Journal of Philosophy and Linguistics
Research Article Peer-review, Open Access

The Pragmatic Potential of Polycode Texts in French Media Discourse

Marjona Mukhtorova[1]

Abstract: This article examines, from theoretical and linguo-semiotic perspectives, the pragmatic potential of polycode texts used in French media discourse. In contemporary media communication, information is increasingly shaped not only by verbal linguistic means but also through the mutual integration of photography, graphic imagery, typography, color, composition, infographics, and other semiotic resources, which creates the need for a communicative-pragmatic study of polycode texts. The main purpose of the study is to define, from a theoretical standpoint, the concept of the pragmatic potential of a polycode text, to identify the mechanisms of its formation, and to characterize the addressee-oriented communicative effect of verbal and visual codes in French media discourse.

Keywords: media discourse, polycode text, pragmatic potential, multimodality, linguo-semiotics, verbal code, visual code, communicative intention, addressee, pragmatic effect, persuasion, interpretation.

[1] *Teacher, "Renessans School"*

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the rapid development of digital communication, the nature of the contemporary media text is undergoing fundamental change. Whereas in traditional written communication the principal carrier of meaning was verbal language, in the contemporary media environment communicative content is generated through the joint operation of various semiotic resources. In particular, alongside verbal text, means such as photographic images, infographics, diagrams, color, font, graphic elements, video footage, and compositional arrangement in media materials are also becoming integral components of the meaning-making process. For this reason, analyzing contemporary media discourse within the bounds of verbal text alone risks overlooking important layers of communicative content [1].

In research on multimodal communication, the combination of various modes of expression within a single document or communicative event is regarded as a distinct theoretical problem. J. Bateman studies multimodal documents as semiotic artifacts in which diverse means of expression — text, graphics, and image — operate together within a complex compositional structure. In his approach, understanding a multimodal document requires identifying not the individual components in isolation, but their mutual relationship and rhetorical organization [2].

G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, for their part, regard visual communication as a semiotic system capable of independent meaning-making, and systematically describe the communicative functions of image composition, the relations among represented participants, salience, framing, modality, and other visual resources [3].

Within the French tradition of discourse analysis, the theoretical approaches developed by P. Charaudeau and D. Maingueneau are of particular importance for the study of media discourse. Charaudeau treats discourse not merely as a sum of linguistic forms, but as a semio-linguistic process bound up with the communicative situation, communicative subjects, and discursive aims. Maingueneau, in analyzing communicative texts, stresses the need to link the structure of a text to its communicative situation, medium, genre, and mode of discursive manifestation. His approach provides an especially important methodological foundation for the study of the press, advertising, and other genres of mass communication [4].

From this standpoint, the pragmatic nature of the polycode text calls for separate investigation, since the communicative effect of a polycode text is not determined solely by the presence within it of several codes. What matters is the communicative purpose on the basis of which these codes are selected, the kind of relationship into which they enter, and how they direct the addressee's interpretation [5].

The problem of the polycode text has taken shape at the intersection of several directions in contemporary linguistics — text linguistics, semiotics, discourse analysis, pragmalinguistics, and research on multimodal communication [6].

In the theoretical study of this problem, R. Barthes's research on the relationship between text and image occupies an important place. Barthes laid the groundwork for viewing the visual image not as a simple object existing independently of verbal commentary, but as a system of signs that generates meanings and interpretations at various levels. This approach became one of the important theoretical foundations for subsequent multimodal research into the relationship between image and language [7].

In the social-semiotic approach developed by G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, visual communication is regarded as a distinct system of semiotic resources. In their conception, the placement, size, degree of engagement, framing, and other compositional means of an image participate in the creation of communicative meaning. In particular, their systematization of the "grammar" of visual design creates a methodological opportunity for the linguo-semiotic analysis of contemporary media texts [8].

J. Bateman substantiates the need for systematic, corpus-based analysis of multimodal documents. In his research, the multimodal page is regarded as a semiotic artifact composed of several layers; text, image, graphics, and layout interact with one another, giving rise to an overall rhetorical organization.

Within French discourse analysis, P. Charaudeau's conception holds particular significance. His semio-linguistic approach makes it possible to view discourse not as confined to the internal system of language, but as a unified whole encompassing the communicative situation, the communicative subject, and the processes of meaning formation. His research is among the important sources for defining the theoretical-methodological foundations of French discourse analysis.

D. Maingueneau argues that in analyzing communicative texts, the linguistic features of a text must be linked to its communicative situation and discursive genre. In his approach, the medium through which a text circulates, the genre to which it belongs, and how it is "staged" within the communicative situation are treated as important analytical categories [9].

However, in these studies the pragmatic potential of the polycode text has not been placed at the center as an independent category. This article therefore attempts to combine existing multimodal and semio-linguistic conceptions with a pragmalinguistic approach.

In our view, such an approach makes it possible to explain not only how a polycode text is organized, but why it is organized in precisely that way and how it affects the addressee [10].

METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis of the study is a complex linguistic approach. The research methodology is built on the following sequence: communicative situation → semiotic codes → inter-code relations → communicative intention → pragmatic orientation → addressee interpretation.

RESULTS

The concept of the "polycode text" is used in contemporary scholarly literature in connection with several closely related terms, including polycode text, multimodal text, creolized text, and multimodal discourse. However, treating these concepts as full synonyms gives rise to certain theoretical ambiguities. It is therefore important to distinguish their content, structural composition, and functional characteristics, and to clearly delineate the scientific-theoretical scope of each term [11].

In our view, polycodality primarily expresses the structural-semiotic property of a text. That is, in a polycode text at least two different sign systems enter into mutual interaction and participate in the formation of a unified communicative content. Multimodality, in turn, denotes the functional interaction and integration of these codes in the process of generating communicative meaning. From this standpoint, these concepts may be distinguished as follows: polycodality — the presence of various codes and their combination; multimodality — the functional integration of these codes in the process of shaping a unified communicative content; and pragmatic potential — the capacity of the integrated codes to realize the communicative purpose, to direct the addressee's interpretive activity, and to exert a particular cognitive, emotional, or behavioral effect upon the addressee. The differentiation among these concepts constitutes one of the principal theoretical positions of this study [12].

We interpret pragmatic potential as the sum of the capacities of particular linguistic and semiotic units, within the communicative situation, to realize the addresser's communicative intention, to direct the addressee's interpretive activity, and to exert a particular cognitive, emotional, or behavioral effect upon the addressee. Proceeding from this definition, the pragmatic potential of a polycode text manifests itself at three main levels: first, at the cognitive level — in activating the process of perceiving, comprehending, and semantically processing information conveyed through various codes; second, at the emotional-evaluative level — in shaping the addressee's emotional attitude and evaluative stance; and third, at the behavioral-communicative level — in directing the formation of a particular attitude, view, or action on the part of the addressee. Thus: pragmatic potential = communicative intention + semiotic integration + interpretive orientation + capacity for effect [13].

DISCUSSION

The pragmatic potential of a polycode text does not depend on linguistic means alone; it arises as the result of several interrelated factors.

1. Communicative intention. Any media text is created on the basis of a particular communicative purpose. Purposes such as informing, persuading, warning, evaluating, arousing interest, producing an emotional effect, or orienting the audience toward a particular position influence the selection of a polycode text's constituent components. For example, in informative material a photograph may serve to identify an event, whereas in political material that same photograph may well serve to shape a positive or negative image of a political figure. The selection of codes is therefore not communicatively neutral.

2. The verbal code. Within a polycode text, the verbal component performs the functions of naming, explaining, specifying, arguing, and evaluating an event. The headline, lead, main text, caption, hashtag, or brief comments may give the addressee direct or indirect instructions on how to interpret the other semiotic components. For this reason, the verbal code often functions as the interpretive guide of the polycode text.

3. The visual code. The visual component need not repeat the verbal information. It may: specify information; highlight a particular object; create an emotional background; intensify evaluation; direct the reader's attention to a particular point; or activate a latent communicative meaning. Kress and van

Leeuwen systematically describe the role played in meaning-making by composition, salience, framing, and other resources of visual design. For this reason, treating the visual component merely as a "supplementary picture" would be a methodologically limited approach.

4. Inter-code relations. One of the most important properties of a polycode text is the relationship between the verbal and visual codes. This relationship may manifest itself in at least three forms: a repetitive relation — the image re-expresses the verbal information; a complementary relation — the visual component provides additional information not present in the verbal text; and a contrastive relation — a certain discrepancy arises between the verbal and visual components, and this discrepancy generates additional pragmatic meaning. The third case is particularly important, since contrast compels the addressee toward active interpretation. Thus, as the semantic distance between codes increases, the addressee's inferential activity may intensify. This, in turn, may be regarded as one of the factors that increases the pragmatic potential of a polycode text.

In media discourse, the addressee is not a mere recipient of information but an active interpreter who combines the text's various codes to form the final communicative meaning. Maingueneau emphasizes that a communicative text must not be separated from its communicative situation; the content of a text depends on the medium through which, the genre in which, and the communicative circumstances under which it is received. In a polycode text this situation becomes even more complex, since the addressee decodes several codes simultaneously. For example: the headline → names the event; the photograph → gives the event a visual image; the caption → explains the image; typography → guides attention; composition → establishes the hierarchy among the elements. As a result, the addressee receives not the separate elements but the communicative whole formed by their mutual relationship. From this standpoint, the pragmatic potential of a polycode text manifests itself in its capacity to activate the addressee's cognitive, emotional, and interpretive activity simultaneously [14].

On the basis of the theoretical analysis, the following pragmatic functions of polycode texts in French media discourse can be distinguished. The informative function — provides the addressee with information about an event, person, place, or process. The orientational function — directs the addressee's attention to a communicatively important element. The evaluative function — shapes a particular positive or negative attitude toward an event or person. The persuasive function — orients the addressee toward accepting a particular opinion, view, or evaluation. The emotive function — activates an emotional response. The identificational function — helps to identify a person, object, or event. The interpretive function — guides how the text is understood through the interaction of its verbal and visual components [15].

Thus, the pragmatic function of a polycode text is not limited to mere "influence." Its effect arises through an integrated system of processes involving the selection, ordering, evaluation, and interpretation of information.

On the basis of the theoretical considerations above, we propose to represent the pragmatic potential of the polycode text in French media discourse through the following model:

The addresser's communicative purpose

↓

Polycode text: verbal + visual + graphic + typographic means

↓

Integration of codes → addressee's perception → interpretation → pragmatic effect

The essential aspect of this model is that it explains pragmatic potential not as a property of individual codes but as the result of their mutual integration on the basis of a communicative purpose. We therefore advance the following scholarly conclusion: the pragmatic potential of a polycode text depends not on the number of semiotic codes it contains, but on the degree to which these codes realize the addresser's communicative intention and direct the addressee's interpretation. This view makes it possible to distinguish the polycode text from the simple notion of a "multi-code text."

CONCLUSION

In French media discourse, polycode texts constitute one of the complex semiotic and pragmatic units of contemporary communication. Their communicative nature does not consist in the mechanical combination of verbal text with a visual component. On the contrary, a new communicative-pragmatic whole arises as a result of the integration of various semiotic codes on the basis of a single communicative intention.

Polycodality expresses the presence and combination of various sign systems within a text; multimodality expresses their mutual interaction in the process of generating communicative meaning; and pragmatic potential expresses the capacity of this integration to realize the addresser's purpose and to direct the addressee's interpretation. The pragmatic potential of a polycode text is shaped by factors such as communicative intention, the integration of verbal and visual codes, inter-code relations, context, the addressee factor, evaluation, and emotional expressiveness.

It was also established that the pragmatic effect of a polycode text manifests itself in three stages: encoding of the communicative purpose — semiotic integration — interpretation by the addressee. In this process the addressee proves to be not a passive recipient of information but a communicative subject who actively interprets the relationship between the verbal and visual signs.

According to the theoretical model proposed in the study, the pragmatic potential of a polycode text is shaped along the following sequence: addresser's communicative intention → semiotic codes → inter-code integration → pragmatic orientation → addressee's interpretation → communicative effect. Thus, the pragmatic effectiveness of a polycode text depends not on the mere quantitative abundance of its semiotic codes, but on the degree of their functional and pragmatic integration in accordance with a single communicative purpose.

REFERENCES

[1] R. Barthes, Image-Music-Text. London, U.K.: Fontana Press, 1977.

[2] J. A. Bateman, Multimodality and Genre: A Foundation for the Systematic Analysis of Multimodal Documents. London, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, doi: 10.1057/9780230582323.

[3] P. Charaudeau, Media Information Discourse: The Construction of the Social Mirror [in French]. Paris, France: Nathan-INA, 1997.

[4] G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design, 3rd ed. London, U.K.: Routledge, 2021.

[5] D. Maingueneau, Analyzing Communication Texts [in French], 4th ed. Paris, France: Armand Colin, 2021.

[6] T. van Leeuwen, "Multimodality," in The Handbook of Discourse Analysis, D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton, and D. Schiffrin, Eds., 2nd ed. Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley, 2015, pp. 447–465.

[7] T. A. van Dijk, Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[8] S. A. Yunusova, "Linguopragmatic analysis of communicative strategies in French political discourse" [in Uzbek], Bulletin of the National University of Uzbekistan, no. 11, pp. 355–357, 2026.

[9] N. Fairclough, Media Discourse. London, U.K.: Edward Arnold, 1995.

[10] C. Jewitt, Ed., The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis, 2nd ed. London, U.K.: Routledge, 2014.

[11] R. Wodak and M. Meyer, Eds., Methods of Critical Discourse Studies, 3rd ed. London, U.K.: SAGE Publications, 2015.

[12] S. Norris, Analyzing Multimodal Interaction: A Methodological Framework. London, U.K.: Routledge, 2004.

[13] J. Blommaert, Discourse: A Critical Introduction. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[14] K. O'Halloran, Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Systemic-Functional Perspectives. London, U.K.: Continuum, 2004.

[15] P. Chilton, Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice. London, U.K.: Routledge, 2004.