Multimodal competence and effective interactive lecturing

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ABSTRACT

Multimodal competence plays a crucial role in effective interactive lecturing, especially when the language of communication is other than one's own. This study explores an English-medium instructor's (EMI) choice and combination of modes when instantiating a university interactive lecture pair work activity. It analyzes the temporal and spatial features of classroom space, gaze, and gestures, together with the spoken and written language, present in the setting up, supervising, and eliciting moves of the activity. Classroom spatial maps and multimodal discourse analysis tables are provided to illustrate the meaning making potential of semiotic resources used by the instructor to carry out specific pedagogical functions. The multimodal discourse analysis reveals that a coordinated use of three to four complementary mode ensembles enables a teacher to textually organize and interpersonally involve students to elicit conceptual meaning. Furthermore, the findings suggest that effective pedagogy has much to do with multimodal competence, the ability to understand the combined potential of various modes for making and eliciting meaning.

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1. Introduction

"Teaching and learning" in higher education, as in all educational contexts, "is multimodal as it happens through speech, writing, gesture, image and space (Archer, 2014, p.189)". In the classroom, teachers combine these semiotic resources into multimodal ensembles to make and elicit meaning. Teachers' effective multimodal and interactive discourse is dependent on their choices and combinations of modes to carry out the diverse pedagogical functions. Evidently, teachers in general, regardless of their field of expertise, can benefit from a greater awareness of how modes may be effectively orchestrated. In the case of non-Anglophone university instructors, who are confronted with teaching their content in English, realization of the potential of other modes besides language, can support and encourage their use of English as the medium of instruction (EMI). Teaching content through a language other than one's own calls for a more careful reflection on instructors' multimodal competence, that is, "the ability to understand the combined potential of various modes for making meaning so as to make sense of and construct texts (Royce, 2002, p.192)".

This study is motivated by "the need for educators to be more aware of the uses of representations in the classroom" and "the importance of looking at the integration of meaning across multiple semiotic modes (Tang, 2013, p. 34)", especially to realize interactive lecture activities that engage students. For this purpose, I explore the multimodal ensembles used by an instructor who elicits conceptual meaning from students, academic participants (educators) of an EMI training workshop, in a pair work activity.

1.1. Literature review

Multimodal research with a social semiotic perspective (Kress, 2010) has focused on a range of work sites (see Jewitt, 2014), including educational contexts. Studies have looked at, for example, primary and secondary schools in general (Jewitt, 2008), science classrooms (Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn, & Tsatsarelis, 2001; Tang, 2013) English classrooms (Kress et al., 2005), TESOL classrooms (Royce, 2002) and 3D virtual environments (Tan, O'Halloran, & Wignell, 2016). Some studies have highlighted the meaning-making potential of diverse semiotic resources, for example, gestures (Bezemer, 2014; Querol-Julián & Fortanet-Gómez, 2012; Sueyoshi & Hardison, 2005), classroom space (Lim, O'Halloran, & Podlasov, 2012) and slide presentations (Rowley-Jolivet, 2012; Wecker, 2012). Other multimodal studies have provided evidence to support improved comprehension, especially for L2 learners (Guichon & McLornan, 2008; Moreno & Mayer, 1999, 2007; Norte Fernández-Pacheco, 2016; Sueyoshi & Hardison, 2005).

In so far as multimodality and academic discourse in higher education is concerned, Crawford Camiciottoli and Fortanet-Gómez, (2015) provide us with a volume on how multimodal resources may be exploited to reinforce and integrate meanings in academic presentations and lectures. In her chapter on how university professors elaborate explanations, Crawford Camiciottoli (2015) found that in the five Yale University OpenCourseWare humanities non-interactive lectures analyzed, instructors used non-verbal signals in a synergetic way to facilitate and reinforce comprehension. Other lecture discourse studies that have identified pedagogical functions (e.g., Kunioshi, Noguchi, Tojo, & Hayashi, 2016; Deroey & Taverniers, 2011, 2012) have only focused on the language, but have also analyzed monologue type lectures, despite current trends in higher education that encourage greater instructor-student interaction (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2015 p. 149). The few existing lecture discourse studies on instructor-student interaction (e.g., Crawford Camiciottoli, 2007;Morell, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015;) have focused on the instructor's spoken language and, as far as I know, no study on interactive lectures has analyzed instructors' use of combined semiotic resources.

In this study, I take on a multimodal social semiotic perspective to focus on how an instructor's multimodal ensembles may support lecture participants' engagement, so that they can contribute to the lecture discourse. This is done, in light of the benefits of interactive lecturing for mediating and assisting content and language learning (Hsu, 2015; Lo & Macaro, 2012; Klaassen, 2001; Suviniitty, 2012; Morell, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015; Walsh, 2012; White, 2011) and the needs of the growing numbers of EMI lecturers and students (Dearden, 2015) that are challenged not only with the demands of the lecture content, but also with the language of instruction.

1.2. Research questions

In the multimodal analysis that follows, I aim to explore one EMI instructor's choice and combination of modes when instantiating an activity to elicit specific conceptual meaning from students (i.e., academics taking part in an EMI workshop). I analyze the temporal and spatial features of the instructor's use of classroom space, gaze, gestures, spoken and written language used to engage the participants. In social semiotic terms, I look at how the instructor's multimodal pedagogical discourse allows him to textually organize and interpersonally involve his audience to elicit conceptual meaning. The following research questions guided the study:

1. When instantiating a pair work activity, what multimodal ensembles are used by an instructor to elicit conceptual information?
2. What specific multimodal patterns are used while setting up a pair work activity, supervising it, and eliciting information?

In the following section, I will describe the EMI workshop from which the pair-work activity was extracted, and explain why I have chosen to carry out a multimodal analysis of this particular extract in the video-recorded mini-lecture.

1.3. Background of the study

The growing global phenomenon of EMI within universities of countries with other official languages has brought with it many challenges for university lecturers. At the large public Spanish university, where this study took place, academic staff are offered workshops to support having to switch from teaching in their mother tongue to English. In this 20-h EMI workshop, academics of diverse disciplines with at least a B2 (upper intermediate) level of English proficiency, according to the Common European Framework Reference of Languages (CEFRL), engage in activities to raise awareness of the ideational, textual and interpersonal metafunctions of language, as well as of the use and combination of classroom semiotic resources (i.e., spoken, written, non-verbal materials and body language modes). As a final workshop task, participants are asked to involve their multidisciplinary workshop peers in an interactive mini-lesson based on a concept from their field of expertise. These mini-lessons are video-recorded with the signed consent of the academics and are used for research purposes. After each 10−20-min mini-lesson, the workshop participants collaborate in evaluating their colleagues' performances constructively, by making use of a Systemic Functional Linguistic (henceforth SFL) and multimodal framework (see evaluation grids in Morell, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015, p. 142). The SFL perspective takes into account *what* is communicated by asking questions referring to the ideational