PICTOGRAMS—HIGHLY EXPRESSIVE AND EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS OF MULTIMODAL TEXTS

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A topic of multimodality has come to attract the interest of linguists in the nature, structure and components of the means that are used in the creation of modern texts. As technology becomes more advanced, visually-oriented information becomes more and more important, and various graphic (paralinguistic) devices become an integral part of text constructions. The heterogeneity of the graphic devices which function along with verbal devices in the English communicative space makes it necessary to investigate the peculiarities of verbal and non-verbal types of signs independently of their belonging to one or several sign systems.

This approach was considered by O'Halloran (2011), Kress (2001), and Van Leeuwen (2001), the most detailed study being O'Halloran's paper which also focused on such areas as context-text relations, paradigmatic meaning rank, metafunction, instantiation, and intersemiosis. In Kress's (2009) study, social and cultural aspects are taken into account while the interplay of text and graphic imagery and the interpretation of individual images is examined. The degree to which verbal and non-verbal devices can now coexist within a single text clearly demonstrates the magnitude of the changes in written discourse in particular which we are experiencing in this digital age. These transformations have not occurred simply by chance—they are being dictated by the desire of communicators to convey information with the maximum possible speed, using communicative devices which may be in total contrast on the level of expression even though they are identical on the level of their content.

The most important, powerful and meaningful semiotic resources are pictograms. It is interesting and in a sense ironic that individuals who are considered to be so advanced in many areas are now turning back to pictorial elements which were actually the primary ones in the history of written communication. Modern pictograms differ from one another in structure, form, features and functions. One of the most promising approaches involves the exploration of their distinctive semantic, pragmatic and cognitive features, taking into account the possible variants of combinability of pictograms on a number of different levels—phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and textual.

Pictograms perform a variety of functions and have paradigmatic relations. For example, pictograms which are indisputably within the realm of visual linguistics and multimodal linguistics perform the functions of duplication, intensification, substitution, compression, contrast, modification and attraction. They can be successfully substituted for phonemes, morphemes and lexemes. They can also be incorporated within a sentence or constitute a whole text without any verbal components being present. These signs can have synonyms and antonyms; they can also be polysemantic. The syntactic combinability of such symbols is one of the main requirements for the successful functioning of the semiotic system.

Although it is not possible to provide an in-depth examination of all the significant aspects of this interesting field within the bounds of this brief abstract, the points which have been presented are no doubt sufficient to illustrate the fact that this area of research is extremely interesting and offers extensive possibilities for further linguistic investigation.

References

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