

A case study of persuasion in oral presentations: Multimodality in conference presentations, research dissemination talks and product pitches.

In this case study a contrastive analysis of persuasion in specimens of three oral genres is presented: one conference presentation, one research dissemination talk and one product pitch. These presentations can be placed along a continuum that ranges from purely academic settings to more business-like contexts. Previous research hints at some similarities across them (Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas 2003, 2010, Bamford 2007, 2008): they present some *novelty* (scientific knowledge or a product), and they also try to *persuade* the audience that what is being presented is valuable.

In persuasive oral genres speakers resort to more than words to convey their meaning, and for this reason a multimodal approach to these genres can be particularly useful (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001, Muntigl 2004). Indeed, as presentations become increasingly multimodal, traditional approaches to genre become unable to account for the complexity of this communicative activity, in which language is only one of different semiotic modes at work.

In addition, research on persuasion draws attention to the fact that there is more than words to persuasion (Chaiken & Eagly 1976, Woodwall & Burgoon 1981, Sparks et al. 1998, O'Keefe 2002, Perloff 2003, Poggi & Pelachaud 2008). In persuasive oral genres, aspects such as emphasis, evaluation (Martin & White 2005), projection of understanding of situation (Brazil 1997) and anticipation of responses are likely to happen through intonation, gestures and head movements as much as with words. Some examples are the use of intonation to present parts of the message as already agreed upon as opposed to open to discussion (Brazil 1997) and gestures used to discourage potential counterclaims (Kendon 2004)

The present study focuses specifically on one *linguistic* mode, i.e. speech; one mode which falls within the scope of *paralanguage* (Birdwhistell 1952), i.e. intonation (Brazil 1997); and two other modes that can be considered *kinesic* (Trager 1958) i.e. head movements (McClave 2002, Kendon 2002) and gestures (Kendon 2004). These modes have been selected due to their conspicuousness in oral discourse. In addition, they have so far received relative little attention in multimodal studies of oral academic and business genres.

Despite some similarities, each of the oral genres object of this study is used in a different communicative situation, which prompts the use of different multimodal persuasive strategies. The results of this case study suggest that speakers in conference presentations seem to take great care to fit within the whole communicative event in which they are participating. Research dissemination talks, on the other hand, tend to highlight the relevance for the audience, while product pitches tend to focus on the need covered and feasibility of the product.

This case study is a preliminary step for a bigger-scale contrastive study of these genres from a multimodal perspective. Such study is expected to highlight significant similarities and differences that, in turn, can enrich the definition of these genres and pave the way for better didactic materials and teaching techniques.

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