

BOOK REVIEW

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Systematically Working with Multimodal Data

Subtitle: Research Methods in Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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SUMMARY

Sigrid Norris' most recent work on multimodality presents a step-by-step introduction of how one goes about conducting a research project that utilizes that multimodal data. Anyone who has tried to engage the literature of multimodality would know that the field is quite vast, crossing disciplines, theories and methods. What Norris has accomplished here is to provide a neophyte with an introduction rooted in her own theory and method, multimodal mediated theory and multimodal and Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis. The audience for this work are undergraduates, graduate students, research professionals, and other English language studies researchers who are new to multimodal mediate discourse analysis theory and method. The text provides an excellent introduction to conducting a multimodal research project whether at the undergraduate, post graduate or

active researcher level of experience. The book is divided into eight chapters which walk a multimodal research enthusiast through the various phases of research from topic development, to research questions, data collection and analysis. Throughout the text one will find numerous notes and tasks that ground the reader in a multimodal research project.

Chapter 1 Introduction provides a very thorough overview of what the reader will find in the specifics of each chapter. More importantly, the reader will be cued in to how to use the book whether for a class or actual research project. Specifically, the section titled how to use this book (p. 17), which notes that for chapters 3, 4, and 5 the sections are useful for different levels of students or researchers: Undergraduate (3.1, 4.1, 5.1); Master's or PhD students (3.2, 4.2, 5.2); and PhD students or research teams. Each different section works with a different type of data (YouTube video, an experimental project, and a longitudinal ethnographic project). Section 1.1 covers a quick introduction to multimodal discourse analysis including, mediated discourse theory.

Chapter 2 Background, offers a number of principles, sub-principles, theories and definitions related to mediated discourse theory. I will only mention a few here that are important as they are reiterated throughout the text, including: the notions of perception and embodiment, the principle of social action, the sub-principles of communication and history, the mediated action, the social actor, the site of engagement, mediational means/cultural tools, lower and higher-level mediated actions, and the frozen mediated action. The mediated action is the unit of analysis and it involves the social actor (a human) performing a social action with a mediational means (a tool that is used to perform a social action. My writing of this book review can serve as an example of a mediated action where the mediated action I am performing is writing the book review and I am the social actor who is performing it. But the mediational means are numerous including: English language, the laptop I am using to write it, a specific form of literacy (academic writing), Sigrid Norris' book, as well as the notes and other inscriptions I have made throughout

her text. What mediated discourse theory analysis has done is to shift the focus of analytical attention away from language to include other modes of communication. Section 2.1 contains a discussion of the philosophical thought of Ron Scollon (Scollon, 1998, 2001, 2002; Scollon & Scollon, 2004, 2007) whose work multimodal mediated discourse is derived from.

Chapter 3 focuses upon Phase I which is data collection. Section 3.0 contains some great brainstorming tasks that could be implemented in a class with undergrads or graduate students. There are I believe some good maxims and ideas when developing a project, the most important being to find something that the researcher is interested in. The researcher is guided through ten steps of data collection: identifying a topic; developing research questions; what is data; what are naturally occurring data; ethics; video recording and camera placement; recording video data, taking field notes and interviewing participants; producing a data collection table; identifying the recording equipment (including: the researcher, video record (inter) action and animals recorded or not); and collating and time stamping. Sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 focus upon how the ten steps for data collection can be implemented for analyzing a YouTube video, an experiment and a longitudinal ethnographic study.

Chapter 4 focuses exclusively upon Phase II: Delineating the Data which involves understanding the data collected in the previous phase. Norris utilizes the site of engagement, the window of opportunity that opens up for a mediated action to take place, as a way for the researcher to understand their data. The researcher is placed analytically as performing a mediated action, “in order to understand that our own actions as researchers are mediated actions” (p. 120). As a researcher who has used mediated discourse, something I have occasionally struggled with has been the notion of the site of engagement which is kind of fuzzy in terms of how it is defined. How Sigrid Norris uses it in this chapter, and later in the book, was very helpful in thinking about how to use this concept. The reader is taken through the five steps of Phase II including: identifying your data set,

understanding the site of engagement that includes the researcher and the data set, identifying a data piece, understanding the site of engagement that includes the researcher and a data piece, and phrasing a research question that encircles your data (p. 127). Sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 specify how to implement Phase II in working with small, medium and large-sized data sets.

Chapter 5 draws our attention to Phase III, Selecting Data Pieces for Micro Analysis. Micro analyses are the hallmark of many multimodal research endeavors indicating the various modes and actions that make up one small segment of data. Phase III involves four steps: rephrasing your general research question, demarcating higher-level mediated actions, developing an overview of higher-level mediated actions in your data set, and narrowing the site of engagement. Sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 go into more specifics with regards to other sizes and types of data as in the previous two chapters: YouTube video, experimental data and larger scale longitudinal study. This is also the last chapter which emerges in this manner.

Chapter 6 involves Phase IV, transcription conventions. This chapter notes how, “all mediated actions communicate, lower-level, higher-level and frozen, communicate” (p. 199). Lower-level mediated actions entail the smallest pragmatic unit of a mode, for example one instance of a pointing gesture. Higher-level mediated actions are combinations of lower-level mediated actions that have a clear beginning and an end, for example a conversation among friends, a YouTube vlog post, or a university lecture. A frozen action is an action which is a part of an environment or an object that is evidence of a previous mediated action. These include objects in the material world such as statues or monuments, but can also include the placing of a smartphone on a table as well as signs in the linguistic landscape (Pietikäinen, Lane, Salo, & Laihiala-Kankainen, 2011). The importance of defining these terms here is that they are important in terms of how Norris defines the term mode, a system of mediated action (p. 201). More so how the steps of phase four emerge have to do with these different systems of mediated action. Phase four

transcription, involves 11 steps: identify a mode, transcribe layout, transcribe proxemics, transcribe posture, transcribe gesture, transcribe gaze, transcribe head movements, transcribe facial expression, transcribe object handling, transcribe language, and produce a final transcript. One transcribes the modes individually then brings them all together at the end. There is also room for steps for other modes to be added in (for example music) or left out if necessary.

Phase V is the focus of Chapter 7 which involves using analytical tools. There are four steps involved in phase five: select analytical tools for micro analysis, conduct a micro analysis by utilizing analytical tools, and select analytical tools. There are seven analytical tools: the lower-level mediated action, the higher-level mediated action, the frozen mediated action, modal density, modal configurations, the modal density foreground-background continuum of attention/awareness and semantic/pragmatic means. There are many tasks, notes, figures and detail exegesis that would help the reader to determine which analytical tools to use. Norris also discusses several analytical tools for intermediate/macro analysis: scales of action; the site of engagement, practices, and discourses; and time cycles and rhythms. Because of space constraints I will not go into specifics of these but it should be noted that these analytical tools provide the multimodal discourse analysts with a means of thinking about analyzing one's data from a micro analytical and macro analytical perspective.

Chapter 8 is a guide for instructors on how to use the contents of the book in specific types of classes or seminars. These include upper level undergraduate courses, graduate seminars as well as working with a research team. This chapter is meant as a reference tool for instructors for developing a course outline as well as how to use specific parts of the book prior to teaching. For example, Norris suggests that Chapter 3 is so long that it could in fact be used as the contents for an entire graduate course on data collection.

Evaluation

Systemically Working with Multimodal Data provides the neophyte multimodal researcher with a step by step approach to a multimodal research project. One of the things I have found helpful in this book was how Chapter 6, transcription walks the researcher through transcribing individual modes. For those who have worked with multimodal data one can often be overwhelmed in trying to analyze every mode at once. In addition, I find that this book complements other recent multimodal methods texts (e.g., Bateman, Wildfeuer, & Hiippala, 2017). A few things to keep in mind, not necessarily criticisms, but reflections on how to read the book. This book is not typical in how it handles a literature review as it does not detail the specific findings of studies but rather guides the reader in exploring certain works on their own. Because of this it took me some time to read through the first two chapters. If you read the book from beginning to end, the reader will find a lot of repetition. The repetition was intentional and that was how the book was designed for readers to read sections depending upon their level of experience, and the size of the research project that they wish to take on.

I would have like to see some of the analytical written work that came from some of the examples, however it should be noted that the author cites many of the articles that were developed from the different projects discussed in some of the sections. One minor criticism I have is how the data about YouTube was presented. As someone who has worked with videos that have been posted to this social media platform, I have found them to be quite complex. As far as mediated action is concerned, the action of posting the video to social media is itself a mediated action, not to mention the mediated actions in the comments section, shares, and the historical trajectory of a vlogger. I would have liked to have seen more attention paid to this type of data as readers familiar with Sigrid Norris's other work (Jones & Norris, 2005; Norris, 2004, 2011, 2014) would know that the majority of her research has focused on naturally occurring data of social interaction. I would have liked to have seen more on how this theory and method can

be used for non-naturally occurring data. Despite this minor criticism I found Sigrid Norris' *Systematically Working with Multimodal Data* to be a thorough and detailed step by step account of how one can implement a multimodal research project.

The Book Reviewer

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