

Image-Centricity – When Visuals Take Centre Stage. Analyses and Interpretations of a Current (News) Media Practice

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Ever since BARTHES' (1977/1964) seminal essay the relative status of language and image has been a major focus in systemic functional descriptions of multimodal genres (BATEMAN 2014: 191ff.). Its importance shows in recent applications to news genres, where a different status of press photographs leads to the contrasting text types 'image-nuclear (or centric)' vs. 'verbiage-nuclear news story' (CAPLE 2008; CAPLE 2013: 127ff./142ff.). While this distinction seems intuitively plausible, it is far from clear which criteria contribute to image-centricity. What is more, the binary typology obscures the genre variety resulting from different inter-semiotic relations.

Based on a theoretical reflection of multimodality (cf. STÖCKL 2016) and image-centricity the keynote sets out to draw up a typology of image-centric media stories, which indicates the genre variety of such texts and the diversity of multimodal design-options. Using a corpus of image-centric media stories drawn from national German and English print-newspapers (e.g. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Welt; Guardian, New York Times, USA Today*) the contribution aims to sketch out genre prototypes (e.g. news-in-brief, story-intro, pre-view, explainer, editorial, gallery etc.) that respond to different text functions (e.g. narrating, commenting, surveying etc.).

The distinctions between the various image-centric media genres will be based on linguistic and multimodal descriptions. In this sense the keynote is not purely empirical but also highlights an analytical method applicable to other multi-semiotic genres. First, we will look at generic structure, which may include headline, image, prosodic tail and caption and produces various multimodal rhetorical clusters (STÖCKL 2017). Second, the type of image used and its visual grammar (MACHIN 2007: 109ff.) exert a strong influence on genre. Third, rhetorical relations between image and text will differ as to how captions contain 'experiential orientation' and 'contextual expansion' (CAPLE 2013: 130ff.). Finally, genre distinctions may emerge from different logical conjunctive relations and from differences in the types and frequency of cohesive ties (CAPLE 2013: 142ff.; STÖCKL 2015: 67–70).

The keynote demonstrates that image-centricity in media stories takes different generic forms and comes in different multimodal patterns, reflecting various journalistic/media cultures. While images may easily dominate the layout, their centricity to a text's overall thematic and multimodal structure appears to be a gradable quality. Current observations suggest that the degree of image-centricity primarily depends on the strength/types of inter-semiotic connectedness (i.e. cohesion/coherence) but also on inter-textual/pictorial relations.

References

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