A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN MEDIA

ION-SORIN LUCA

West University of Timișoara

Abstract: *This study attempts a multimodal discourse analysis of a newspaper article during the Brexit campaign. The aim is to help the audience decode and evaluate photographs and texts from media by providing a few strategies as guidance. The approach adopted for this analytical research is inspired by Halliday and Matthiessen's An Introduction to Functional Grammar (2004). Consequently, the objects in a photograph and words in a text function similarly conveying information to the audience, and additionally, involve a similar strategy of analysis. To sum up, these strategies are intended to improve the audience's comprehension of decoding article meaning and journalist's intention.*

Keywords: *Discourse Analysis, linguistics, multimodal, photograph.*

1. Introduction

This study attempts a multimodal discourse on several modes of analysis used in an online newspaper article during the Brexit campaign. The article is from *Daily Mail* (May 15, 2016) and is interpreted according to different modes of analysis used in multimodality. This study aims to help the audience paying attention to the approaches adopted by decoding and evaluating from online newspaper photographs and sentences. Besides, attention will be paid to objects in the image which are not taken at random but on purpose, and these modes include objects, words, colours, gestures, symbols, and the relation between these. Multimodal discourse takes account of the fact that many scholars paid attention to the analysis of words, clauses, or texts, but only a few who take account of both of the non-verbal and verbal language interpreting them together in the analysis of photographs or video clip with the text. Firstly, the study opens with a discussion of the multimodal discourse approach and the strategies used to decode and interpret the modes in the photograph. Moreover, there should be mentioned that theories and strategies used are applied in a top-down order according to Fairclough's dimensions from his book *Language and Power* (1989) as a frame and includes elements from Kress & van Leeuwen's work *Reading Images – The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006), and Halliday and Matthiessen's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2004) that pays attention to words and clauses from a functional perspective. Additionally, to the strategies mentioned, it will be added techniques of reading thoughts and gestures in an article derived from Peas' book *The Definitive Book of Body Language* (2004).

2. Theoretical Background

The term multimodality was used for the first time at the Sydney school of semiotics by M.A.K. Halliday and refers to the modes of analysis used that could be applied to objects and words inferred from semiotics. Besides, multimodality finds its roots in Prague School that was focused on linguistics and slowly shifted also in art and theatre interpretation. Additionally, these strategies developed in linguistics, and consequently, they were applied by different scholars to old paintings and photographs analyzing costumes as a source of information for a person status, age, religion, but also for period or event, settings, gestures or actions (van Leeuwen, 2015: 448). According to van Leeuwen (2015: 447), multimodality refers to the discourse which implies more characteristics of communication apart from

spoken discourse such as “voice, gestures, facial expressions or aspects of self-presentation”. Multimodality involves strategies used by the semiotic analysis which implies semiotic modes as image, sound, and language for interpretation developed alongside technology used in media. Also, Kress’s (2012: 38) perspective regarding multimodality is seen as an interdisciplinary field that comprises theories and approaches from different areas of research. One of those is linguistics that as any other field is treated equally and is a part of multimodality discourse that comes at the package as any other discipline to contribute to this approach. Each discipline implies a different knowledge specific to its mode of analysis. For instance, the analysis of the image that appeals to the history of art in which the language is involved partially. Consequently, there could not be a complete analysis of a text without the implication of other modes as it would be the knowledge of the subject which could imply certain objectivity, but it is masked by different interpretations due to the subjectivity of the participants (2012: 38). The carrier of the meaning in the case of a text is the language that with the help of other modes creates a unique interpretation by a listener, a reader, or a viewer, in this case of a newspaper.

The coherence of text implies the cohesion from a semiotic point of view creates the link between internal and external elements of the text. Through the coherence of the text, the real intentions of the writer or speaker are spread and picked up by the audience as an “immaterial discourse (s)” interpreted according to their knowledge and ideology that stands for “a specific configuration of discourse in any other text” (Kress, 2012: 36). An article is represented through “an ensemble of modes” which involves more or less five modes related to cultural knowledge and convention in the meaning. These modes are “layout, colour, writing, image and font” (Kress, 2012: 39). Each of them has its role, “writing tells, image shows, colour frames highlights, and layout and font” refer to the arrangement of objects from picture involving a certain reason for this (2012: 39).

The genre is the principle that makes it possible for modes to be seen as a body that implies several stages with “specific communicative functions” in a specific order with a specific purpose(s). Usually, in a newspaper, it starts with a hook for catching the reader's attention as “an enticement” (van Leuween, 2015: 454) to open somebody’s curiosity regarding a popular subject. Thus, the order of the text or the objects from the image is firstly settled to emphasize specific dates in arguments and persuade the reader or viewer. Besides, the interpretation of the text from an article could be done according to the strategies of Systemic Functional Linguistic, more specific, the transitive process. Consequently, the transitivity process which is part of ideational metafunction includes six types of processes that are represented through specific characteristics of verb functions in a clause. These processes are material, relational, mental, verbal, existential, and behavioural. Each of them according to the order presented implies characteristics as doing or happening, identification or characterization, way of thinking over an issue, reaction to an issue derived from a cause, description of an issue taken as real, and features from the consciousness reflected in the action of the actor. Besides, many analysts mentioned above adopted Halliday’s systemic functional linguistic to analyse also the photographs from newspapers attributing to the objects from photograph functions of words.

3. The Approach Adopted

According to Norman Fairclough (1989: 109), discourse implies three stages for critical analysis: “description, interpretation, and explanation of text”. The first one stands for “the formal properties of the text” (Fairclough, 1989: 110) and the way it is given, written, or spoken as an object of study. On the other hand, the interpretation refers to the “relationship between text and interaction” (1989: 141) emphasizing certain features: “experiential,

relational, expressive, connective or a combination between these" (1989: 141). More or less these are related to the three metafunctions from SFL elaborated by Halliday. Additionally, the explanation is "the relationship between interaction and social context" (Fairclough, 1989: 26) that stands for the status of the participants and their knowledge or ideology reflected in a specific social situation. Moreover, Halliday's metafunctions are ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 29). "The ideational metafunction" includes two functions "the logical and experiential". The first one stands for the meaning of a clause and its "logical-semantic meaning" related to other clauses. Additionally, the interpersonal metafunction implies different characteristics of the previous one which is inferred from clauses as "offers, orders, asking questions, giving information or expressing attitudes" specific to a certain topic (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:30). Besides, Fairclough highlights that Halliday's metafunctions are intertwined and could be simplified involving a sociological viewpoint than linguistic. Consequently, this study will accept Halliday's functions specifying that the textual function is following Fairclough's viewpoint (2003: 27), in other words, being encapsulated in the other two functions. Besides, the text interpretation using SFL requires the reader to possess knowledge of grammar skills for splitting the text into clauses and identify the transitivity process. For example, the headline of the article is split and noted as "(1a) D Day hero Lord Bramall leads attacks on Boris Johnson's 'laughable' claim (1b) the EU's superstate ambitions are like Hitler's". Thus, the verbs' functions are interpreted to the characteristics of the transitive process mentioned above. Also, splitting all the text here is not possible for reasons of space. On the other hand, in the analysis of the image according to van Leeuwen (2008: 138), the analyst should take account of the "representation" of photography that is emphasized in three dimensions. Firstly, it is "the distance" in which the shot could be close or far. The next one is "the relation" which implies two elements one of "involvement and another of detachment". The first one is done from a frontal angle and the other from the oblique angle. The second element is "one of power" and refers to the level at which the viewer sees the image that could be high, eye-level, or low angle. Lastly, "the interaction" dimension refers to the viewer and the actors from an image whether they interact with him or not through their looks as a bridge of communication. If their look directly means that they are close to us, if not, their look is indirectly and mean that they are just like everybody else, strangers.

4. Analysis of the Article

4.1. Description

The article from Daily Mail which is analyzed is available at:
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3591180/Boris-Johnsoncompares-EU-HITLER-warns-ambitions-European-superstate-end-tragically.html>.

The headline of the article from the very beginning stands as a suggestive element for an assessment of the journalist regarding the old soldier's statements who was present in WW II against Boris Johnson's viewpoints regarding Europe. Anyway, the five sentences emphasizing the topics of the article as 'a lead' contradict the expectations of the reader. Besides, through 'intertextuality' the ex-mayor of London labels the EU with Nazi European Empire. The insertion of history in a political event is used to get an emotional effect from a certain period of British history against Nazi Germany alluding to Germany's dream of ruling all Europe.

Thus, the text is divided into 35 paragraphs including a schema related to the opinion reportage genre specific to the media field and reflects two interviews of two important actors in the person of Lord Bramall, a retired military who fought in WW II and ex-mayor of London, Boris Johnson. Their rhetoric remarks are expressed in the paragraphs which stand

for the specificity of the genre through introducing the most important aspect of information, a summary of the news fact, the quotations of the interviews, the addition of the new information, and the contextualization from a double perspective, situational context and historical.

4.2. Interpretation

The headline of the article anchors the reader directly in the background and context category until the end of the journalistic text standing for the main topic. The journalist appeals to audience knowledge and imagination to raise curiosity through the importance of insinuated consequences. Consequently, one of the signals, “D Day”, refers to a specific day in the calendar used by the military. Besides, in history, it refers to the battle during World War II of the allies against Nazi Germany. On the other hand, only mentioning Hitler’s name to the audience rejects any association with one of the darkest pages of humankind in which he is guilty of killing millions of people.

The first photograph is Boris Johnson’s and is situated in the proximity of the main topic even if the image is not from the interview given to *The Telegraph* is related to the headline. The distance of the shot reflects the familial zone and the closeness of him by the viewer, and the head down and eyes up implies a persuasive strategy that reflects his status. Additionally, the raised hand works for catching the audience’s attention like a magnet but makes also an allusion to Hitler’s salute. Anyway, the photograph was chosen for the allusion presented above as a support for text. Consequently, the photographer tries to express impartiality according to the oblique angle, but the proximity says the contrary. The lectern is the symbol of authority and the red color implies strength, determination, and good communication with his audience giving him the status of a leader. Moreover, the cube was chosen with the role of stability but at the same time for the value of traditions and taking back control. In contrast, Lord Bramall’s photograph is smaller positioned on the right side of the text from an angle which implies a shot taken from a long distance even if it is on zoom. Even if the military uniform denotes respect, admiration, and security, the dimension of the photograph in a similar way with those of advertising in a corner could be passed unnoticed. The uniform is situated on the right side of the article as a symbol of tradition, honor, bravery, but at the same time, the image of his looking out of the frame of shot could stand for a different world of the photographer.

The message of the third photograph of the bus refers to the amount of money paid by the UK to the EU and stands as one of the main factors of the referendum. First of all, the 350000000 pounds is the gross of money, not the net 250000000, where the amount of money net per year is 11 billion and not 15 billion, and additionally, the leavers do not also mention the EU’s money left in the UK such as regional funds and subsidies for farmers. In contrast, Cooper’s photograph as opposition to Johnson represents her with eyes up, a feature of superiority while her hands standing for the meaning of a reliable person. For Benn, the photograph, according to his position, implies an air of arrogance due to his unpleasant behaviour, related to his whistling lips and his hands in pockets looking uninterested in a conversation. The last shot is given by the video clip paused on Boris Johnson’s image standing as ‘*Do it or else you will suffer the consequences!*’ obviously, a clear ‘*Vote leave!*’ In addition, imperative signals express also the intimidation of the audience.

The transitive process starts from the headline (1a) with the material process which represents a percentage of 30.48 and stands for interpretation of characteristics such as doing and happening. Consequently, the actor “D Day hero” is also the theme and implies a triple meaning, a concern of the journalist, (re)action taken by the subject against a politician, and the topic about the journalist wants to give details. As the predicator “leads” suggests, the actor tries to clarify from experience the overstatements made by Johnson through the scope

“attacks”. Additionally, the apposition, “Lord Bramall”, highlights the identity of the actor giving a tone of astonishment to the text amplifying curiosity. In contrast to clause 1, no. 6 contains details as the circumstance of the cause “for comparing the EU . . .” which expresses the consequences of his intention. In both clauses, the real intention of D Day hero is highlighted and it contradicts the politician’s aberration. From the inner perspective of the actor, the topic is shifted in the outside world through the clauses 3bc, “fail” and “had done” in which Johnson’s claims reflect a possible context in which the EU will collapse. These statements are represented as a solid argument emphasized through a circumstance of location (time), “for the past 2000 years”, and as a long previous experience that stands for the incapability of being homogeneous as a state. This is related to Johnson’s competence as he wrote “an acclaimed book” on Winston Churchill. Johnson’s rhetorical skills are perceived in arguments and mentions of historical characters, for instance, through “history. . . repeated” (12c) and the multiple subjects “Napoleon, Hitler, various people” (13ac) in which the main topic is linked to the audience’s knowledge and the verbs appeal to distrust and fears mirrored from actions of the thirst for power as Napoleon and Hitler. On the other hand, Johnson’s position (21b) is harshly criticized by his opponents as through the scope “a nasty, nasty game” and ridiculized for his comments about European history related to political matters. In contrast, the journalist mentions (39a) a possible leaving of Cameron and suggesting that Johnson could be the one.

The relational process is represented by a percentage of 32.38 and stands for the outer world perceived by actors involved as Johnson, Lord Bramall, and obviously, the journalist according to the topic of the context through the two features, identification, and characterization related to knowledge and interests. The process (1b), “is like Hitler’s”, starts with the main concerning of the article and subject of the clause, “the EU’s superstate ambitions”, which is reflected from the very beginning in Johnson’s position and relationship with the EU and the way he interacts with the other actors involved in the Brexit referendum. The negative features attributed to Johnson are as an effect of an ex-military member due to his knowledge and experience and raises to the aimed audience curiosity and frustration. This idea is repeated also in clause 2c intensive through the carrier represented by the EU and Hitler to whom their attribute “similar political goals of a superstate” represent their desire of possession but without mentioning a different ideological viewpoint gives a negative connotation to the text. In contrast, the politician statement (4b) is sanctioned through the D Day hero’s evaluation, “simply laughable”. The relation of Lord Bramall with the context of WWII and the present social situation of Brexit could pass unnoticed but the reality lies in that experiences lived and in the absurd comparison with a peaceful context. Johnson’s relationship with the opposition is perceived in attributed syntagma “dog whistle attacks” (23). Besides, he is seen in (29b) by other politicians as “offensive and desperate” standing for inexperience, childish and ill-mannered. In contrast, his partners see in him “an effective historian” (37bc, 38b).

Additionally, the mental process represents actors’ way of thinking reflected in the verbs related to this. Thus, Johnson (16c) emphasizes his feelings regarding the EU as a state that should be respected, but this could not happen as the EU’s leadership creates chaos and dissension. Lord Bramall (18b) expresses clearly his opinion about Johnson’s viewpoint appealing to the audience’s knowledge through the adverb “too well”. Additionally, Paddy Ashdown (27b), a liberal democrat, thinks that the electors are exasperated by Johnson’s role-play of acting PM Winston. The issue is not that Boris Johnson expresses the way he feels regarding the EU but it is when there are more people (35a) who thinks the same.

The verbal process is seen as a (re)action and is represented by the verb “said” (2b) which stands for a verbal reaction of the actors on the purpose to affect electors’ behavior. The warning used by Boris Johnson regarding the history of the old continent (3a) offers

information known as true but introduced in present contexts through ‘intertextuality’ distorts the real information regarding the UK benefits. Additionally, Johnson’s remarks not once are contradictory. He accuses PM “undermining Nato”, and consequently, the security, which is the main characteristic of the alliance and the EU in which almost all the EU’s states are, is rejected (10b, 11a).

The existential process, represented by “there is” stands for the description of the main topic which belongs to the context, in this case, the description of trust regarding the EU (15e, 16a, 34) which shoots arrows to the past which functions as predictable consequences of context for future such as the dismemberment of the EU.

The behavioural process implies the features of consciousness and those of action from mental and material processes (16b) which reflects the position of Johnson regarding the EU as an effect of the outer world. This effect could be represented by the populism direction which is spread at the moment in Europe by representatives as Le Pen, Salvini, and Orban. Along the same line, his opponents describe his behaviour as he “flails his hysterical claims” (22a) and is directly linked to the topic. Moreover, his behaviour (22b) is reflected in Cooper’s enumeration which describes Johnson’s behaviour as deriving from his “shameful lack of judgement”.

Taking account of SFL the analysis reflects the fact that the journalist wants to create a strong bond with the audience denigrating the government and the EU before the Brexit referendum through a relational process (32.38%). The implication aims at a productive effect through the way the reader and the journalist (inter)act. This is seen in the percentage of the second process, the material one, of 30.48 which reflects the direction of acting given by the journalist. Furthermore, the information is given through the verbal process (23.81%) and is adapted to the interest and style of a journalist to support the institution’s interest. The great disappointment stands in the lower rate of mental (7.61%) and existential process (2.86%) which should reflect the rational and affective thinking regarding the issues encountered in the real world. And lastly, the mental behaviour (2.86%) being reduced almost completely to the text in an article and omitting visible body action features could be inferred from the verbal process and could be misinterpreted.

4.3. Explanation

From the very beginning, the aim of the article reflects political implications and is addressed to all types of audiences with the role of changing the manner of action of the readers. The arguments presented by journalist reflects three social concerns. Firstly, the EU is presented by Johnson’s statements as if a wise saying stood for old habits die hard. Secondly, an economic perspective is presented almost without raising flags as Johnson’s bus covers the explanation of the issue. Lastly, as in any political campaign, there is a newspaper, a television channel, or more to represent the interests of a certain party.

The first social concern hides a deep implication of a populism ideology that stands for a specific kind of class. Here the politician appeals to the past to open some wounds of the unhappy history of Europe. One of these reasons is the new world order after the second world war in which Britain lost its supremacy once with its dismemberment. On the other hand, the attack on Nazi Germany is a subtle allusion to nowadays Germany which from an economical point of view is ‘breathing down its neck’ and the UK is not used to be in second place. Anyway, having opinions on certain issues is something normal and solutions should be found to such disagreements not turning back and walking away. That is why the reactions of the opposition and the position of persons with experience as Lord Bramall never stop coming. The issue related to the economy in which the amount of money paid to the EU mentioned above and the arguments used by actors without experience or actors with experience but without a cold analysis distort the audience’s opinion from reality and

persuade it through appealing to British nationalism. It is something very common to be pushed in front of such political characters, experts in all fields that know all and nothing. Furthermore, the article is used as a subtle conclusion to disseminate indirectly opinions according to the institution's interests.

5. Conclusion

The study of multimodal discourse has demonstrated that without mentioning the strategies developed by these scholars it would be almost impossible to interpret a photograph or a text similarly. Moreover, if the audience reads the article, the journalist's aim is partially achieved only thinking of the photographs presented as proof that stands for a hook. The most difficult characteristic during the analysis is that of staying rational without any involvement of the belief or the ideology in the interpretation of the photography and the text. Besides, an interesting result could be obtained from a survey made on the photography and the text within the general readership of the newspaper.

Taking account of these defining characteristics is no need for other interpretations than the text and photographs stand for Brexit context which is also related to consequences of such a referendum for EU countries submitted to common law and security. The concern is the position adopted by the UK which could also be adopted by other states and could escalate as an act of rebellion against Germany and Brussel.

References

Books:

- Fairclough, Norman. 2003. *Analysing Discourse. Textual analysis for social research*, Routledge: London and New York.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*, Longman: New York.
- Halliday, M.A.K, Matthiessen Christian M.I.M. 2004. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Third Edition, Hodder Arnold: London.
- Kress, Gunther and Van Leeuwen, Theo. 2006 (1996). *Reading Images - The Grammar of Visual Design*. Second Edition. Routledge: London and New York.
- Pease, Alan & Pease Barbara. 2004. *The Definitive Book of Body Language*. McPherson's Printing Group.
- van Leeuwen, Theo. 2008. *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*, Oxford University Press.
- van Leeuwen, Theo. 2015. "Multimodality." *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Volume I and II, edited by Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin, Blackwell Publishers, Malden and Oxford.

Internet sources:

- Schulthorpe, Tim. 2016. "D Day hero Lord Bramall leads attacks on Boris Johnson's 'laughable' claim the EU's superstate ambitions are like Hitler's". *Daily Mail*". May 15. Available: [https:// www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3591180/Boris-Johnson-compares-EU-HITLER-warns-ambitions-European-superstate-end-tragically.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3591180/Boris-Johnson-compares-EU-HITLER-warns-ambitions-European-superstate-end-tragically.html) [Accessed: August 22, 2020].

Note on the author

Ion-Sorin LUCA is a PhD student in Philology at the West University of Timișoara and holds an MA in Philology. He works as a secondary school teacher. His research has partly been published in prestigious journals and international volumes.