

INTRODUCTION

Cognition, communication, discourse.

2019, 19: 15-19.

<http://sites.google.com/site/cognitiondiscourse/home>

DOI: 10.26565/2218-2926-2019-19-01

UDC: 811.111'22

ENACTIVE MEANING-MAKING IN THE DISCOURSE OF THEATRE AND FILM

Iryna Shevchenko

(V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine)

1. Approaches to meaning-making in multimodal discourse

Interest in the broad multimodal issues of theatre and film by philologists and language scholars has increased over the years with the growing role of media in society. There have also been multidisciplinary studies that apply and develop discourse, cognitive, intersubjective and intersemiotic approaches to the analysis of meaning-making in theatre and film. All of them are rooted in theories of semiosis, underpinned by the Peirce model comprising a sign, an object, and an interpretant, providing a translation of the sign. Lately, the growing interest to interpretation has stipulated a “meaning-making turn” in numerous studies of literature, theatre and film.

In cinematic and theatre discourse studies, there is a broad variety of approaches to meaning-making, which share the ideas of ‘added’ information in a screen version or play as compared to the original literary text, on the one hand, and of meaning ‘negotiated’ in theatre or film with the help of various semiotic resources, on the other. As Bateman and Schmidt (2012, p. 4) put it,

the most fundamental assumptions of all are that it is possible for a sequence of moving images to signal meanings that are not limited to are description of what the images show, that are describable independently of any putative authorial intent, and which enter into active negotiations of more abstract interpretations with recipients as more than equal partners (i.e., ‘pre-arrange’ and ‘pre-figure’).

The recent researchers’ focus on the role of communicants’ interaction in meaning-making has revealed the unstable and ever-changing character of meaning constructed in multimodal discourse of theatre and film. This perspective is underpinned by the understanding of embodied cognition of interlocutors as participatory sharers of the information (Freeman, 2017) and a cognitive-pragmatic approach to the construal of meaning-in-context. Starting with Gricean cooperation principles and Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory, pragmatics has always been cognitive in treating speech act interpretation and other issues as resulting from cognitive processes carried out in human minds. In Carston’s (2002) parlance, a cognitive conception of pragmatics as a mental processing system responsible for interpreting communicative stimuli (specifically, utterances) has transformed pragmatics from a philosophic to a cognitive science.

In its classic form, cognitive pragmatics highlighted the mental edge in communication studies:

Cognitive pragmatics “focuses on mental operations associated with the meanings conveyed in discursive situations: its subject emphasizes the construction and interpretation of meanings as mental / cognitive phenomena in human speech activity. At the same time, two pragmatics, traditional and cognitive, can only be talked about in terms of the researcher preference; they

form two promising research vectors – the communicative and the cognitive, corresponding to two aspects of linguistic pragmatics (Shevchenko, Susov, & Bezuglaya, 2008, p. 6).

The more recent developments in cognitive pragmatics tend to integrate speaker and hearer perspectives in a ‘participatory’ sense-making, or ‘intersubjective co-creation’ of meaning (Foolen, 2019; Di Paolo et al., 2018). Proceeding from the dynamic character of the interaction, this approach is a synthesis of cognitive pragmatics, intersubjectivity (Zlatev et al., 2008), and joint attention theory (Tomasello, 1999/2008; Turner, 2017). As Foolen claims (2019, p. 44), participatory sense-making is connected with modern enactive philosophy:

Enactive philosophy is a philosophy of mind that is characterized by a spirit of recontextualization. In this approach, the mind is not seen as something isolated from the rest of the world, as in Cartesian dualism, but as connected to body, the environment, and other minds; or, in a popular phrasing in this approach, it is embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive (the 4 E's, or 6, if one adds ‘emotional’ and ‘evolutionary’, as Johnson (2016, p. 120) proposes).

What is common to cognitive semiotics and participatory approach in cognitive pragmatics is their emphasis on dynamic, enactive, ‘on-line’ character of meaning-making. The advent of new framework in the analysis of multimodal discourse of theatre and film matches the need to explain meaning-making ‘on-line’: determine its mechanisms, find out semiotic resources, and interpret underlying intentions.

In multimodal discourse studies, researchers in semiology and linguistics can benefit from enactive, interaction related, and dynamics-oriented methodology. In linguistic perspective, modes are visual and auditory variable ‘information channels’ within a play or a film, such as sound, lighting, dialogue, music, and mise-en-scène, i.e., everything that appears in the shot or on the stage. Modes are inherently dynamic, which makes the study of multimodality increasingly attractive. Building on semiotic and cognitive research from recent decades, the relatively new field of cognitive semiotics appeared. As Konderak (2018) claims, cognitive semiotics is a transdisciplinary approach to meaning and meaning-making, and unlike traditional semiotics it focuses on the meaning dynamism:

It means that meaning is seen not as a static phenomenon (e.g. a fixed result of the process of interpretation), but as a process (e.g. of constant reinterpretation). “Dynamic” means that researchers are interested in change of meaning rather than in some “snapshot,” particular meaning at particular time. Language, for instance, is not seen as ready-to-analyze complete phenomenon, but rather as a process, where semantics, pragmatics as well as grammatical structures change due to various individual, social and environmental factors. <...> One of the leading ideas of cognitive semiotics is to describe and explain this dynamicity. <...>. In this view, meaning-making subject cannot be considered a passive information-receiver, but an active information-seeker (Konderak, 2018, p. 22).

These few references signal that both linguistic and semiotic theories become more and more transdisciplinary, and their developments move in social, cultural, cognitive, and pragmatic direction forming an approach capable of enhancing our understanding of language, thought, and semiosis in multimodal discourse.

2. Meaning-making in theatre and film: transmedial and multimodal issues

The papers in this thematic issue of *Cognition, communication, discourse* address the language – literature – art interface from a socio-cognitive pragmatic perspective with an emphasis on dynamic interactive nature of meaning-making in theatre and film. Linguists and literary theorists tackle the problems of meaning-making in theatre and film aiming to study multimodal and transmedial matters of human transaction with the world in its socio-cultural manifestations. Importantly, transmediality as one of today's most innovative communicative practices (Ojamaa & Torop 2015) draws attention to how meanings are made in verbal, audiovisual, and other sign systems and transformed by the given media, be it in filming processes or in the practices of theatre (Matito 2019).

The contributors of this issue use a broad range of both traditional semiotic and interaction- and dynamics-oriented approaches to meaning-making process, as well as to communicative impact of different modes of expression in theatre and film. Their articles draw attention to the synergy between discourse analysis, cognitive, semiotic, literature, linguistic, theatre, and cinematographic studies. They mainly concentrate on aspects of multimodality, transmediality, and intersemiosis in the discourse of English theatre and film.

The language – art interface has been in the focus of research on the material of cinematic discourse. Both multisemiosis and intersemiosis as ways of sense-making arouse great interest for the study of multimodal emotional meaning-making (Tetiana Krysanova's analysis) and for the intersemiotic translation analysis (the paper by Tetiana Lukianova and Alona Ilchenko).

Tetiana Krysanova's work suggests a valuable methodological explanation of constructing emotions in cinematic discourse. In her paper, she adapts an interactional-dynamic perspective on emotive meaning making in film underpinned by a more complex cognitive-pragmatic approach and uses theories of intersubjectivity, conceptual integration, and joint attention to speak about the multisemiosis of negative emotive meanings by verbal, non-verbal, and cinematographic semiotic resources. Her paper stresses the polycoded and multimodal nature of feature cinematic discourse, where a combination of visual and acoustic modes changes dynamically in the film time and space. As a result of the analysis of a broad material of cinematic discourse Krysanova claims, that negative emotions in cinematic discourse are emergent multimodal dynamic constructs resulting from the online interaction of verbal, non-verbal, and cinematic resources at the two stages of film making. The primary semiosis occurs in the screenplay, which presents a film cognitive model, and the secondary semiosis takes place in the film diegesis through a combination of different semiotic resources. This paper also distinguishes the main models of intersemiosis and combination patterns of multimodal semiotic resources of constructing negative emotions in film.

In their experimental research work, **Tetiana Lukianova** and **Alona Ilchenko** situate themselves within the intersemiotic translation approach to meaning-making in film and musical art. The data of their associative experiment, provided by the groups of amateur Ukrainian and professional English music reviewers, reveal the mechanisms of interpreting the multimodal texts (film adaptations and film-related soundtracks). In these two groups, the authors compare and describe means and procedures of intersemiotic translation: visual (light including), auidial (music and sound) verbal, and non-verbal semiotic resources of cinematic discourse, as well as symbolism in film, etc. The film adaptation brings about changes in the verbal mode, adds or omits information, but the audiovisual mode compensates for the loss, and cinematic semiotic resources (music, light, shot) contribute to the adequate meaning reconstruction. Lukianova and Ilchenko prove, that in the course of an intersemiotic translation of a verbal text (film scenario) into a soundtrack, meaning-making reveals its intersubjective spontaneous nonlinear dynamic nature. This may suggest that for sense-making in film, intuition and sensations are more powerful than linear rational reasoning.

This special issue of *Cognition, communication, discourse* also pays homage to an ever-important problem of a literary story and its screen version. **Zoia Ihina** in her paper focuses on

Miseen scène in the original and adaptation. She offers a new dynamic-based approach to the narrative organisation of the event in its internal symbolism. Zoia Ihina makes use of her post-doctoral experience in studying English Gothic narrative (Ihina, 2018) and explores narrative organisation of the event in the literary story “Nunc dimittis” by T. Lee and its screen version. The event is treated as a dynamic change of states with the known and the unknown confronting each other throughout the whole narrative. The literary story and its screen version (the filmic narrative) are brought to comparison in terms of the authentic retranslation that reproduces the original event in the cinematic medium in detail, but with minor fluctuations. In the article, the mode of retranslation is shown according to the pattern the original – a transponent, where the original is the initial, primary work, and transponents are the products of intermedial, or extra compositional reinterpretation. Both literary and filmic episodes of “Nunc dimittis” resolve into three types of miseen scène: (1) the enclosed mise en scène keeping all the participants inside up to its end; (2) the pass-through mise en scène that adheres to one of the characters who is in and out; and (3) the open miseen scène where the characters take turns in coming and going.

Anna Stepanova offers a style-centered approach to the study of the literature – art interface. She chose the theme of madness in an Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” and Claude Chabrol’s film for her analysis. In her paper, Stepanova treats madness as a cultural phenomenon and proves that it has different meaning in its romantic (Edgar Poe) and postmodern (Claude Chabrol) film interpretation. Embodied in literary (verbal) and visual plastic (cinematographic) forms, the romantic image of madness in Edgar Allan Poe’s story differs from a surrealistic form in Claude Chabrol’s film. In Poe’s story, madness is a local phenomenon, a state of human consciousness determining their behavior. In Chabrol’s film, on the contrary, madness is embedded in a cosmic experience, which corresponds to the postmodernist aesthetics of the film. This cross-cultural and intersemiotic analysis demonstrates how Chabrol uses surrealistic Buñuel’s intertext to play with the audience and change the interpretations of the end. As a result the film transforms Poe’s romantic-ironic interpretation of madness into a surrealistic image of the “tragic madness of the world”.

Following the topic of the theatre, doctor **Olena V. Marina** turns to the conceptual facet of the society—literature—art interface and studies the concept of LIBERTINISM in the English Restoration drama in a social-cognitive and pragmatic perspective adopting the theories of cultural linguistics. She claims that in the 17th century, LIBERTINISM is a discourse-generative concept of the Restoration and aims to find out its manifestations in drama. In the focus of her attention, there is both the dramatic discourse of the seventeenth century and social, cultural, and historical conditions that explicated the rise of libertinism in the Restoration drama. During the Interregnum, LIBERTINISM thrived along with the concepts of EMPIRE, HONOUR, LOVE, MODE, SCIENCE, TRADE, and WIT. Libertinism takes its ideas from extreme hedonism and rejection of all moral and religious dogmas. The royal court itself set an example which made libertine modes of behaviour attractive for the aristocracy and general public. Marked by the libertine ideals, seventeenth century playhouses disseminated the libertine ethos and gave rise to a new type of English identity, i.e., the English Restoration libertine-aristocrat.

To conclude, enactive, dynamics-oriented, interactive, and transdisciplinary methodologies become a meeting ground between linguistic and semiotic studies of meaning-making in theatre and film. Hopefully, the articles of this theme issue of *Cognition, communication, discourse* will have useful applications to investigate multimodal discourse patterns of meaning-making and the potential to situate the study of multimodal interaction within a broader interface of language, art, and cognition.

REFERENCES

- Barbieri, M. (2008). Biosemiotics: a new understanding of life. *Naturwissenschaften*, 95, 577-599.
- Bateman, J. A., & Schmidt, R.-H. (2012). *Multimodal film analysis .how films mean*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Carston, R. (2002). Linguistic meaning, communicated meaning and cognitive pragmatics. *Mind and language* 17(1-2), 127-148. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0017.00192> .
- Di Paolo, E., Cuffari, E., & De Jaegher, H. (2018). *Linguistic Bodies. The Continuity Between Life and Language*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.
- Foolen, E. (2019). Quo vadis pragmatics? From adaptation to participatory sense-making. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 145, 39-46.
- Freeman, M. H. (2017). Multimodalities of metaphor: A perspective from the poetic arts. *Poetics Today*, 38(1), 61-92.
- Johnson, M. (2016). Pragmatism, cognitive science, and embodied mind. In R. Madzia & M. Jung, (Eds.). *Pragmatism and Embodied Cognitive Science. From Bodily Intersubjectivity to Symbolic Articulation* (pp. 101-125). Berlin: De Gruyter,.
- Ihina, Z. (2018). Intermediality and polymorphism of narratives in the Gothic tradition. *Lege Artis*, 3/1, 80-123. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/lart-2018-0003> .
- Konderak, P. (2018). *Mind, Cognition, Semiosis: Ways to Cognitive Semiotics*. Lublin: Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press.
- Matito, F.D. (2019). The drift towards mockery in the context of the practices of Spanish baroque theater. *Hispanofila*, 185, 21-35.
- Ojamaa, M., & Torop, P. (2015). Transmediality of cultural autocommunication. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18 (1), 61-78. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877914528119> .
- Shevchenko, I., Susov, I., & Bezuglaya, L. (2008). Abris kognitivnogo vektora pragmalingvistiki [Anoutline of the cognitive vector of pragmalinguistics]. *Visnyk V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University*, 811, 3-7. (in Russian)
- Zlatev, J., Racine, T. P., Sinha, C., & Itkonen, E. (2008). Intersubjectivity: What Makes us Human? In J. Zlatev, T. P. Racine, C. Sinha & E. Itkonen (Eds.). *The Shared Mind: Perspectives on Intersubjectivity* (pp. 1-14). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Tomasello, M. (2008). *Origins of Human Communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
- Turner, M. (2017). Multimodal form-meaning pairs for blended classic joint attention. *Linguistics Vanguard*, 3, 1-7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingvan-2016-0043>.

Iryna Shevchenko – Doctor of Linguistics, Professor, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (4, Svobody Sq., Kharkiv, 61023, Ukraine); e-mail: iryna.shevchenko@karazin.ua; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2552-5623>

Ірина Семенівна Шевченко – доктор філологічних наук, професор, Харківський національний університет імені В.Н. Каразіна (майдан Свободи, 4, Харків, 61022, Україна); e-mail: iryna.shevchenko@karazin.ua; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2552-5623>

Ирина Семеновна Шевченко – доктор филологических наук, профессор, Харьковский национальный университет имени В.Н. Каразина (пл. Свободы, 4, Харьков, 61022, Украина); e-mail: iryna.shevchenko@karazin.ua; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2552-5623>