

Multimodal Cohesion, Narrative Interpretation and Empirical Foundations

Chiao-I Tseng (University of Bremen)

This presentation will show how the analytical method of multimodal cohesion is an effective tool for empirically unpacking several significant issues with regard to narrative comprehension and stylistic interpretation in multimodal texts such as film and comics. Multimodal cohesion is a linguistics-informed framework for narrative construction in audiovisual and graphic media (Tseng 2013; Tseng & Bateman 2018; Tseng et al. 2018). It explains how characters, objects and settings are identified and tracked in verbal, visual and audio modalities and what technical details of filmic and graphic composition afford inter-modal tracking.

This talk will first present how to systematically construct cohesive structures of the main identities of narrative characters and settings and how these structures reflect the film viewers' and comic readers' narrative interpretation paths. I will then present two studies, showing the integration of systematic analysis of multimodal cohesion and empirical methods. This combination balances the two main research streams of narrative interpretation: 1. the recipient-based question of how the direction of viewers' attention affects comprehension and 2. the narrative-based issue of how narrative elements in film and comic guide meaning interpretation.

The first study combines cohesion analysis in film and the method of eye-tracking. Based on an analysis of the beginning of Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) which combines semiotic and empirical methods, I will address how specific and generic cohesive cues play significant roles in directing viewers' narrative understanding.

The second study unravels cohesion in comics. Using the example of the comic adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1994), I will present how the character-centred cohesive patterns are the main trigger for character immersion in the genre of metafiction. The results of an eye-tracking study support this hypothesis.

In summary, the synthesis of multimodal cohesion analysis with an eye-tracking approach provides powerful empirical evidence for the hypothesis that even if the possible high-levelled narrative interpretations may at first appear boundless, textual artefacts are, in fact, often designed to guide their receivers in specific, intended directions.

References

- Tseng, Chiao-I. 2013. *Cohesion in film: Tracking film elements*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
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