field of multimodality is one "of application rather than a theory". This concept has been present in higher education through pedagogies and texts that involve the use of pictures and new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Throughout the book, issues such as academic genres, verbal and non-verbal communication are reviewed. Other relevant topics are related to teaching writing practices taking into account

students' linguistic and social backgrounds, since these elements will aid them to construct their academic identities.

The volume consists of 11 chapters grouped in three main sections that explore a specific theme:

- Part 1 accounts for Multimodality in Academia (Chapters 1–4).
- Part 2 involves Multimodality in Text Composition (Chapters 5–8).
- Part 3 delves into Multimodality across Domains (Chapters 9–11).

The focal point of the first chapter is an interview with Gunther Kress, a well-known international researcher whose fields of expertise involve education, genre studies, and multimodality, among others. Kress accounts for four challenges that higher education is facing at the moment from a multimodal approach, those of knowledge, social, agency and non-native researchers/students. All of them have to do with what he calls *Umbruch*, a German word that stands for a period of change and transition. He points out the notion of knowledge should be re-examined in higher education institutions, since writing in the academic field has been the source traditionally accepted. The “social” has varied, that is, academic disciplines have developed over time, thereby having an impact on recent research. Chapter 2 illustrates the evolution of the lecture from a historical point of view. In fact, it presents the different written and spoken communication practices taking the Middle Ages as a starting point. Hence, it shows how the role of authority and learners in lectures has adapted to the contemporary era, which is characterized by the “triumph of the eye over the ear” (Clark, 2006: 36), due to the introduction of ICTs. In other words, this genre has proven to be flexible in terms of academic identity and authority as suggested by Thesen (2007, 2009a, 2009b). Lectures are regarded as a multimodal teaching practice where modes (written, spoken, gaze, image) interact with each other. The chapter that follows (Chapter 3) departs from a multimodal analysis of the research monograph. Despite being highly influenced by written language, figures, tables and other graphic elements are traits of a research monograph. According to Bateman (2008), its dominant mode is text-flow, which may vary depending on the discipline. So far, the author delves into two additional concepts in the chapter: medium and genre, which help to identify multimodal genre patterns within the Genre and Multimodality model (GeM) (Bateman, 2008). Focusing on this

GeM model, several aspects concerning content play a significant role in a research monograph, such as layout, visuals, cohesive devices and recontextualisation. The first part of the volume closes with Chapter 4 where the author discusses academic arguments, paying attention to non-verbal communication (i.e. visuals). Even though scholars state that images can convey messages on their own, limitations need to be acknowledged given that these visuals probably need to be supported by some kind of linguistic content. Hence, the chapter concludes that visuals depend on spoken or written communication to avoid ambiguous statements.

The second part of the volume is based on text composition from a multimodal perspective. Chapter 5 reviews the notion of multimodal academic argument, previously mentioned in Chapter 4. The author looked at the multimodal assignments of first year undergraduate students enrolled in a History and Theory of Architecture module. By means of pedagogical implications, the author remarks the need for a multimodal pedagogy to train educators. Chapter 6 introduces a discussion on how the use of digital media has not only influenced the emergence of new genres, but also the reconsideration of the existing ones. Moreover, being familiar with popular culture can help students produce multimodal texts at university. So far, the social relations generated by ICTs leads the author to reflect on this issue. Chapter 7 reinforces the idea that all texts are multimodal to some degree. The author focuses on six art and design writing projects, carried out by students who were free to combine text and imagery. However, in this multimodal texts a balance between freedom and restriction as well as between content and innovation was required. Part 2 of the book ends with Chapter 8, which emphasizes the need to share one's voice in academic writing. As it stresses the ability to display one's critical thinking as an author, writer identities are key. According to Clark and Ivanič's (1997: 137), there are three identities: a) the *autobiographical self*, in which the writer tells his/her life story; b) the *discoursal self*, which can be found in higher education and is related to the writer's field of expertise; and c) the *authorial self*, which corresponds to "the writer's sense of authority or authorial presence in the text" (p.137). The author claims that providing students with Image Theatre techniques in writing courses can encourage them to express their *authorial* and *discoursal* selves equally.

Part 3 of the volume includes Chapters 9, 10 and 11. Chapter 9 analyses intersemiotic relationships in undergraduate science textbooks, particularly American ones, which display text and images to make meaning. Including explicit instruction of these features in academic courses allows students to improve their writing and reading strategies effectively. Chapter 10 has to do with a case study carried out with postgraduate international accounting students. Following Halliday's *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (1985), the author describes participants' multimodal practices in a Management Accounting module. The fact that international students may have grown with a different linguistic and cultural background may affect their comprehension in higher education contexts. Therefore, issues like language (EFL/ESL) and culture need to be borne in mind. The last chapter (Chapter 11), based on the *Integrative Multisemiotic Model* proposed by Lim (2004), goes into the specific functions of the written components of Civil Engineering drawings, which are said to carry contextual meaning. These written components combined with pictures contribute to the overall meaning-making process.

All things considered, the volume is a good reference to think about the dissemination of knowledge in higher education from a multimodal approach. The authors do not only review traditional communication practices in academic settings, but they also include a variety of texts and visuals explaining the changes they have undergone in our society, more specifically in higher education institutions.

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